The Cook County Human Rights Ordinance protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of one's source of income, but since 1993 it has exempted the protection of persons with "Section 8" Housing Choice Vouchers. An amendment passed on May 8, 2013 to protect Housing Choice "Section 8" Voucher Holders from discrimination. Starting August 8, 2013 landlords can no longer legally refuse to rent solely on the basis of a household's voucher status.

THE NEW HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROTECTION

- Residents with Housing Choice Vouchers have the right to be screened on the same basis as non-voucher residents by prospective landlords. Voucher holders still have to meet the criteria of the landlord—for example, pass credit and background checks.
- The amendment does not force property owners to rent any or all of their units to households using Housing Choice Vouchers; they are only obligated to consider their application.
- Cook County screens for eligibility for the voucher program.
- Landlord participation in the voucher program is not overly burdensome. Landlords have to complete four simple forms: the RFTA, the Payment and Ownership Declaration form, the W-9, and the Direct Deposit form.
- The amendment does not control rent rates. Landlords can charge whatever rent the market will bear.
- The City of Chicago, five Illinois municipalities, ten states, the District of Columbia, and eight counties around the country have laws protecting individuals from discrimination based on use of a Housing Choice Voucher.
- Only 5% of tenants in Suburban Cook County have housing choice vouchers.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

- Residents in the voucher program will have expanded housing options and are no longer forced to search for housing only in economically depressed and often racially segregated areas of the county.
- Landlords in your community will have the opportunity to receive guaranteed rent directly deposited from a secure funding source that is not impacted by economic fluctuations.
- Areas of job and educational opportunity in Cook County will be more open to residents with vouchers.
- Households with children, people with disabilities, senior citizens, and veterans that use the voucher will have access to quality housing all throughout Cook County.
- Through expanded access to areas of opportunity, voucher holders will have enhanced avenues to the necessary components for self-sufficiency—notably, greater job and educational access.
- Vouchers bring a diversity of people, ideas, and cultures into a community.
- Residents with vouchers are more likely to work and utilize local businesses in the communities where they live, stimulating economic prosperity.
- Vouchers make it possible for individuals to "age in place" and remain in a community if they develop disabilities.
- Expanding voucher protections ease racial and poverty concentrations throughout the County, furthering regional equity and leading to more housing options for everyone, including market-rate renters and homeowners.
- Equitable, stable, and inclusive housing patterns increase a town and area's desirability and economic viability.
The Cook County Human Rights was amended on May 8, 2013 and now protects Housing Choice “Section 8” Voucher Holders from discrimination. **What does this mean for voucher holders?**

**BACKGROUND**

- In the past, voucher holders were exempt from source of income protection at the county level, meaning that landlords could legally refuse to rent solely on the basis of a household’s voucher status.
- Although this protection has been in place in the City of Chicago since 1993, the new county-wide protection goes into effect on August 8, 2013.
- The voucher program allows families to pay fair market rent in units throughout the county, and with this amendment housing options for voucher holders will be expanded—voucher tenants will no longer be forced to search for housing only in economically depressed and often racially segregated areas of the county.

**HOW THE PROTECTION WORKS**

- Tenants will have the right to be screened on the same basis as non-voucher tenants by prospective landlords.
- Landlords may not refuse to process a renter’s application simply because s/he has a housing voucher.
- To secure housing, tenants will still have to meet the criteria of the landlord—for example, pass credit and background checks.
- The voucher program is essentially a three-way agreement between the renter, landlord, and housing authority that allows for the subsidized payment of market rate rents. Required paperwork includes the lease (terms of which are established by the landlord and agreed to by the tenant, as in a typical leasing arrangement) and the housing assistance payment contract (a contract between the landlord and housing authority which runs concurrently with the lease). Landlords can receive direct deposit of the housing authority’s rent portion, and the tenant pays the remainder of the rent on the schedule agreed upon by the landlord and tenant.

**EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY FOR VOUCHER TENANTS:**

- Tenants with housing vouchers will have increased opportunities to secure decent, safe, affordable, accessible, and integrated housing along with access to community amenities.
- Tenant advocates should work to inform tenants of this new protection and encourage voucher holders to search for housing outside of traditional voucher enclaves, or areas of concentrated poverty.
- With this new protection, areas of job and educational opportunity in Cook County are now more open to voucher tenants, as it makes it illegal for landlords to treat voucher and non-voucher tenants differently.
- Programs for tenants that improve credit ratings, renter skills, and introduce and acculturate tenants to new areas of opportunity are essential to ensure that this protection serves its intended purpose.
- Tenants with disabilities have an especially hard time finding housing, as accessible units are severely limited. This amendment enables voucher holders with disabilities to have more accessible housing options.

**REPORTING DISCRIMINATION**

If a landlord refuses to rent solely on the basis of the voucher, impose different terms or conditions on voucher tenants, advertises or communicates that s/he does not accept vouchers, or otherwise treat HCV holders differently from tenants without vouchers, file a complaint.
The Cook County Human Rights Ordinance was amended on May 8, 2013 and now protects Housing Choice “Section 8” Voucher Holders from discrimination. Starting August 8, 2013 landlords can no longer legally refuse to rent solely on the basis of a household’s voucher status. What does this mean for landlords?

BACKGROUND

- Voucher holders are no longer exempted from source of income protection at the county level.
- Although this protection has been in place in the City of Chicago since 1993, the new county-wide protection goes into effect on August 8, 2013.
- 5% of the renters in suburban Cook County have housing choice vouchers.
- The majority of voucher holders are families with children, followed by people with disabilities, the elderly, and veterans.

HOW THE PROTECTION WORKS

- Residents with housing choice vouchers will have the right to be screened on the same basis as non-voucher tenants by prospective landlords.
- Landlords may not refuse to process a renter’s application simply because s/he has a housing voucher.
- Landlords may still conduct credit and background checks as long as they apply the same process to every tenant.
- The ordinance does not control rent rates. Landlords can set rent rates based on what the market will bear.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A LANDLORD ACCEPTS A VOUCHER HOLDER?

- After tenants pass the Housing Authority’s screening, they are responsible for finding and securing housing in the private market. Tenants undergo expansive screening by the Housing Authority before they get a voucher.
- Once a landlord approves the tenant, and fills out the Request for Tenancy Approval, the Housing Authority is alerted and an inspection is scheduled for the unit.
- The Housing Authority has a contract with a professional private inspection firm that will inspect the unit in no more than three to five business days after proper paperwork is filled out and turned in.
- Once the unit passes inspection and the rent negotiation is completed, the tenant can move in.
- The landlord will receive the Housing Authority’s portion of the rent through direct deposit, and the tenant pays the rest of it on the schedule that you agree on with the tenant.
- Just like any other tenant, voucher holders can be evicted for violation of lease terms.

REMEMBER:

- Landlords will have the security of receiving guaranteed funds from the Housing Authority each month.
- Accepting voucher holders is not unduly burdensome on landlords and benefits both parties.
- If a landlord violates the ordinance, a complaint can be filed at the Cook County Human Rights Commission, which can result in paying actual damages, paying all or part of a complainant’s costs (including attorneys’ fees), as well as leasing the unit to a complainant. The Commission may also levy fines of $100.00 to $500.00 for each offense.

Don’t let this happen to you! Educate yourself on the law.