



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lt. Governor ♦ Jennifer D. Maddox, Undersecretary

PHN 2020-08

To: All Local Housing Authorities

From: Ben Stone, Associate Director, Division of Public Housing

Re: Temporary Changes to DHCD Oversight Activities to Mitigate Spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19)

- Performance Management Review (PMR) Site Visits and
- Management and Occupancy Review (MOR) Site Visits
- Technical Assistance in the Field (Via Site Visits)
- Construction Advisor Project Oversight
- Architect/Engineer Site Visits for Work Orders or Milestone Phase Meetings

Date: March 12, 2020

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW NOW – KEY POINTS:

- **Site Visits** for Performance Management Reviews (PMRs) will not take place **for LHAs with FYE 12/31/2019**.
 - HMS staff will conduct the desk audit review **remotely**.
 - FMS staff will conduct portions of the physical conditions review **remotely**.
- Management and Occupancy Reviews (MORs) for Section 8 New Construction/Substantial Rehabilitation developments will be **postponed** until further notice and re-scheduled for a later date.
- DHCD Facilities Management Specialists (FMS) will **only** provide technical assistance to local housing authorities (LHAs) in the field (via site visits) for emergencies/health and safety items, until further notice. **Routine inspections and site visits will be postponed.**
- DHCD Housing Management Specialists (HMS) **will not** provide technical assistance to local housing authorities in the field (via site visits), until further notice.
- Construction Advisors will **continue** to visit job sites to provide construction oversight.
- DHCD architects & engineers will **limit** their site visits to emergencies, or cannot be scoped without an in-person site visit, and meetings will be held via conference call.
- At this time, **all** DHCD Staff will **CONTINUE** to be available by phone and email, and **all** activities that do not require site visits will continue.
- Additional guidance around best practices and LHA operations during this emergency period will follow within next few business days.

As you are likely aware, Governor Baker declared a State of Emergency, on Tuesday, March 10, 2020, due to the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Public health officials have stated that the virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to person, between people who are in close contact (within six feet) with one another. Given the threat of serious illness that COVID-19 poses, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) will take steps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, when implementing its management review, housing management, and capital programs.

Bureau of Housing Management Activities

PMR Desk Audit Review

- HMS will schedule a date and time to review the desk audit with the Executive Director via the telephone.
- HMS may request that the Executive Director (ED) send documentation, electronically, prior to the desk audit review. Said documentation may include, but not be limited to:
 - LHA Rent Roll and Unit List
 - Collection Policy, Rent Re-Payment Agreements, etc.
- HMS will review each criteria rating and next steps with the ED.

PMR Physical Conditions Review

- FMS will schedule a date and time to review the physical conditions criteria with the Executive Director and Maintenance Director/Supervisor via the telephone. FMS will coordinate with HMS to schedule their review on same date as HMS, if possible, for that LHA.
- FMS will request that the ED send documentation electronically prior to the physical conditions review. Said documentation may include, but not be limited to:
 - Random Unit Inspection Reports
 - Random Work Orders and/or Work Order Reports
 - Deferred Maintenance Plan
 - Preventive Maintenance Plan
- FMS will review each criteria and corresponding documentation with the ED and ask questions of ED and Maintenance Director/Supervisor.

PMR Reports will be issued with adjustments made to the Physical Conditions criteria due to absence of site visit and unit inspections. We also understand that going forward from this date (3/12/2020), certain routine inspections and work orders may not be serviced due to the COVID-19 emergency, and will take this account during our review.

Management and Occupancy Reviews (MORs)

- Management and Occupancy Reviews (MORs) for Section 8 New Construction/Substantial Rehabilitation Developments will be postponed until further notice and re-scheduled for a later date.
- If an MOR has been scheduled for one of your developments, local housing authorities will receive notice of the cancellation.

FMS Technical Assistance (TA)

- FMS staff will **only** provide technical assistance to local housing authorities (LHAs) in the field (via site visits) for emergencies/health and safety items, until further notice. Routine inspections and site visits will be postponed.

- If you need technical assistance due to an emergency/health and safety item, please contact your FMS via the telephone or email first to determine if the problem can be resolved by providing technical assistance remotely.
- If the emergency/health and safety item requires technical assistance in the field (via a site visit), your FMS will schedule a site visit to address the situation.

HMS Technical Assistance (TA)

- HMS **will not** provide technical assistance to local housing authorities in the field (via site visits), until further notice.
- All technical assistance from HMS staff will be done remotely, until further notice.

Bureau of Housing Development and Construction Activities

Construction Advisors

Construction Advisors will **continue** to go into field to provide construction oversight on large capital projects, approve payment requisitions and change orders, and provide technical assistance to emergencies as needed. They will take sensible precautions, including avoiding entering occupied units where possible and holding construction meetings in well-ventilated rooms or outside.

Architects and Engineers

DHCD Architects and Engineers will **substantially limit** their site visits for the purpose of drafting work orders. They will continue to write work orders for capital projects, relying on drawings and photographs as possible, and group remote meetings via conference call. They will go into field if the project is A) an emergency and B) cannot be scoped without an in-person visit.

Regional Capital Assistance Teams (RCATs)

RCATs will **continue** to go into the field but have been advised to avoid entering occupied units where possible and to hold construction meetings in well-ventilated rooms or outside. To the extent possible, CIP coordination meetings will be held over the phone.

For other initial questions regarding COVID-19, please refer to DHCD's Public Housing Notice issued on March 10, 2020 <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2020-07-covid-19-information-memo/download> as well as the materials on the Mass DPH website <https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

DHCD will share additional information and guidance in the coming days. We thank you for your hard work and ingenuity in dealing with these unforeseen circumstances.

If you have any questions regarding this notice, please contact Laura Taylor, Director for the Bureau of Housing Management at Laura.Taylor@Mass.Gov or (617) 573-1289 or Fatima Razzaq, Director for the Bureau of Housing Development and Construction at Fatima.Razzaq@mass.gov or (617)573-1189.