

## **Public Housing Authority Waiting List Characteristics**

### **Introduction and Summary of Findings**

This section of the needs assessment examines the characteristics of the public housing and Section 8 waiting lists of Florida's local public housing authorities (PHAs). The paper addresses three topics. First, it examines the extent of waiting lists for public housing units and Section 8 vouchers, including the number of applicants on each list, the waiting time for current applicants, and whether waiting lists are open or closed to new applicants. Second, it discusses the demographic characteristics of applicants on the waiting lists, including household incomes; whether applicant households consist of families, elderly individuals, or disabled individuals; and the number of bedrooms requested. Finally, it lists the vacancy rates for public housing and utilization rates for Section 8 vouchers, with a discussion of the reasons for under-occupancy.

Findings include the following:

- ?? Nearly all of the PHAs responding to the survey indicated that they had waiting lists for their public housing and Section 8 programs. Waiting lists for public housing tended to be shorter than for Section 8 vouchers.
- ?? Typical wait times for applicants for public housing units and Section 8 vouchers ranged from six months to two years. However, nearly one-quarter of respondents indicated that Section 8 wait times could exceed two years.
- ?? Most public housing waiting lists were open and accepting new applicants, but most Section 8 waiting lists were closed.

- ?? The majority of applicants on waiting lists for public housing and Section 8 vouchers had household incomes below 30 percent of the area median.
- ?? Most applicants for public housing and Section 8 vouchers were family households, with a smaller number of elderly and disabled individuals applying for assistance.
- ?? Nearly three-quarters of applicants for public housing units requested one- or two-bedroom units.
- ?? Vacancy rates in public housing generally were low, with nearly three-quarters of PHAs reporting no vacancies or vacancy rates of 5 percent or lower. Evictions and turnover time between tenants were the most common reasons cited for public housing vacancies.
- ?? Most PHAs reported that their Section 8 vouchers were not fully utilized, but just over half of PHAs reported utilization rates between 90 and 99 percent. PHAs cited applicants' inability to find units, a lack of affordable housing and landlord participation, and applicants' inability to pay security deposits or utility deposits as the most common reasons for under-utilization of Section 8 vouchers.

## **Methods**

To gather this information, we conducted a telephone survey of Florida's city-, county-, and area-level PHAs in June and July 2001. Of the 106 PHAs in Florida, 84 responded to the survey, yielding a 79 percent response rate. In some cases, data

collected in the survey was augmented with data from the five-year *Public Housing Agency Plan* submitted by each PHA to HUD in 2000.

Table 1 lists the PHAs that responded to the survey and the number of public housing units and Section 8 vouchers that they reported administering.

**Table 1. Public Housing Units and Section 8 Vouchers Administered by Responding PHAs (in order of total units administered)**

PHA Name	Public Housing Units	Section 8 Vouchers
Broward County	776	4373
Jacksonville	17	5044
Orlando	1606	1825
St. Petersburg	600	2400
Brevard Family of Housing Authorities <sup>1</sup>	1368	1050
Fort Lauderdale	-	2347
West Palm Beach	732	1388
Pensacola	-	2000
Lakeland	748	1250
Hillsborough County	-	1950
Gainesville	853	1016
Tallahassee	641	1200
Homestead	-	1600
Fort Pierce	827	710
Clearwater	579	941
Sarasota	561	728
Ocala	185	1100
Orange County	-	1250
Hialeah	1230	-
Delray	200	906
Collier County	641	423
Daytona	413	600
Fort Myers	972	-
Panama City	450	420
Fort Walton	173	600
Palatka	483	236
Alachua County	316	397
Boca Raton	146	520
DeLand	200	439
Pensacola Area	603	-
Riviera	154	425
Crestview	273	200-300

<sup>1</sup> Brevard, Cocoa, and Melbourne combined.

PHA Name	Public Housing Units	Section 8 Vouchers
Titusville	255	295
Pahokee	515	30
Indian River County	200	341
Kissimmee	-	492
Dania	40	399
Bradenton	319	80
Walton County	-	384
Milton	89	292
Santa Rosa/Milton	89	292
Plant City	200	172
Seminole County	30	334
Springfield <sup>2</sup>	40	287
Volusia County	-	321
Lee County	150	169
Flagler County	131	188
Sarasota City/County Housing and Community Development	-	318
Winter Haven	229	88
Lake Wales	240	72
Punta Gorda	184	121
Ormond Beach	41	255
Hernando County	-	285
Levy/Gilchrist County	124	142
Tarpon Springs	225	-
Leesburg	-	202
Holmes	-	196
Marianna	80	110
Winter Park	171	-
Manatee County	80	75
Tri-County <sup>4</sup>	-	155
Avon Park	129	25
Green Cove Springs	-	148
Baker County	-	147
Bartow	82	55
Sumter County <sup>3</sup>	-	132
Arcadia	130	-
Brooksville	126	-
Jefferson County	-	122
Union County	122	-
Fernandina	57	62
Niceville	111	-
Live Oak	104	-
Citrus County	0	101
Haines	-	92

<sup>2</sup> Springfield and Bay County Housing Agency.

<sup>3</sup> Sumter and Wildwood Housing Authority.

<b>PHA Name</b>	<b>Public Housing Units</b>	<b>Section 8 Vouchers</b>
Columbia County	80	-
Macclenny	80	-
Eustis	60	-
Apalachicola	54	-
Venice	50	-
DeFuniak	50	-
Hendry	-	43
Mulberry	26	-
Suwannee County	20	-

### **Length of Waiting Lists**

Nearly all of the PHAs responding to the survey indicated that they had applicants on a waiting list for public housing units or Section 8 vouchers. These waiting lists ranged from just a few applicants to hundreds and even thousands of applicants.

Of the 84 respondents to the survey, 59 provided the length of waiting lists for public housing units and 64 provided the length of waiting lists for Section 8 vouchers. Waiting lists for public housing units tended to be shorter than for Section 8 vouchers; 84 percent of responding PHAs indicated that their waiting lists for public housing units consisted of less than 250 applicants, while only 54 percent of PHAs indicated that their Section 8 waiting lists contained less than 250 applicants.

Tables 2 and 3 on the following pages divide the PHAs into categories based on the lengths of their waiting lists for public housing units and Section 8 vouchers.

**Table 2. PHAs by Number of Applicants on Waiting Lists for Public Housing Units**

<b>0-49 applicants</b> (32% of responding PHAs)	<b>50-99 applicants</b> (27% of responding PHAs)	<b>100-249 applicants</b> (25% of responding PHAs)	<b>250-499 applicants</b> (5% of responding PHAs)	<b>500-999 applicants</b> (5% of responding PHAs)	<b>1,000 or more applicants</b> (5% of responding PHAs)
Citrus County	Dania	Titusville	Plant City	Broward County	Daytona
Eustis	Crestview	Ormond Beach	Boca Raton	Tallahassee	Hialeah
Lee County	Lake Wales	Fort Myers	Fort Pierce	West Palm Beach	Jacksonville
Marianna	Fort Walton	Pahokee			
Union County	Flagler County	Palatka			
DeFuniak	Macclenny	Winter Haven			
Springfield	Punta Gorda	Brevard Family			
Suwannee County	Panama	Lakeland			
Seminole County	Bartow	Delray			
Venice	Milton	Sarasota			
Arcadia	Santa Rosa/Milton	Fernandina			
Mulberry	Riviera	Apalachicola			
Live Oak	DeLand	Manatee County			
Gainesville	Bradenton	Pensacola Area			
Columbia County	Winter Park	Clearwater			
Brooksville	Tarpon Springs				
Collier County					
Avon Park					
Levy/Gilchrist County					

**Table 3. PHAs by Number of Applicants on Waiting Lists for Section 8 Vouchers**

<b>0-49 applicants</b> (14% of responding PHAs)	<b>50-99 applicants</b> (9% of responding PHAs)	<b>100-249 applicants</b> (31% of responding PHAs)	<b>250-499 applicants</b> (23% of responding PHAs)	<b>500-999 applicants</b> (11% of responding PHAs)	<b>1,000 or more applicants</b> (11% of responding PHAs)
Pahokee Holmes Citrus County Hendry Ormond Beach Tri-County Jefferson County Winter Haven Levy/Gilchrist County	Baker County Punta Gorda Sumter County Marianna Flagler County Bartow	Riviera Crestview Gainesville Dania Plant City Haines Milton Santa Rosa/Milton Brevard Family Lake Wales Fort Pierce DeLand Avon Park Fernandina Green Cove Springs Palatka Panama Sarasota Walton County Sarasota City/County Housing and Community Development	Kissimmee Fort Walton Titusville Leesburg Orange County Seminole County Collier County Lee County Fort Lauderdale Delray Tallahassee Broward County Daytona Springfield Pensacola	Manatee County Lakeland Hernando County Clearwater Homestead Ocala Boca Raton	Volusia County West Palm Beach Alachua County Jacksonville Hialeah St. Petersburg Hillsborough County

In general, as would be expected, the waiting lists with the most applicants fall within more populous jurisdictions. However, not all populous areas have long waiting lists. Moreover, the length of a PHA's waiting list for public housing units does not necessarily correspond to the length of its Section 8 waiting list. For example, Collier County PHA's waiting list for Section 8 contains 321 applicants, but its waiting list for public housing contains just 42 applicants.

### **Wait Times and Closed Waiting Lists**

Survey respondents estimated the time that applicants currently on their waiting list could expect to wait for a public housing unit or Section 8 voucher. The typical wait times for both public housing units and Section 8 vouchers ranged from six months to two years, with 57 percent of respondents indicating times within this range for public housing units and 68 percent indicating times within this range for Section 8 vouchers. Again, wait times for Section 8 vouchers tended to be longer than for public housing units; 22 percent of respondents indicated that wait times for Section 8 vouchers could exceed two years, while only 3 percent of respondents indicated that public housing wait times could reach that length of time.

Several respondents noted that wait times for units and vouchers often fluctuate throughout the year. Moreover, many noted that the wait time for public housing units depended on the size of the unit requested. These fluctuations did not fall into a consistent pattern; in some cases, larger households would have to wait longer for a unit, and in other cases smaller households would wait longer.

Some PHAs close one or both waiting lists to new applications when the lists become too long. Most respondents (79 percent) indicated that their public housing waiting lists were open and accepting new applicants, although a number of the public housing waiting lists with wait times of 6 months to two years were closed. However, 67 percent of respondents indicated that their Section 8 lists were closed. The closed Section 8 lists included nearly all of the lists with wait times exceeding one year and several of those with wait times between 6 months and 1 year.

Tables 4 and 5 on the following pages divide the PHAs into categories based on their estimated wait times for public housing and Section 8 wait-listed applicants. Where data is available, the tables also indicate whether the wait lists are open or closed. Table 4 is based on responses from 63 of the 84 PHAs surveyed. Table 5 is based on responses from 59 of the 84 PHAs surveyed. Where a PHA's range of wait times does not fit within one category of the table, the range is listed next to the name of the PHA.

**Table 4. PHAs by Public Housing Wait Time and Open/Closed Status of Public Housing List**

Less than 3 months (8% of responding PHAs)	3-5 months (17% of responding PHAs)	6-12 months (35% of responding PHAs)	1-2 years (21% of responding PHAs)	More than 2 years (3% of responding PHAs)	Varies according to unit size or type (13% of responding PHAs)
Eustis (open) Marianna (open) DeFuniak (open) Panama (open) Union County (open)	Lake Wales (open, 2-6 months) DeLand (open, 2-6 months) Avon Park (open) Tarpon Springs (open) Lakeland (open) Fort Walton (open) Milton (open) Ocala (open) Santa Rosa/Milton (open) Tri-County (open) Walton County (4 months or more)	Broward County (closed) Venice Alachua County (open) Tallahassee (open) Titusville (open, 6 weeks to 1 year) Dania (closed) Winter Haven (open) Jefferson County Ormond Beach (closed) Apalachicola (closed, 3-12 months) Riviera (closed) West Palm Beach (closed) Plant City (closed, 6 months to 1 year) Fort Myers (open) Manatee County (open) Pahokee (open) Mulberry (open) Daytona (open) Palatka (open) Clearwater (open) Jacksonville (open)	Delray (closed) Flagler County (open) Fort Pierce (open) Orlando (closed) Boca Raton (closed, 1-3 years) Brevard Family (open, 1 month - 2 years) Sarasota (open, 2 weeks - 1 year) Bradenton (open) Fernandina (open) Seminole County (open) Springfield (open) Punta Gorda (open, 6-18 months) Bartow (open, 6-24 months)	Pensacola Area (open, 3 months to 5 years or more) Homestead	Collier County (closed, 12 months for 1-2 bedroom, 6 months for 3-4 bedroom) Macclenny (open, 1 year or more for 1 bedroom, 6 months - 2 years for 2 bedroom, 1 year for 3 bedroom, 1-2 years for 4 bedroom, 3-4 years for 5 bedroom) Crestview (open, 7-8 months for 1 bedroom, 3-4 months for 2 bedroom, 1 month for 3 bedroom, 2-3 weeks for 5 bedroom) Gainesville (open, 30-40 days for smaller units, 6-12 months for larger units) Brooksville (open) Hialeah (closed, 1-2 years for families, 4-5 years for elderly, 2 years for disabled) Columbia County (open) Arcadia (open)

		Indian River County (open)		
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**Table 5. PHAs by Section 8 Wait Time and Open/Closed Status of Section 8 List**

<b>Less than 3 months</b> (7% of responding PHAs)	<b>3-5 months</b> (3% of responding PHAs)	<b>6-12 months</b> (34% of responding PHAs)	<b>1-2 years</b> (34% of responding PHAs)	<b>More than 2 years</b> (22% of responding PHAs)
Broward County (closed) Pahokee (closed) Levy/Gilchrist County (open) Holmes (open)	Baker County (open) Citrus County (open)	Dania (closed) Pensacola (open) Clearwater (open) Riviera (closed) West Palm Beach (closed) Plant City (closed) Flagler County (open) Fort Walton (open) Gainesville (closed) Milton (closed) Ocala (open) Palatka (open) Santa Rosa/Milton (closed) Crestview (closed) Marianna (closed) St. Petersburg (closed) Winter Haven (closed) DeLand (closed) Green Cove Springs (open) Ormond Beach (closed)	Hendry (closed) Fort Pierce (closed) Leesburg (closed) Punta Gorda (closed) Collier County (closed) Orange County (closed) Orlando (closed) Springfield (closed) Indian River County (open) Sumter County (open) Panama City (closed, 2 months - 2 years) Bartow (closed, 6 months - 2 years) Lakeland (closed, 6 months - 2 years) Fort Lauderdale (closed) Lake Wales (closed) Daytona (closed) Fernandina (open) Hernando County (open) Seminole County (closed) Kissimmee (closed)	Tallahassee (closed, 1-3 years) Manatee County (closed, 1-5 years) Delray (closed, 6 months - 3 years) Volusia County (closed, 6 months - 3 years) Avon Park (open) Sarasota City/County Housing and Community Development (closed) Hillsborough County (closed) Titusville (closed) Haines (closed) Alachua County (open) Boca Raton (closed) Brevard Family (closed) Hialeah (closed)

## **Demographic Characteristics of Applicants**

A number of PHAs track information about applicants on their waiting lists, including household income levels, whether the household consists of a family or of an elderly or disabled individual, and the unit size requested by the applicant. While the majority of survey respondents were unable to provide this information easily, the responses of those who did provide the information are summarized below.

Survey results indicate that most applicants for public housing and Section 8 vouchers had extremely low incomes; that is, their household incomes fell below 30 percent of the area median income. Fifteen PHAs with combined wait lists of 2,590 applicants provided income data for applicants on their public housing waiting list. Of these 2,590 applicant households, 87 percent had extremely low incomes. The remaining 13 percent fell within the very low- and low-income categories, with incomes between 30 percent and 80 percent of the area median. The Section 8 waiting lists demonstrate a nearly identical pattern. Among 18 reporting PHAs with Section 8 waiting lists totaling 9,570 applicants, 86 percent of applicant households fell within the extremely low-income category, with 14 percent of households in the very low- and low-income categories.

PHAs also may divide their waiting lists between households composed of families and those composed of elderly or disabled individuals. This division is particularly relevant to public housing waiting lists, since PHAs designate their public housing units as family or elderly/disabled units. Fifteen PHAs with public housing waiting lists totaling 3,807 applicants provided this information in the survey. Of these 3,807 applicants, 61 percent of households consisted of families and 39 percent consisted

of elderly or disabled individuals.<sup>4</sup> A smaller number of surveyed PHAs track this information for their Section 8 waiting lists. Of six PHAs responding to this question with a total of 758 applicants on Section 8 waiting lists, 65 percent of applicants were reported to be family households and 35 percent were households composed of elderly or disabled individuals.

Finally, many PHAs track the number of bedrooms requested by applicants for public housing units. Thirty-five PHAs with public housing waiting lists totaling 10,138 applicants provided this information. Table 6 below shows the distribution of these applicants by the number of bedrooms they requested.

**Table 6. Distribution of Public Housing Applicants by Number of Bedrooms Requested**

<b>0 Bedrooms</b>	<b>1Bedroom</b>	<b>2Bedrooms</b>	<b>3 Bedrooms</b>	<b>4 Bedrooms</b>	<b>5 Bedrooms</b>
11%	37%	35%	13%	3%	0.20%

Thus, one- and two-bedroom units made up nearly three-quarters of requests for public housing units by applicants on the waiting lists.

### **Vacancies and Utilization Rates**

Although waiting lists indicate high demand for public housing units, many PHAs reported some vacancies within their public housing inventories. These vacancy rates generally were low: approximately half (48 percent) of the 52 PHAs responding to this

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<sup>4</sup> The actual proportion of families on public housing waiting lists statewide likely is higher. Of the 3,807 applicants included on the waiting lists of the 15 PHAs that responded to this question, 2324 (61%) come from Hialeah’s list, which is evenly divided between family and elderly/disabled applicants. All but one of the other PHAs responding to this question indicated that the percentage of family applicants on their waiting lists ranged from 70 to 98 percent.

question indicated that they had no vacant public housing units, and an additional 25 percent reported vacancy rates of 5 percent or lower. Table 7 below lists the PHAs responding to this question by public housing vacancy rate.

**Table 7. PHAs by Public Housing Vacancy Rate**

<b>No vacancies</b> (48% of responding PHAs)	<b>1-5%</b> (25% of responding PHAs)	<b>6-15%</b> (17% of responding PHAs)	<b>Above 15%</b> (10% of responding PHAs)
Dania	Titusville	Sarasota	Pahokee
Punta Gorda	Clearwater	Pensacola Area	Lake Wales
Collier County	Lakeland	Eustis	Bartow
Plant City	Crestview	Panama	Brooksville
Indian River County	Jacksonville	Winter Haven	Avon Park (in summer)
Manatee County	Delray	Orlando	
Hialeah	Ft. Pierce	Gainesville (under 10%)	
Boca Raton	Daytona	Apalachicola (1-10%)	
Riviera	Fort Myers	Fort Walton	
Tarpon Springs	Union County		
Columbia County	Tallahassee		
DeFuniak	Lee County		
DeLand	Broward County		
Fernandina			
Flagler County			
Live Oak			
Macclenny			
Marianna			
Milton			
Niceville			
Ocala			
Palatka			
Santa Rosa/Milton			
Seminole County			
Springfield			

Twenty-six of the PHAs surveyed reported their reasons for public housing vacancies, with evictions and turnover time between tenants the most common reasons cited. Table 8 below lists the reasons given for vacancies and the number of respondents citing each reason. Respondents were allowed to cite more than one reason.

**Table 8. Reasons for Public Housing Vacancies**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number of Respondents Citing</b>
Resident turnover	16
Evictions	13
Unit renovations	4
Tenants transfer to Section 8 program	3
Tenants purchase homes	3
Increased move-outs in summer	2
No applicant for unit size	1
Tenants change units	1
Tenants abandon apartments	1
Applicants fail background checks	1
Elderly tenants die or move into nursing home or relative's home	1

Section 8 utilization rates track the percentage of the vouchers available to a PHA that are actually in use. A high utilization rate for Section 8 vouchers is analogous to a low vacancy rate for public housing units. Most PHAs reported utilization rates below 100 percent. However, utilization rates tended to be high, with just over half (54 percent) of PHAs reporting utilization rates between 90 and 99 percent. Table 9 on the following page lists the 61 PHAs responding to this question by utilization rate.

**Table 9. PHAs by Section 8 Voucher Utilization Rate**

<b>Full utilization</b> (34% of responding PHAs)	<b>90-99%</b> (54% of responding PHAs)	<b>Less than 90%</b> (11% of responding PHAs)
Fort Lauderdale Plant City Pahokee West Palm Beach Bartow Haines Citrus County Crestview Fernandina Gainesville Green Cove Springs Levy County Marianna Milton Palatka Pensacola Santa Rosa/Milton Seminole County Tallahassee Fort Pierce Sarasota City/County Housing and Community Development	Boca Raton Orlando Tri-County Lake Wales Jacksonville Jefferson County Sarasota Panama Homestead Riviera Ormond Beach Hernando County St. Petersburg Dania Manatee County Sumter County Hendry Brevard Family Hillsborough County Lee County Kissimmee Baker County Ocala Orange County Walton County Volusia County Lakeland Daytona Springfield Punta Gorda Winter Haven Holmes Delray	DeLand Flagler County Leesburg Alachua County Clearwater Avon Park Indian River County

38 of the PHAs surveyed reported their reasons for utilization rates below 100 percent. The most common reasons cited were applicants' inability to find a unit before the voucher expired, the lack of affordable housing or landlords willing to accept Section 8 vouchers in their areas, and applicants' inability to pay security deposits or utility deposits. Table 10 below lists all reasons given for utilization rates below 100 percent and the number of respondents citing each reason. Respondents were allowed to cite more than one reason.

**Table 10. Reasons for Section 8 Utilization Rates Below 100 Percent**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number of Respondents Citing</b>
Applicants cannot find units before voucher expires	9
Shortage of affordable housing or landlord participation	9
Applicants lack security deposits or utility deposits	8
Applicants do not attend appointments or agency cannot contact applicants	5
Applicant does not look hard enough for housing	4
Applicants move into or stay in public housing units	2
Wait list attrition	2
Applicant finds housing by other means	1
Less expensive for applicants to live with others than to use voucher	1
Emphasis on homeownership over renting	1
Section 8 office understaffed	1
Applicants move away from the area	1
Poor credit or rental histories	1
Program cannot accommodate large families	1

### **Conclusion**

The results of this survey represent the characteristics of public housing and Section 8 waiting lists at a single point in time. Many survey respondents noted that conditions change over time. Waiting list lengths, wait times, open/closed status, and public housing vacancy rates tend to fluctuate, especially in smaller jurisdictions. Vacancy rates are particularly sensitive to seasonal fluctuations, with more tenants moving during the summer.

In terms of more stable trends, the survey indicates a continued demand for public housing units and Section 8 vouchers, particularly among families and those with extremely low incomes. While utilization of public housing and Section 8 is strong, PHAs are somewhat hampered in their full usage of Section 8 vouchers by the shortage of available units and tenants' lack of financial resources.