

Robin Carter
Chairperson, Board of Commissioners

Janet Abrahams
President | Chief Executive Officer



HB 826

February 28, 2023

TO: Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Janet Abrahams, Chief Executive Officer

RE: House Bill 826 – Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program - Establishment

POSITION: Information Request

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that Housing Authority of Baltimore City requests clarification on House Bill 826.

The Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) was established to provide federally funded public housing programs and related services for Baltimore's low-income residents. Through our Public housing and Housing voucher (HCV) programs, HABC serves approximately 43,000 residents in every zip code in Baltimore City.

HB 826 creates a statewide rental assistance voucher program in the Department of Housing and Community Development to provide vouchers and housing assistance payments for low-income families that are on a waiting list under the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program; and requires the Department and public housing agencies to administer the State Program.

HABC is in favor of the bill's intent to provide housing to vulnerable low-income populations and minimize the time in which they stay on the voucher waiting list. However, there are specific concerns about the viability of the program as proposed.

For instance, as written, the State Program limits the time that a family would receive housing assistance through a temporary voucher to five years or until a HUD voucher becomes available, whichever is sooner. HABC is concerned about the possibility that after five years, a HUD voucher may not be

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available to a family participating in this program, particularly given the instability of federal funding, and that a family would find themselves without housing assistance.

HB 826 intends to distribute a 1% fee each year to public housing authorities (PHAs) to defray staffing expenses related to the administration of the State Program. In addition to intake and eligibility screening, personnel would be required to perform periodic recertifications of the program participants, inspections of rental units, customer service to applicants and landlords, training, counseling, and ancillary functions. Therefore, HABC requests an increase to the 1% fee, as the average annual administrative fee is significantly higher.

Finally, of most concern to HABC is how applicants would be pulled from our waiting list given the priority households listed in the bill. Currently the bill requires PHAs to prioritize families that are selected for participation in this program that include:

- (1) a child who is under the age of 16 years;
- (2) a military veteran;
- (3) an individual experiencing homelessness;
- (4) a disabled individual; or
- (5) an elderly individual.

Households are placed on our waiting list based on the date and time that HABC receives their application and are not sorted or prioritized based on factors listed above. The bill would in effect require HABC to select households for participation in the State Program over other households that may have been waiting longer and are in a higher position on our waiting list. HABC's applicant waiting list is organized and administered in accordance with federal requirements to avoid discriminating against groups or classes of persons.

While HABC strongly agrees with the bill's intent to decrease the time that families remain on the voucher waiting list and provide more immediate assistance to those in need of housing, the Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program – Establishment as currently proposes raises concerns that HABC would recommend being addressed before enacting the program.

Respectfully submitted:

Janet Abrahams, HABC President & CEO