

# DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

## 24 CFR Chapter IX

[Docket No. FR-4087-N-01]

RIN 2577-AB68

### Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing; Strengthening the Role of Fathers in Public Housing Families, Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

**AGENCY:** Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing, HUD.

**ACTION:** Advance notice of proposed rulemaking.

**SUMMARY:** In his 1996 State of the Union Address, President Clinton said "Our first challenge is to cherish our children and strengthen America's families. Family is the foundation of American life. If we have stronger families, we will have a stronger America."

HUD is committed to cooperating with other Federal agencies and with State and local entities to identify and pursue policies and to support activities that will encourage reuniting families and strengthen the role of fathers in American families.

This notice announces HUD's intention (1) To develop a regulatory package concerning measures, practices, and authorizations to local public housing agencies and Indian Housing Authorities (hereinafter referenced collectively as HAs) in support of efforts to encourage husbands and/or fathers to play a more responsible role in the lives of families in HA-owned or assisted developments, and (2) to solicit public comment on this subject prior to publication of a proposed rule.

Issues for which HUD specifically requests comment from the public are identified in Section II of the Supplementary Information portion of this Notice.

**DATES:** *Comment Due Date:* September 13, 1996.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** MaryAnn Russ, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public and Assisted Housing Operations, HUD, Room 4204, 451 Seventh Street SW., Washington, DC 20410-5000, telephone (202) 708-1380 (this is not a toll-free number). A telecommunications device for hearing- and speech-impaired persons (TTY) is available at 1-800-877-8339 (Federal Information Relay Services). (This is a toll-free number.)

**ADDRESSES:** Interested persons are invited to submit comments in response to this notice to the Rules Docket Clerk,

Office of the General Counsel, Room 10276, Department of Housing and Urban Development, 451 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20410-0500. Comments should refer to the above docket number and title. A copy of each comment submitted will be available for public inspection and copying during regular business hours at the above address. Facsimile (FAX) comments are not acceptable.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

##### I. Background

In a June 1995 memorandum to the heads of all Executive Branch departments and agencies, President Clinton charged the Federal government to review every policy, program, and initiative that pertains to families, to

- Ensure, where appropriate, and consistent with program objectives, that these policies, programs and initiatives seek to engage and meaningfully include fathers;
- Proactively modify those programs that were designed to serve primarily mothers and children, where appropriate, and consistent with program objectives, to explicitly include fathers and strengthen their involvement with their children;
- Include evidence of father[s'] involvement and participation, where appropriate, in measuring the success of the program; and
- Involve fathers, where appropriate, in government initiated research regarding children and their families.

HUD has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening families through its public and assisted housing programs, affordable housing and homeownership initiatives, and services for homeless people. For homeless women and children—America's fastest-growing homeless population—HUD has implemented a rental assistance certificate/voucher program to move women and children out of shelters and into safer, long-term transitional housing. HUD provides premiums to shelters that help keep families intact. Working families also find it more advantageous to stay together in public housing under new rent computation procedures that permit optional deductions from, or exemptions of, earned income. Additionally, HUD works to strengthen families through employment initiatives that incorporate conditions for participation, encouraging workers to adopt positive behaviors toward their families and their communities.

HUD has undertaken two major pilot programs involving outreach to absent fathers, using a combination of job

opportunities and housing benefits to encourage uniting or reuniting of families, and more active and positive participation of fathers in their families. These two pilot efforts were described in detail by the Secretary at the Vice President's May 3, 1996, "Federal Conference on Strengthening the Role of Fathers in Families."

In Baltimore, Maryland, the housing authority has developed a Healthy Head Start Men's Service Program, which links employment in a housing rehabilitation project, including training in lead-based paint and asbestos removal, with requirements that participants accompany their families on obstetric and pediatric visits.

In Hartford, Connecticut, a public housing Family Restoration Program at Charter Oak Terrace apartments is using a portion of a \$20.8 million project redevelopment grant to redevelop families. Absent fathers are eligible for on-site construction jobs paying up to \$22/hour, but qualification for employment is premised on the father's commitment to behavior that is positive for themselves and their families; such positive behaviors include agreeing to work on a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, participating in counseling on parenting and communications skills, and agreeing to become and/or remain free from substance abuse. At a very early stage of this initiative, there are twenty families participating; the Hartford Housing Authority has established a goal of reuniting 100 families.

While these two pilot programs have concentrated on providing training and employment opportunities to absent fathers, HUD recognizes that an absent spouse or parent may be a mother as well. As a result any future programs of this type will be administered in a gender neutral fashion to permit these opportunities for women as well as men.

##### II. Solicitation of Public Comments

HUD is requesting public comment in several areas to be addressed by the regulation. In developing this regulation, HUD will work closely with HAs and their associations and with residents and community organizations to ensure that HUD has heard as many viewpoints as possible.

Based on the comments that HUD receives in response to this notice and any written guidance received from additional communications with industry groups and others, HUD will publish a proposed rule. Following careful consideration of the comments received on the proposed rule, HUD will issue a final regulation.

The areas for which HUD specifically requests comment from the public include the following:

1. The basic principle underlying this initiative is that families ought to be reunited. Fathers living apart from mothers and children, or living-in only intermittently, should be encouraged to rejoin their families and accept a role in the upbringing of the children. To the extent that it may be necessary to encourage such responsible behavior by an absent parent (who may also be mother, we acknowledge) HAs would be encouraged, but not necessarily required, to

a. Provide a priority for transfer among HA properties;

b. Offer a priority for a Section 8 certificate or voucher (consistent with the principles of the Family Unification program);

c. Exempt from rent determinations the incremental income of the returning parent for a period of up to three years without adverse effect on the HA's eligibility for operating subsidy under the PFS.

HUD is interested in public comments on whether such encouragements are necessary, or sufficient.

2. To obtain any benefits or incentives offered by an HA program, a returning parent would be required to enter into a formal agreement or contract, binding him or her to comply with the requirements of the HA lease and to

make and honor commitments to their family and to the HA community. HUD is interested in public comments on the nature of such an agreement, and on the range of obligations that could reasonably be demanded of a returning parent. Should HUD create a model form of agreement for this purpose? Are there certain minimum requirements that HUD could itemize, and permit HAs to make additions to reflect local interests? Or should HAs be given maximum latitude to develop their own standards and agreements?

3. HUD's position is that participants must be subject to admissions screening, to assure the rest of the community that the new or re-joining family member would not constitute any special treat to the peace and quiet of the neighborhood.

4. Returning parents, or a parent newly accepting a responsible role in a family, would be required to participate in a parenting and/or counseling program. To the extent that some returning parents may have been involved in domestic violence or abuse, such counseling or training must have been completed before admission or re-admission to the HA housing. Parenting training or counseling would be allowable budget costs for the HA.

5. The Hartford Family Reunification model includes an explicit requirement that returning parents be and remain drugfree, including provisions for pre-

admission drug testing and subsequent random testing. Testing is at the expense of the housing authority. HUD is interested in public comments on drug abstinence and drug testing requirements and policies.

6. HUD is soliciting public input on any other matters, ideas, recommendations, or any other form of comment relevant to the issue of re-integrating absent parents and strengthening the role of fathers and husbands in public housing families. In addition to comments, HUD is also requesting any reports, documents, or other material that will assist the Department in evaluating issues to be addressed in the regulation.

HUD requests that, in submitting comments on any of the foregoing issues, the commenter please cite the item number of the issue addressed by the comment. HUD also welcomes comments on issues not specifically included in the foregoing list, but related to involving husbands and fathers, and strengthening the role of husbands and fathers in families living in public and assisted housing.

Dated: July 15, 1996.

Michael B. Janis,

*General Deputy, Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing.*

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