

Chapter 13

COMPLAINTS, GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS [24 CFR 966.50-966.57]

INTRODUCTION

This document describes the policies to be used when families disagree with a decision by the RCRHA based on any action, decision, or inaction by RCRHA. It is the policy of RCRHA to ensure that all families have the benefit of all protections due to them under the law.

If a Complainant does not follow the procedures set forth in this policy and/or does not request a hearing, then the Authority's action, inaction, or decision shall be considered final on part of RCRHA. Failure of a Complainant to request a hearing does not constitute a waiver of his/her right to contest the Authority in an appropriate judicial proceeding.

For all aspects of the grievance and appeals process, a disabled person shall be provided reasonable accommodation to the extent necessary to provide the disabled person with an opportunity to use the grievance procedures equal to a non-disabled person.

The RCRHA has determined that it will use a hearing officer which means a person selected in accordance with 24 CFR 966.55 of the grievance regulations to hear the grievance and render a decision with respect thereto. The RCRHA may use either of the following methods to appoint a hearing officer

- A method approved by a majority of tenants (in any building, group of buildings or project, or group of projects to which the method is applicable) voting in a election or meeting of tenants held for the intended purpose
- Appointment of a person who will be the officer selected in a manner required by the grievance procedure.

This document is divided into four (4) main sections:

- A. Complaints:** This section covers how to report a complaint of a general nature and the appropriate staff member or Department to whom the complaint should be referred.
- B. Applicants:** This section covers how an applicant would file a grievance, such as to appeal withdrawal from a Wait List. This section also covers the process for appealing determinations of ineligibility based on HUD's Restrictions to Non-Citizens.

C. Tenants: This section covers how a resident of RCRHA property would appeal a decision, action, or inaction. Such appeals may include, but are not limited to, appealing the action to evict or appeal of how the resident's portion of the rent was calculated.

D. Definitions: This section covers definitions used in the document "Complaints, Grievances and Appeals."

A. COMPLAINTS

RCRHA will respond promptly to all complaints.

Complaints from Resident Families. If a resident family disagrees with an action or inaction of RCRHA, complaints will be referred to the central office, or RCRHA staff member as appropriate. Complaints regarding the physical condition of the units may be reported to the central office or RCRHA staff member. If the complaint cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the resident, the resident shall have the right to appeal by following the grievance procedures outlined in Section C of this document.

Complaints from Staff. If a staff person reports a family is violating or has violated a lease provision or is not complying with program rules, the complaints will be referred to the Executive Director.

Complaints from the General Public. Complaints or referrals from persons in the community in regard to RCRHA or a family will be referred to the Executive Director, as appropriate.

Selecting the hearing officer or panel: [966.55(b)(2)(ii)]

A grievance hearing shall be conducted by an impartial person or persons appointed by the RCRHA after consultation with resident organizations, as described below:

- A. The RCRHA shall nominate a slate of impartial persons to sit as hearing officers or hearing panel members. Such persons may include RCRHA Board members, RCRHA staff members, professional arbitrators, or others. The RCRHA Hearing Panel shall consist of one person appointed by the Mayor, one Resident, and one person approved by the RCRHA Board.

The RCRHA will check with each nominee to determine whether there is interest in serving as a potential hearing officer or panel member, whether the nominee feels fully capable of impartiality, whether the nominee can serve without compensation, and what limitations on the nominee's time would affect such service.

Nominees will be informed that they will be expected to disqualify themselves from hearing grievances that involve personal friends, other residents of developments in which they work, reside, or grievances in which they have some personal interest.

Nominees who are not interested in serving as hearing officers or whose time is too limited to make service will be withdrawn.

- B. A slate of potential hearing officers or hearing panel members nominated by the RCRHA shall be submitted to the RCRHA's resident organizations, if one exists. Written comments from the organizations shall be considered by the RCRHA before the nominees are appointed as hearing officers or panel members.
- C. When the comments from resident organizations have been received and considered, the nominees will be informed that they are the RCRHA's official grievance hearing committee. The RCRHA will subsequently contact committee members in random order to request their participation as hearing panel members or hearing officers.

B. APPEALS BY APPLICANTS

Applicants who are determined ineligible, who do not meet RCRHA's admission standards, or where RCRHA does not have an appropriate size and type of unit in its inventory will be given written notification promptly, including the reason for the determination. The written notification will state that the applicant may seek an Informal Hearing.

Applicants must submit their request for an Informal Hearing **in writing** to RCRHA within 10 working days from the date of the notification of their ineligibility. RCRHA will then provide an Informal Hearing within 10 working days of receiving the applicant's request. RCRHA will notify the applicant of the place, date, and time of the hearing.

Informal Hearings will be conducted by an impartial Hearing Officer. The person who is designated as the Hearing Officer cannot be the person who made the determination of ineligibility or a subordinate of that person.

The applicant may bring to the hearing any documentation or evidence s/he wishes. The applicant's information, along with data compiled by RCRHA, will be considered by the Hearing Officer. A determination will be made based upon the merits of the evidence presented by both sides.

Within 10 working days of the date of the Informal Hearing, the Hearing Officer will mail a written decision to the applicant and place a copy of the decision in the applicant's file.

SPECIAL HEARING AND APPEAL PROVISIONS FOR APPLICANTS NOTIFIED OF INELIGIBILITY BASED ON "RESTRICTIONS ON ASSISTANCE TO NON-CITIZENS"

Assistance to a family may not be delayed, denied or terminated on the basis of immigration status at any time prior to the receipt of the decision on an Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) appeal.

INS Determination of Ineligibility [24 CFR 912.9(e)]

If a family member claims to be an eligible immigrant and the INS SAVE system and manual search do not verify the claim, RCRHA notifies the applicant within 10 working days of their right to appeal to the INS. The family will have 30 days from the date of RCRHA's notification to request an appeal of the INS results. The request for appeal shall be made by the family communicating in writing directly to the INS. The family must provide RCRHA a copy of the written request for appeal, and proof of mailing. For good cause shown, RCRHA shall grant the family an extension of the time within which to request an appeal.

Documentation to be submitted to the INS as apart of an appeal to the INS:

1. Copy of original Form G-845S received from INS annotated at the top center in bold print: **HUD APPEAL**.
2. Include two stamped envelopes, one addressed to the applicant and one addressed to RCRHA.
3. Attach any and all documentation available to support the reason or basis for the appeal. This should include legible copies of both sides of the Form G-845S.

The INS will issue the results of the appeal to the family, with a copy to RCRHA, within 30 days of its receipt. If, for any reason, the INS is unable to issue a response within the 30-day time period, the INS will inform the family and RCRHA of the reason for delay.

When RCRHA receives a copy of the INS response, RCRHA will notify the family of its right to request an Informal Hearing on RCRHA's ineligibility determination in accordance with the procedures outlined in "Section B. Appeals by Applicants."

If the Hearing Officer decides that the individual is not eligible, and there are no other eligible family members RCRHA will:

1. Deny the applicant family, or
2. Defer termination if the family is a participant and qualifies for deferral, or

3. Terminate the participant if the family does not qualify for deferral.

If there are eligible members in the family, RCRHA will offer to prorate assistance or give the family the option to remove the ineligible members.

A decision against an applicant under the INS appeal process or RCRHA's Informal Hearing, does not preclude the applicant from exercising the right to seek redress directly through judicial procedures [24 CFR 912.9(g)].

All other complaints related to eligible citizen/immigrant status:

If any family member fails to provide documentation or certification as required by the regulation, that member is treated as ineligible. If all family members fail to provide, the family will be denied or terminated for failure to provide documentation and/or certification.

Participants whose assistance is pro-rated (either based on their statement that some members are ineligible or due to failure to verify eligible immigration status for some members after exercising their appeal and hearing rights described above) are entitled to a hearing based on the right to a hearing regarding determinations of Tenant Rent and Total Tenant Payment.

Families denied or terminated for fraud in connection with the non-citizens rule are entitled to a review or hearing in the same way as terminations for any other type of fraud.

C. TENANT GRIEVANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

RCRHA's Grievance Policy and Procedures, for 30-Day Notices (Two-Part Process) and for 3-Day Notices (Expedited Process), shall be applicable to all individual grievances between the Resident and RCRHA, *except* that it shall not apply to an order of eviction following a hearing in a court containing the elements of due process*. Denial of the hearing process does not preclude the resident from exercising the right to seek redress directly through judicial procedures.

* "Elements of Due Process" shall mean an eviction action or termination of tenancy in a state or local court in which the following procedural safeguards are required:

1. Adequate notice to the Resident of grounds for terminating the tenancy and for eviction.
2. Opportunity for the Resident to examine all relevant documents, records, and regulations of the Authority prior to the trial for the purpose of preparing a defense.

3. Right of the Resident to be represented by counsel.
4. Opportunity for the Resident to refute the evidence presented by RCRHA, including the right to confront and cross-examine witnesses and to present any affirmative legal or equitable defense which the tenant may have.
5. A decision on the merits.

Victims of domestic violence have access to the grievance process for an adverse action on admission to assisted housing, or termination of benefits of assisted housing. Only victims retain the right to the formal grievance process as provided under the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA).

Furthermore, the grievance policy is not applicable to disputes between Residents not involving RCRHA, nor of class action grievances. The policy and procedures are not intended as a forum for initiating or negotiating policy changes between individual Residents or a group of residents and RCRHA's Board of Commissioners.

The Grievance Process for a 30-DAY NOTICE to a resident is a two-part process:

- 1. Informal Settlement:** The resident first requests an Informal Settlement (an informal discussion of the problem) with the program staff and attempts to resolve the matter with the program staff. The request may be presented orally or in writing to the program staff. The request must be made within five (5) working days of the time the Resident was notified of an Authority action, or became aware of the condition, situation, or circumstance alleged in the grievance, in order that the grievance may be discussed informally and settled without a hearing if possible.

A summary of the discussion between the resident and program staff will be prepared within a reasonable time following the Informal Settlement, not to exceed five (5) working days, and one copy will be given to the Resident and one retained in RCRHA's Resident lease file. The summary will specify the following:

1. The names of the participants.
2. The date of the meeting or meetings held between the participants.
3. The nature of the disposition thereof and the reason therefore.
4. The procedures by which a hearing under provisions of RCRHA's policy may be obtained if the resident is not satisfied.

2. **Hearing:** If the resident is not satisfied with the decision of the program staff, the resident may then file a written request for a Hearing with RCRHA's Hearing Officer within five (5) working days of receipt of the program staff member's written decision. The **written request** shall be hand delivered or mailed to the attention of RCRHA's Hearing Officer, at RCRHA's Administrative Office.

The written request shall specify:

- The reasons for the grievance;
- The action of relief sought from the RCRHA; and
- Several dates and times in the following 5 days when the complainant can attend a grievance hearing.

The Hearing Officer will have five (5) working days from receipt of the request in which to schedule the time, place, and date of the Hearing. Once held, the Hearing Officer will prepare of summary of the Informal Hearing within five (5) working days of the Hearing, inclusive of the following:

- The names of the participants.
- The date of the meeting held between the participants.
- The nature of the disposition thereof and the reason therefore.

Hearing Process: Procedures governing the hearing: [966.56]

The hearing shall be held before a hearing panel or hearing officer. The complainant shall be afforded a fair hearing, which shall include:

- A. The opportunity to examine before the hearing RCRHA documents, including records and regulations that are directly relevant to the hearing. The Tenant shall be allowed to copy any such document at the Tenant's expense. If the RCRHA does not make the document available for examination upon request by the complainant, the RCRHA may not rely on such document at the grievance hearing.
- B. The right to be represented by counsel or other person chosen as the Tenant's representative and to have such person make statements on the Tenant's behalf.
- C. The right to a private hearing unless the complainant requests a public hearing. The right to present evidence and arguments in support of the Tenant's complaint to controvert evidence relied on by the RCRHA or project management, and to confront

and cross examine all witnesses upon whose testimony or information the RCRHA or project management relies; and

- D. A decision based solely and exclusively upon the fact presented at the hearing. [966.56(b)]

The hearing panel or officer may render a decision without proceeding with the hearing if they determine that the issue has been previously decided in another proceeding. [966.56(c)]

At the hearing, the complainant must first make a showing of an entitlement to the relief sought and, thereafter, the RCRHA must sustain the burden of justifying the PHA action or failure to act against which the complaint is directed. [966.56(e)]

The hearing shall be conducted informally by the hearing panel or officer. Oral or documentary evidence pertinent to the facts and issues raised by the complaint may be received without regard to admissibility under the rules of evidence applicable to judicial proceedings. [966.56(f)]

The hearing panel or officer shall require the RCRHA, the complainant, counsel and other participants or spectators to conduct themselves in an orderly fashion. Failure to comply with the directions of the hearing panel or officer to obtain order may result in exclusion from the proceedings or in a decision adverse to the interests of the disorderly party and granting or denial of the relief sought, as appropriate. [966.56(f)]

The complainant or the RCRHA may arrange in advance, and at expense of the party making the arrangement, for a transcript of the hearing. Any interested party may purchase a copy of such transcript. [966.56(g)]

The RCRHA must provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities to participate in the hearing. Reasonable accommodation may include qualified sign language interpreters, readers, accessible locations, or attendants. If the Tenant is visually impaired, any notice to the Tenant which is required under this procedure must be in an accessible format. [966.56(h)]

EXPEDITED GRIEVANCE PROCESS:

The Expedited Grievance Process for a 3-DAY NOTICE to a resident is a one-part process:

Because HUD has issued a due process determination that the law of the State of North Carolina requires the Tenant be given an opportunity for a hearing in the court which provides the basic elements of due process before eviction from the dwelling unit, the formal grievance procedure shall not be applicable to any termination of tenancy or eviction that involves:

1. Any criminal activity that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises of other residents or employees of RCRHA, or;

2. Any violent or drug-related criminal activity on or off the public housing premises.

Only an expedited hearing may be requested for the above activities.

The expedited hearing process shall be listed on all 3-Day Notices and the procedure is as follows:

1. An informal settlement of grievance is not applicable under this provision. When the resident receives a 3-Day Notice and they are subject to the Expedited Grievance Process, the resident may file a written request for a Hearing with their central office Manager within two (2) working days of receipt of the 3-Day Notice.
2. The Expedited Hearing will be conducted by the Executive Director and shall take place within three (3) working days from the date the request was received.
3. The Executive Director will schedule the hearing within three (3) working days from receipt of the request for the expedited hearing. The Executive Director will promptly notify the appropriate parties of the time, place and date of the review. The notice shall state that no postponements will be permitted and that failure to appear waives the right to the hearing.
4. A written decision shall be provided to all parties within **two (2) working days from the date of the hearing.**

DECISIONS

The decision of the Hearing Officer shall be binding on RCRHA which shall take all actions, or refrain from any actions, necessary to carry out the decision unless RCRHA's Board of Commissioners determines within a reasonable time, and promptly notifies the resident of its determination, that (a) the grievance does not concern RCRHA action or failure to act in accordance with or involving the resident's lease on RCRHA regulations, which adversely affect the resident's rights, duties, welfare or status; (b) the decision of the Hearing Officer is contrary to applicable Federal, State or local law, HUD regulations or requirements of the annual contributions contract between HUD and RCRHA.

A decision by the Hearing Officer or Board of Commissioners in favor of RCRHA or which denies the relief requested by the resident in whole or in part shall not constitute a waiver of, nor affect in any manner whatever, any rights the resident may have to a trial *de novo* or judicial review in any judicial proceedings, which may thereafter be brought in the matter. [24 CFR 966.57]

Miscellaneous matters related to the Tenant Grievance Policy and Procedures:

1. Before a hearing is scheduled in any grievance involving the amount of rent which RCRHA claims is due, the resident shall pay to RCRHA an amount equal to the amount of rent due and payable as of the first of the month preceding the month in which the act took place. The resident shall thereafter deposit the same amount of rent monthly in an escrow account established and maintained by RCRHA, to be disbursed at the direction of the Hearing Officer at such time as the grievance is resolved by decision of the Hearing Officer.

If the resident fails to deposit the amount required, he or she shall have waived his or her right to a Hearing. However, RCRHA in extenuating circumstances may waive these requirements. Unless so waived, the failure to make such payment shall result in a termination of the grievance procedure, provided however, that failure to make payment shall not constitute a waiver of any right the resident may have to contest the Authority's disposition of his or her grievance in any appropriate judicial proceeding.

2. The Hearing Officer may render a decision without proceeding with the Hearing if the Hearing Officer determines that the issue has been previously decided in another proceeding.
3. If the resident or RCRHA fails to appear at a scheduled Hearing, the Hearing Officer, for good cause and in the interest of justice, may make a determination to postpone the Hearing for a period of time not to exceed five (5) working days (except for an expedited hearing), or may make a determination that the party has waived its right to a Hearing. Both the resident and RCRHA shall be notified of any such determination by the Hearing Officer, provided that determination that the resident has waived his or her right to a Hearing shall not constitute a waiver of any right the resident may have to contest the Authority's disposition of the grievance in an appropriate judicial proceeding.

D. DEFINITIONS

“**Authority**” shall mean the Housing Authority abbreviated also as RCRHA.

“**Complainant**” shall mean any Tenant (as defined below) whose grievance is presented to the RCRHA in accordance with the requirements presented in this procedure.

“**Elements of due process**” shall mean an eviction action or a termination of tenancy in a State or local court in which the following procedural safeguards are required:

- (1) Adequate notice to the Tenant of the grounds for terminating the tenancy and for eviction;
- (2) Right of the Tenant to be represented by counsel;

- (3) Opportunity for the Tenant to refute the evidence presented by the PHA, including the right to confront and cross examine witnesses and to present any affirmative legal or equitable defense which the Tenant may have;
- (4) A decision on the merits.

“Hearing Officer” shall mean a person selected in accordance with 24 CFR Section 966.55 and this procedure to hear grievances and render a decision with respect thereto.

“Hearing Panel” shall mean a panel selected in accordance with 24 CFR Section 966.55 and this procedure to hear grievances and render a decision with respect thereto or a system adopted by the RCRHA.

“Tenant” shall mean the adult person (or persons)(other than a Live-in aide): (1) Who resides in the unit, and who executed the lease with the PHA as lessee of the dwelling unit, or, if no such person now resides in the unit, (2) Who resides in the unit, and who is the remaining head of the household of the Tenant family residing in the dwelling unit.

“Grievance” shall mean any dispute that a Resident may have with respect to any RCRHA action, or failure to act, in accordance with the Resident’s lease or RCRHA regulations, policies, or procedures that adversely affect the Resident’s rights, duties, welfare, or status with RCRHA

“Request for Hearing” shall mean a written request filed in accordance with the provisions of the RCRHA’s Grievance Policy and Procedures. The Request for Hearing should state the reason for the grievance, and the action or relief sought.