

Defending Families and Individuals threatened with Eviction from Federally Subsidized Housing, HOME-Funded Properties, Shelter Plus Care and Supportive Housing, Tax Credit Housing, Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, Public Housing, and Project-Based Voucher Program

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Copyright November 15, 2008; Updated December 16, 2008

Note: This article presents a brief overview on defending evictions of tenants from housing assisted through various federal housing programs. It is intended only as a quick introduction. For a detailed and comprehensive discussion of defending such evictions, I refer you to the “Greenbook” published by the NATIONAL HOUSING LAW PROJECT (“NHLP”), *HUD Housing Programs: Tenants’ Rights* (3d. 2004), and the *2006-2007 Supplement*. NHLP’s telephone number is 510-251-9400. The fax number is 510-451-2300. The e-mail address for NHLP is: nhlp@nhlp.org, and the website is www.nhlp.org

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A. Introduction.

This article is intended as a primer on the rights of tenants threatened with eviction from federally subsidized multi-family housing, HOME Investment Partnership-funded housing, Shelter Plus Care and Supportive Housing, tax credit housing, the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, public housing, and the Project-Based Voucher Program..

B. Evictions from Multi-Family Subsidized Apartments receiving Project-Based Section 8 housing assistance payments, or a subsidy in the form of below-market interest rates under section 221(d)(3) and (5), or interest reductions payments under section 236 of the National Housing Act, or below market interest rate direct loans under section 202 of the Housing Act of 1959.

This section of the article applies to evictions from multi family apartment complexes that receive the benefit of rental subsidy in the form of (1) below-market interest rates under section 221(d)(3) of the National Housing Act;¹ (2) interest reduction payments under section 236 of the National Housing Act;² (3) below-market interest rate direct loans under section 202 of the Housing Act of 1959;³ and apartment complexes receiving project-based housing assistance payments under Section 8.⁴ Multi-family apartments receiving project-based Section 8 housing assistance payments under the following programs are covered by this discussion: (1) Section 8 in connection with Section 202 loans for housing for the elderly or disabled;⁵ (2) Section 202 Projects for Non-Elderly

¹ 12 U.S.C.A. § 1715l (d)(3), (5) (West 2001 & Supp. 2008).

² *Id.* at § 1715z-1 (West 2001).

³ *Id.* at § 1701q (West 2001 & Supp. 2008).

⁴ 42 U.S.C.A. §1437f (West 2003 & Supp. 2008).

⁵ 24 C.F.R. § 891.500 - § 891.650 (2008) (program regulations).

Disabled Families and Individuals – Section 162 Assistance;⁶ (3) Section 8 additional assistance program for apartments with HUD-insured and HUD-held mortgages;⁷ (4) the Section 8 housing assistance program for the disposition of HUD-owned apartments;⁸ (5) Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities;⁹ and (6) the Section 8 Project-Based Voucher Program.¹⁰ Much of this Part also applies to evictions from Section 8 new construction, Section 8 substantial rehabilitation, and Section 8 through state housing agencies properties. The primary differences are noted in Part C of this article.

1. Grounds for Eviction.

Congress has mandated that subsidized owners with project-based Section 8 contracts use leases that provide for termination of tenancy for any criminal activity that threatens health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other tenants; any criminal activity that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of their residences by persons residing in the immediate vicinity of the premises; or any drug-related criminal activity **on or near** such premises, engaged in by the tenant, any member of the tenant’s household, or any guest or other person under

⁶ *Id.* at § 891.655 - § 891.790 (program regulations).

⁷ *Id.* at § 886.101- § 886.138 (program regulations).

⁸ *Id.* at § 886.301- § 886.338 (program regulations).

⁹ *Id.* at § 891.430 (applying eviction regulations at 24 C.F.R. Part 247 and § 5.850 - § 5.861).

¹⁰ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437f(o)(13) (West Supp. 2008); 24 C.F.R. Part 983 (2008) (program regulations). The regulation on evictions is set forth at 24 C.F.R. § 983.257 (2008). The regulations permit an owner, upon lease expiration, to refuse to renew the lease for good cause or to refuse to renew the lease without good cause. *See* 24 C.F.R. § 983.257(b) (2008). But, if the owner refuses to renew the lease without good cause, the public housing authority must provide the family with a tenant-based voucher, and the unit is removed from the HAP contract. *Id.*

the tenant's control.¹¹ The statutory mandate is implemented in governing regulations for the preceding programs set forth primarily at 24 C.F.R. Part 247 and § 5.850 - § 5.861 (2008). The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") has also published a handbook, *HUD Handbook 4350.3*, that fleshes out somewhat the regulations.¹²

A subsidized housing landlord may not terminate any tenancy except for (1) material noncompliance with the rental agreement; (2) material failure to carry out obligations under any state landlord and tenant act; (3) criminal activity by the tenant, a household member, guest, or other person under the tenant's control that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents, including property management staff residing on the premises; (4) criminal activity by the tenant, a household member, guest, or other person under the tenant's control that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of their residences by persons residing in the immediate vicinity of the premises; (5) drug-related criminal activity engaged in on or near the premises by any tenant, household member, or guest, and any such activity engaged in on the premises by any other person under the tenant's control; (6) illegal use of a drug by a household member or a pattern of illegal drug use that interferes with the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents; (7) alcohol abuse by the tenant or a household member; (8) violation by the tenant of a condition of probation or parole imposed under federal or state law; (9) fleeing by the tenant to avoid prosecution or confinement after conviction

¹¹ 42 U.S.C. A. § 1437f(d) (West Supp. 2008); (emphasis added); 42 U.S.C.A. § 13662 (West 2005) (statutory termination of tenancy provisions for illegal drug use and alcohol abuse).

¹² UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, *Handbook 4350.3, Rev-1, Occupancy Requirements of Subsidized Multifamily Housing Programs*, chp.. 8, § 3, at paras. 8-11 - 8-16. (May 2003, as revised with CHG-2 effective June 29, 2007) (hereafter referred to as *Handbook 4350.3*). These are the regulations and the handbook that govern evictions from the apartments identified in the preceding paragraph.

of a felony; and (10) other good cause.¹³ To the extent a lease provides for termination of the tenancy without cause, the lease provision is invalid.¹⁴ Thus, even at the end of the lease term, the subsidized housing landlord may terminate the tenancy only for cause.¹⁵

The regulations define the phrase *material noncompliance* as including one or more substantial violations of the rental agreement; repeated minor lease violations that disrupt the livability of the apartment complex, adversely affect the health or safety of any person or the right of any tenant to the quiet enjoyment of the leased premises and related facilities, interfere with the management of the apartments, or have an adverse financial effect on the apartments; nonpayment of rent or other financial obligations under the lease; failure to timely supply information necessary for annual and interim recertifications of the family's income and family composition; and knowingly providing incomplete or inaccurate information required by the landlord to verify tenant income and family composition.¹⁶ The late payment of rent after the due date but within the grace period constitutes a minor violation of the lease.¹⁷ Material noncompliance requires a pattern of

¹³ 24 C.F.R. § 247.3(a); § 5.858 - § 5.861 (2008) (The regulations at Part 5 were first promulgated in 2001 and address evictions for criminal activity, illegal drug-related activity, alcohol abuse, violation of terms of probation or parole, and fleeing to avoid prosecution or confinement after conviction for a felony.); *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, § 3, paras. 8-11 - 8-16.

¹⁴ *Id.* § 247.3(a).

¹⁵ *Id.*; *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, § 3, para. 8-12-C; *Horizon Homes of Davenport v. Nunn*, 684 N.W.2d 221 (Iowa 2004); *Kennedy v. Andover Place Apartments*, 203 S.W.3d 495, 497 (Tex. App. – Houston [14th Dist.] 2006, no pet.); *911 Glen Oaks Apartments v. Wallace*, 88 S.W.3d 281, 285 (Tex. App. – Corpus Christi 2002, no pet.); *Newhouse v. Settegast Heights Village Apartments*, 717 S.W.2d 131 (Tex. App. – Houston [14th Dist.] 1986, no writ).

¹⁶ 24 C.F.R. § 247.3 (c) (2008).

¹⁷ *Id.* at § 247.3 (c) (4).

repeated minor violations, not isolated incidents.¹⁸

With respect to minor violations, the subsidized landlord must not only show the violation is repeated but also that it disrupts the livability of the apartments, or adversely affects the health or safety of any person or the right of any tenant to the quiet enjoyment of the leased premises and related facilities, or interferes with the management of the apartments, or has an adverse financial effect on the apartment complex.¹⁹ HUD gives the following non-comprehensive list of examples of minor lease violations: unauthorized occupants; failing to pay the utilities; damaging or destroying the unit or property; behaving in a manner that continuously disrupts the right of other residents to enjoy the property; and failing to pay the cost of all repairs caused by neglect or carelessness of the tenant.²⁰

The phrase *other good cause* is not defined under regulations. But, the conduct of a tenant cannot be deemed *other good cause* for the eviction unless the landlord has given the tenant prior notice that such conduct constitutes a basis for termination of the tenancy.²¹ Since subsidized owners use form leases and do not bargain over the terms of the lease, any ambiguity on whether an act

¹⁸ *Waimanalo Village Residents' Corp. v. Young*, 956 P.2d 1285, 1300 (Haw. Ct. App. 1998); *Mid-Northern Management, Inc. v. Heinzeroth*, 599 N.E.2d 568, 574 (Ill. App. Ct. 1992).

¹⁹ *See* 24 C.F.R. § 247.3(c)(2) (2008); *Oak Glen of Edina v. Brewington*, 642 N.W.2d 481 (Minn. Ct. App. 2002) (in eviction for repeated late payments or any repeated minor violation of the lease, the landlord must also satisfy one of the preconditions of § 247.3(c)(2)); *see also* *911 Glen Oak Apartments v. Wallace*, 88 S.W.3d 281 (Tex. App. – Corpus Christi 2002, no pet.) (upholding trial court finding that landlord failed to prove that tenant had violated the lease by numerous loud disturbances that threatened the health and safety of other tenants); *compare* *Chancellor Manor v. Gales*, 649 N.W.2d 892 (Minn. Ct. App. 2002) (holding that filing more than seventy late rent notices and evictions constituted an adverse financial effect on the subsidized owner).

²⁰ *See Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, § 3, at para. 8-13-A-4-d.

²¹ 24 C.F.R. § 247.3(b) (2008). Such notice must be in writing and served on the tenant by first class mail and hand delivery.

constitutes good cause or material noncompliance should be resolved in the tenant's favor.²² Thus, if the landlord has not given the tenant prior written notice that the conduct on which the eviction is premised constitutes a basis for eviction and the ground for eviction does not clearly fit within the definition of material noncompliance, alcohol abuse, criminal activity, or illegal drug activity, the tenant should argue that the eviction is for *other good cause*. In such case, since the tenant has not been given prior written notice that the conduct could result in eviction, the landlord cannot evict the tenant for the conduct.

In addition, when the eviction is based on *other good cause*, the termination date must be effective at the end of the lease term and not during the lease term.²³ Thus, for example, if the tenant is six months into a one year lease, the landlord may not evict on grounds that fall under the definition of *other good cause* until the lease term has expired. On the other hand, if the tenant's lease term has expired or the lease is on a month-to-month basis, the landlord may evict for *other good cause* after giving the proper thirty-day notice of proposed termination. Of course, the owner must prove good cause in court and cannot simply show that the lease has expired and that he has given proper notice of termination.²⁴

2. Notice of Lease Termination.

The notice of termination must comply with certain requirements. It must state the date the tenancy is terminated; state the reasons for the eviction with sufficient specificity to enable the tenant to prepare a defense; advise the tenant that if he or she remains in the apartment on the date

²² See e.g., *Sirtex Oil Industry v. Erigan*, 403 S.W.2d 784, 789 (Tex. 1966) (lease will be most strongly construed against the lessor).

²³ 24 C.F.R. § 247.4 (c) (2008).

²⁴ See *supra* note 15.

specified for termination, the landlord may seek to enforce the termination only by bringing a judicial action, at which time the tenant may present a defense;²⁵ advise the tenant that he has ten days in which to discuss the proposed termination of tenancy with the landlord;²⁶ and advise that persons with disabilities have the right to request reasonable accommodations to participate in the hearing process.²⁷ In addition, the landlord must also comply with all requirements of state law.²⁸ No termination is valid unless the landlord has complied with the federal notice requirements.²⁹

Subsidized landlords frequently fail to give adequate notice of termination. As noted, it is a defense to eviction when the landlord fails to give proper notice of lease termination.³⁰ Although

²⁵ 24 C.F.R. § 247.4(a) (2008).

²⁶ *Handbook 4350.3*. at chp. 8, § 3, para.8-13-B-2(c)(4) . The requirement that the tenant be notified of an opportunity to discuss the proposed eviction is imposed by *Handbook 4350.3*; it is not included in 24 C.F.R Part 247. The regulations for the Section 8 new construction program, however, do include a requirement that the owner advise the tenant of the tenant’s right to respond to the owner. 24 C.F.R. § 880.607 (c)(1) (2008). The right to respond established by the Section 8 new construction regulations is also applicable to the Section 8 substantial rehabilitation program and the Section 8 through state housing agencies program. See 24 C.F.R. § 881.601 (substantial rehabilitation); § 883.701 (Section 8 for state housing agencies).

²⁷ *Handbook 4350.3*. at chp. 8, § 3, para.8-13-B-2(c)(5). This is a new requirement imposed by HUD with its CHG-2 revisions to the Handbook effective June 29, 2007.

²⁸ See 24 C.F.R. § 247.6(c) (“A tenant may rely on State or local law governing eviction procedures where such law provides the tenant procedural rights which are in addition to those provided by this subpart, except where such State or local law has been preempted. ...”); *Rowe v. Pierce*, 622 F. Supp. 1030 (D.D.C. 1985); *Kennedy v. Andover Place Apartments*, 203 S.W.3d 495, 498 (Tex. App. – Houston [14th Dist.] 2006, no pet.).

²⁹ 24 C.F.R. § 247.3(a) (2008); *Leake v. Ellicott Redevelopment Phase II*, 470 F. Supp. 600, 602 (W.D. N.Y. 1979).

³⁰ See, e.g., *Leake v. Ellicott Redevelopment Phase II*, *supra* note 29, 470 F. Supp. at 602 (finding termination notice failed to comply with the requirements of 24 C.F.R. Part 450, the predecessor to Part 247); *Riverview Towers Associates v. Jones*, 817 A.2d 324 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 2003) (landlord must comply with HUD lease termination notice requirements); *Lincoln Terrace Associates, Ltd., v. Kelly*, 635 S.E.2d 434, 438 (N.C. Ct. App. 2006) (subsidized (continued...))

the notice may appear at first blush to comply with the regulations, it should be closely scrutinized. One frequent mistake is failure of the notice to state the reasons for the eviction with sufficient specificity. Conclusory allegations that the tenant is being evicted for “violation of paragraph six of the lease,” “material noncompliance with the lease,” or for “conduct that disturbs the quiet enjoyment of the premises neighbors” are all insufficient.³¹ Another common mistake is the failure to state the date of the termination of the tenancy; a statement that the lease will be terminated a certain number of days after delivery of the notice is insufficient.³² In nonpayment of rent cases the notice must state both the dollar amount of the balance due on the rent account and the date of the

³⁰(...continued)

landlord failed to prove that notice of termination complied with lease requirements); *Hedco v. Blanchette*, 763 A.2d 639 (R.I. 2000) (notice of proposed termination that failed to specify the termination date of the lease but that merely stated “unless you make payment of all rent in arrears within ten (10) days of the date that this Notice was mailed to you, your tenancy will be terminated and an eviction notice may be initiated in court against you on or after June 29, 1998,” does not comply with the requirement of 24 C.F.R. § 247.4(a)(1), which requires a specific termination date for a federally subsidized tenancy); *Moon v. Spring Creek Apartments*, 11 S.W.3d 427 (Tex. App. – Texarkana 2000, no pet.) (termination notice failed to meet the specificity requirement mandated by the federal regulations and constitutional due process and, therefore, tenant’s lease was not lawfully terminated); *Lakeside Gardens v. Lashay*, No. 2007AP1246, 2008 Wisc. App. LEXIS 43, *3-8 (Wis. Ct. App. Jan. 16, 2008) (subsidized owner must comply with federal rules relating to notice of lease termination even if the terms are not included in the lease); *see also Swords to Plowshares v. Smith*, 294 F. Supp. 2d 1067, 1070-72 (N.D. Cal. 2002) (recognizing that landlord must comply with applicable federal regulations when serving lease termination notice).

³¹ *See e.g., Fairview Co. v. Idowu*, 559 N.Y.S.2d 925, 928-30 (N.Y. Civil Ct. 1990) (termination notice not sufficiently specific); *Associated Estates Corp. v. Bartell*, 492 N.E.2d 841, 846 (Ohio Ct. App. 1985) (notice that claimed “serious, repeated damage to unit. Repeated disturbance.” was inadequate because it did not refer to specific instances of conduct; *Moon v. Spring Creek Apartments*, *supra*, note 30 (termination notice failed to meet the specificity requirement mandated by the federal regulations and constitutional due process and, therefore, tenant’s lease was not lawfully terminated); *see also Escalera v. New York City Housing Authority*, 425 F.2d 853, 862 (2d Cir.), *cert denied*, 400 U.S. 853 (1970) (public housing – termination notices must adequately inform tenant of nature of evidence against him).

³² *See* 24 C.F.R. § 247.4(a) (2008); *Hedco v. Blanchette*, *supra* note 30.

computation.³³ Because federally subsidized landlords may not evict for unpaid late fees,³⁴ the inclusion of late fees on the notice of lease termination violates the law.³⁵

The notice of termination must be served on the tenant by mailing it to the tenant by first-class mail and by serving a copy on any adult person answering the door at the apartment, or, if no adult responds, by placing the notice under or through the door or by attaching it to the door.³⁶ Service is not effective until both notices have been served.³⁷ The notice is deemed received on the date on which it is mailed or the date on which the notice is delivered to the apartment, whichever is later.³⁸

A thirty-day notice of termination is required for termination based on good cause.³⁹ In evictions for criminal activity, alcohol abuse, material noncompliance, or material failure to carry out obligations under a state landlord and tenant act, the notice period is determined by the lease agreement and state law.⁴⁰ The landlord may not rely on any grounds in court which are different from the reasons set forth in the termination notice, except those grounds of which the landlord had

³³ 24 C.F.R. at § 247.4(e); *Fairview Co. v. Idowu*, *supra* note 31, 559 N.Y.S.2d at 929; *see Leake v. Ellicott Redevelopment Phase II*, *supra* note 29, 470 F. Supp. at 602.

³⁴ Handbook 4350.3, at chp. 6, § 3, para. 6-23E.

³⁵ *Seldin Co. v. Calabro*, 702 N.W.2d 504 (Iowa Ct. App. 2005).

³⁶ 24 C.F.R § 247.4(b) (2008).

³⁷ *Id.*; *Leake v. Ellicott Redevelopment Phase II*, *supra* note 29, 470 F. Supp. at 602.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.* at § 247.4 (c).

⁴⁰ *Id.*

no knowledge at the time the termination notice was sent.⁴¹ As noted, the notice of termination must state that the tenant has ten days in which to discuss the proposed eviction with the landlord.⁴² Although this does not entitle the tenant to a formal grievance hearing as is available in public housing evictions based on non-criminal conduct, it does at least ensure that the tenant has an opportunity to talk with management. The tenant should always utilize this meeting as both an opportunity to resolve the eviction and as an informal discovery opportunity.

The meeting requirement may lead to several possible defenses. For example, if management refuses to meaningfully discuss the proposed termination but merely insists that the tenant must move, the tenant should argue that the landlord has failed to comply with the meeting requirement of the lease and *Handbook 4350.3*, because *Handbook 4350.3* and the lease require a discussion.⁴³ The lease is a contract. Just as the landlord has a right to enforce the contract, the tenant has a contract right to enforce the discussion provision. Judges who may not regularly see federally subsidized eviction cases and who may be unfamiliar with the importance of the tenant rights can certainly understand an argument based on the lease contract.

In addition, the tenant should use the ten-day meeting requirement as an opportunity to cure any breach of the lease (for instance, by tendering any rent owed or by ceasing any conduct of which management has complained). If the landlord proceeds with the eviction, the tenant should argue

⁴¹ *Id.* at § 247.6(b). But section 8 new construction landlords may not rely on any grounds that are different from the grounds set forth in the termination notice. See 24 C.F.R. § 880.607(c)(3) (2008); *Ross v. Broadway Towers, Inc.*, 228 S.W.3d 113, 120-21 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2006), *cert denied*, 128 S. Ct. 543 (2007).

⁴² *Handbook 4350.3*. at chp. 8, § 3, para. 8-13-B-2(c)(4) .

⁴³ *See id.*

that the ten-day period should be construed as a cure period.⁴⁴

Advocates should also use the meeting requirement as an opportunity for informal discovery about the landlord's case. This can be accomplished by asking questions of the landlord about the underlying facts for the eviction and by reviewing the tenant's file. Often, however, landlords or their attorneys refuse to allow review of the tenant's file. Unlike HUD, such owners are not covered by the Freedom of Information Act.⁴⁵ But, with the revisions to HUD Handbook 4350.3 effective June 29, 2007, HUD mandated that owners permit tenants and their authorized representatives to review the tenant's file.⁴⁶ Sometime an owner can be convinced to allow review of the file with the argument that settlement is more likely when both parties fully understand the strength of each other's position. When landlords simply shut the door, however, the tenant should aggressively use the discovery process in the eviction proceeding to obtain the tenant's file. Competent advocacy requires review of the landlord's tenant file, because it can lead to many possible defenses. For example, the landlord may claim nonpayment of rent, but may have failed to properly calculate the tenant's rent. That can be determined only by reviewing the HUD Form 50059 completed by the landlord on the tenant. Or, the file may reveal that the landlord retaliated

⁴⁴ *Cf. Housing Authority of the City of Everett v. Terry*, 114 Wash. 2d 558, 78 P.2d 745 (Wash. 1990) (en banc) (holding that state law cure provision not preempted by federal public housing eviction and grievance regulations). With respect to evictions premised upon criminal activity, at least one court has held that a state law opportunity to cure does not apply to federally subsidized housing evictions premised upon criminal activity. *See Scarborough v. Winn Residential L.L.P.*, 890 A.2d 249, 258 (D.C. 2006). That limitation on the right to cure under state law should be limited to criminal activity and drug-related criminal activity and not other non-rent breaches.

⁴⁵ *See* 24 C.F.R. Part 15 (2008) (public access to HUD records).

⁴⁶ *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 4, § 3, at para. 4-22-E; chp. 5, § 3 at para. 5-23-C (effective June 29, 2007).

against the tenant by sending a notice of lease termination after the tenant complained about failure to repair or management practices.

3. Nonpayment of Rent Evictions.

Evictions for alleged nonpayment of rent must always be scrutinized especially carefully, because many possible defenses are available. If the facts show that the eviction is truly for nonpayment of rent (as distinguished from nonpayment of other charges), the reason for the default should be examined. If, for example, the tenant did not pay because of a decrease in income, the tenant family is entitled to have its rent reduced.⁴⁷ Only two exceptions to this rule exist.⁴⁸ First, an owner may refuse to process an interim adjustment when the tenant reports a decrease in income if the decrease was caused by a deliberate action of the tenant to avoid paying rent.⁴⁹ This will almost never be the reason a tenant suffers a decrease in income. Second, the owner may refuse to decrease the tenant's rent if the owner has confirmation that the decrease will last less than one month.⁵⁰ HUD gives the owner the right, however, to process an interim recertification if it chooses

⁴⁷ *See id.* at § 5.657 (c) (2008) (“A family may request an interim reexamination of family income because of any changes since the last examination. The owner must make the interim reexamination within a reasonable time after the family request.”); *Handbook 4350.3*, at chp. 7, § 2, para. 7-13, “Effective Date of Interim Recertifications;” *see City of Albuquerque v. Brooks*, 844 P.2d 822, 824 (N.M. 1992) (it is an equitable defense in public housing eviction for failure to pay back rent that tenant is indigent and unable to pay); *Housing Authority of St. Louis County v. Boone*, 747 S.W.2d 311 (Mo. App. 1988) (public housing – holding that after the separation of husband and wife, the remaining spouse is liable only for adjusted rent based upon the household's new income level); *Maxton Housing Authority v. McLean*, 313 N.C. 277, 328 S.E. 2d 290 (N.C. 1985) (public housing – holding that after separation, remaining spouse's public housing rent should be based on new income).

⁴⁸ *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 7, § 2, at para. 7-11-D.

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

but cautions that an owner must implement this policy consistently for all tenants.⁵¹ Therefore, in a case when the owner is resisting processing an interim adjustment, the tenant should remind the owner that the owner clearly has the right to process an interim adjustment and that failure to do so may not be done in a discriminatory manner. In such a case, it may be necessary in the eviction to obtain discovery of the owner's records relating to requests by other tenants of interim adjustments. If the tenant can show inconsistent or discriminatory treatment, the tenant will have a defense to the eviction.⁵²

Issues often arise over the effective date of the rent decrease. Owners frequently attempt to make the rent decrease effective the month following the owner's action in completing the interim recertification after the tenant reports the loss of income. *Handbook 4350.3*, however, is quite clear that if the tenant complies with interim reporting requirements, rent decreases must be effective on the "first day of the month after the date of action that caused the interim certification."⁵³ The action causing the interim certification is the loss of income (for example, a loss of a job or reduction in child support), and not the recertification action by the owner.

In addition, owners often do not properly retroactively reduce a tenant's rent when the tenant delays in reporting a loss of income. Take the following example: Ms. Jones loses her job in early January. She first reports the loss of income in March. The landlord reduces Ms. Jones's rent effective April 1 and files an eviction lawsuit for the unpaid rent for February and March. The lease imposes no time requirement on reporting decreases in income, but it does require that income

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *See id.*

⁵³ *Id.*, at chp. 7, § 2, para. 7-13, "Effective Date of Interim Recertifications."

increases be reported in ten days. Here, the owner should reduce Ms. Jones's rent retroactive to February 1. Ms. Jones complied with her interim reporting requirement, because the lease does not mandate that she report the income loss within a certain reporting period. Thus, under *Handbook 4350.3*, she is entitled to have the rent decreased effective February 1.⁵⁴

(In these cases in which the defense depends on the provisions in *Handbook 4350.3*, the advocate must make sure that the applicable section of *Handbook 4350.3* are entered into evidence. Unlike statutes and regulations, the court will not take judicial notice of handbooks. The handbook can be proved up through the manager's testimony. My experience is that managers pride themselves on familiarity with the handbook even if they misinterpret it, and they will authenticate it for you.) .

4. Minimum Rent Tenants and Eviction for Nonpayment.

Evictions of minimum rent tenants raise unique issues. Although Congress mandated minimum rents with the passage of the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998⁵⁵, it recognized that situations would arise in which a family would be unable to pay the minimum rent. Thus, Congress created an exception for hardship circumstances.⁵⁶ Congress required that a hardship exemption be granted to families unable to pay the minimum rent because of financial hardship in the following circumstances: (1) the family has lost eligibility for or is waiting on an eligibility determination for a federal, state or local assistance program; (2) the family would be evicted as a result of the minimum rent requirement; (3) the income of the family has decreased

⁵⁴ *See id.*

⁵⁵ Pub. L. No. 105-276, 112 Stat. 2461, 2518 (October 21, 1998) (codified in scattered sections of Title 42 of the United States Code).

⁵⁶ *See* 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437a(a)(3)(B) (West 2003).

because of changed circumstances, including loss of employment; (4) a death in the family has occurred; and (5) such other circumstances determined by HUD.⁵⁷ When HUD published implementing regulations, it did not expand the list of circumstances but tracked the hardship circumstances established by Congress.⁵⁸ Public housing authorities (“PHAs”) and project-based Section 8 landlords, are free, however, to establish other circumstances in their local policies.⁵⁹

If the tenant is being evicted for nonpayment of the \$25 minimum rent,⁶⁰ the tenant may have a hardship exemption defense to the eviction. This includes cases in which a minimum rent tenant receives a utility reimbursement check to pay for utilities and the eviction is based not on nonpayment of the \$25 but on the tenant’s failure to maintain utility service.⁶¹ The tenant’s failure to maintain utility service, however, may be attributable to a qualifying hardship. For example, if a tenant is on the minimum rent of \$25 and entitled to a utility allowance of \$45, that tenant will receive a monthly utility reimbursement check of \$20. However, if the tenant is granted a hardship exemption from payment of the minimum rent, the tenant will receive a utility reimbursement check of \$45. If the tenant’s utility bill is averaging \$40 each month, the exemption from the minimum rent will give the tenant \$45 to apply to the utility bill rather than \$20. That extra \$25 may mean the difference between homelessness and shelter. In sum, although the eviction on its face may seem

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ *See* 24 C.F.R. § 5.630(b) (2008); *HUD Handbook 4350*, at chp. 5, § 3, para. 5-26-D.

⁵⁹ 24 C.F.R. at § 5.630(b)(1)(v) (2008).

⁶⁰ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437a(a)(3) (West 2003); 24 C.F.R. § 5.630 (2008). The \$25 minimum rent must be adjusted by any utility allowance for which the family is eligible. *See* 24 C.F.R. § 5.632, § 5.634 (2008).

⁶¹ Minimum rent tenants who pay their own utilities are entitled to a utility allowance and utility reimbursements when the allowance exceeds the total tenant payment. *See generally* 24 C.F.R. § 5.628 (total tenant payment), § 5.632 (utility reimbursements), and 5.634 (tenant rent).

to be a straightforward failure to maintain utility service, it should be closely examined to determine whether a hardship exemption from the minimum rent might prevent the eviction.

In any nonpayment of the minimum rent case, the advocate should immediately request that the landlord grant the tenant a hardship exemption from the minimum rent.⁶² That will start the clock running on the effective date for implementation of the hardship exemption and can help set up a defense to the unpaid rent due before the request. If a family requests a financial hardship exemption, the project-based Section 8 landlord must suspend the minimum rent beginning the month following the family's request.⁶³ The suspension continues until the landlord determines whether a hardship exists and whether it is temporary or long term.⁶⁴ In addition, PHAs are prohibited from evicting the family for nonpayment of the minimum rent during the ninety days following the family's request for a hardship exemption even if the PHA determines that the family does not qualify for a financial hardship exemption.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, this same ninety day protection does not apply to project-based Section 8 landlords who determine that the family does not qualify

⁶² The regulations and *Handbook 4350.3* do not contain a requirement that subsidized owners notify minimum rent tenants of the right to request a hardship exemption. But, when a subsidized owner fails to do so and a resulting nonpayment of rent eviction could have been avoided, the tenant should craft an argument under state law theories of equity, estoppel, and due process that the landlord may not evict. *Cf. Bella Vista Apartments v. Herzner*, 796 N.E.2d 593 (Ohio Ct. Common Pleas 2003) (applying equity and refusing to evict tenant who moved in his wife and three children without getting approval from the subsidized landlord). Public housing authorities, on the other hand, must "advise any family who pays the minimum rent of the right to request the exemption. UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, *Public Housing Occupancy Guidebook*, chp.. 13, at § 13.1 (June 2003).

⁶³ 24 C.F.R. § 5.630(b)(2)(ii) (2008).

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *See id.* at § 5.630(b)(2)(i)(c).

for an exemption.⁶⁶

It is not perfectly clear under the regulations whether a family is protected from eviction for any unpaid minimum rent that came due before the family requested an exemption. It can be argued that the family is protected for the ninety day period. The family cannot avail itself of the hardship exemption until the month following the request, but one can argue that the eviction protection prohibits eviction for the ninety day period – even for unpaid minimum rent due prior to the request for a hardship exemption. This makes sense because most families will first request a hardship exemption only after they have defaulted on paying the minimum rent. The family can then use the ninety day period to pay any minimum rent that came due before the request for the hardship exemption.

When the tenant requests a hardship exemption, three different results are possible. First, if the owner determines there is no qualifying hardship, the owner must immediately reinstate the minimum rent, and the tenant is responsible for paying any minimum rent that was not paid from the date the rent was suspended.⁶⁷ The owner is required to enter into a reasonable repayment agreement.⁶⁸ Second, if the owner determines the hardship is temporary, the owner may not impose the minimum rent requirement until ninety days after the suspension.⁶⁹ At the end of the ninety days, however, the tenant is responsible for paying the minimum rent retroactive to the date of the

⁶⁶ *See id.*; § 5.630(b)(2)(ii) (directing that project-based Section 8 landlords suspend the minimum rent until they determine whether a qualifying hardship exists and whether it is temporary or long term but imposing no mandatory ninety day suspension period.)

⁶⁷ *Id.* § 5.630(b)(2)(iii)(A).

⁶⁸ *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 5, § 4, at para. 5-26-D-3-b(2).

⁶⁹ 24 C.F.R. § 5.630(b)(2)(ii) (C) (2008).

suspension.⁷⁰ Here again, the owner must permit the tenant to pay under the terms of a reasonable repayment agreement.⁷¹ Third, if the owners determines the hardship is long term, the owner must exempt the tenant from the minimum rent until such time the hardship no longer exists.⁷² But, the owner must recertify the tenant every ninety days.⁷³

5. Evictions for Nonpayment of Other Charges.

Evictions for alleged nonpayment of rent must also be reviewed to determine whether the alleged nonpayment of rent is really nonpayment of charges other than rent. For example, the eviction for nonpayment of rent may have resulted from the subsidized owner applying rent payments by the tenant to late charges, repair charges, or other amounts owed by tenant. Unless the lease or state law specifically allows the owner to determine how payments are to be applied, the owner's unilateral action in supplying rent payments to other charges may be illegal.⁷⁴ The tenant in such a case may have notice defenses or defenses to the validity of the particular charges assessed by the landlord. For instance, subsidized owners are prohibited from evicting for failure to pay late

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.* at § 5.630(b)(2)(iii)(B).

⁷³ *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 5, § 4, at para. 5-26-D-3-b(4).

⁷⁴ At least one HUD regional office has taken the position that an owner's policy of applying rent payments to accrued late charges is illegal. See letter from Lionel Jenkins, Director, Housing Management, Providence Rhode Island Regional Office, to Muriel Varieur of PROMAC, Inc. (July 29, 1991) (on file with the National Housing Law Project).

charges⁷⁵ and must pay the cost of repairs resulting from normal wear and tear.⁷⁶ Finally, when all else fails, Chapter 13 bankruptcy may be appropriate as a legal measure to prevent the tenant's eviction for nonpayment of rent.⁷⁷

6. Evictions Following Subsidy Terminations by Owner, including Fraud Allegations.

Some nonpayment of rent evictions result when the owner claims the tenant failed to comply with the annual recertification requirement, and the owner raises the rent to the fair market rent. HUD requires the owners to follow specific notice procedures.⁷⁸ Notices should be carefully scrutinized for compliance with all HUD requirements. The owner is not entitled to evict the tenant when the owner does not scrupulously follow those procedures.⁷⁹

Subsidized owners may also terminate the tenant's rental subsidy in certain other limited

⁷⁵ *Handbook 4350.3* at chp. 6, § 3, para. 6-23-F; *Community Realty Management Inc. v. Harris*, 714 A.2d 282, 292-93 (N.J. 1998); *Seldin Co. v. Calabro*, 702 N.W.2d 504 (Iowa Ct. App. 2005).

⁷⁶ *See Handbook 4350.3*, at chp. 6, § 3, para. 6-25-C (permitting owner to charge for damages cause by carelessness, misuse, or neglect by tenant, household members or visitors); The lease will also impose a repair obligation upon the subsidized owner; *see also Gorsuch Homes, Inc. v. Wooten*, 597 N.E.2d 554 (Ohio Ct. App. 1992) (holding that failure of a subsidized housing tenant to pay disputed damages cannot be deemed to be a material breach of the lease.).

⁷⁷ *See e.g., Stoltz v. Brattleboro Housing Authority (In re Stoltz)*, 315 F.3d 80 (2d Cir. 2002); *Brattleboro Housing Authority v. Stoltz (In re Stoltz)*, 197 F.3d 625 (2d. Cir. 1999); *Biggs v. Hous. Auth. of City of Pittsburgh*, No. 07cv0007, 2007 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 14232 (W.D. Pa. Feb. 28, 2007, *appeal dism'd sub nom. In re Biggs*, 2008 U.S. App. LEXIS 7034 (3d Cir. April 1, 2008). Use of Chapter 13 bankruptcy as a tool to defend evictions is a topic onto itself and beyond the scope of this article.

⁷⁸ *Handbook 4350.3*, at chp. 7.

⁷⁹ *See, e. g., Good Neighbor Apt Associates v. Rosario*, No. 073743/07, 2008 N.Y. Misc. LEXIS 4584 (N.Y. Civ. Ct. June 20, 2008); *Lower East Side I Associates LLC v. Estevez*, 787 N.Y.S.2d 636 (N.Y. Civ. Ct. 2004); *East Harlem Pilot Block Building 1 HFDC v. Cordero*, 763 N.Y.S.2d 203 (N.Y. Civ. Ct. 2003).

circumstances, but those circumstances are very limited,⁸⁰ and an owner may do so only in strict compliance with the notice procedures set forth in the lease and *Handbook 4350.3*.⁸¹ An owner may not terminate assistance because of alleged lease violations and then seek to evict the tenant on the basis of nonpayment of the fair market rent.⁸² HUD's form family model lease for subsidized program requires that the landlord give the tenant notice and an opportunity to meet with the owner to discuss the proposed termination of assistance in two circumstances: (1) when the tenant does not provide requested recertification information within ten days after receipt of the landlord's notice of intent to terminate assistance and (2) the tenant's income has increased such that the tenant is required to pay the full fair market rent.⁸³ When the termination of assistance is based on the family's failure to establish citizenship or eligible immigration status, the owner must also notify

⁸⁰ The owner may terminate the tenant's rental subsidy if (1) the tenant fails to provide required information at the time of the annual recertification; (2) the tenants fails to sign required consent and verifications forms; (3) the tenant's income has increased such that it is sufficient to pay the full contract rent; (3) the tenant fails to move to a different-sized unit within thirty days after notification from the owner that the unit of the required size is available; (4) a tenant is receiving housing subsidy assistance but the owner is unable to establish citizenship or eligible immigration status for any family members; or (5) a student enrolled at an institution of higher education does not meet the eligibility requirements for Section 8 assistance. *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, § 1, at para. 8-5; see also *Homesavers Council of Greenfield Gardens, Inc. v. Sanchez*, 874 N.E.2d 497 (Mass. App. Ct. 2007). In *Homesavers* a Section 236 landlord terminated the tenant's section 8 subsidy, without notice to the tenant, because the value of the subsidy at the time was minimal because of the tenant's income and transferred it to another apartment. The landlord subsequently filed an eviction when the tenant lost her job and was unable to pay the section 236 rent. The parties settled the eviction with the landlord agreeing to reinstate the tenant's section 8 subsidy. The court upholds emotional distress damages of \$5,000 and attorney's fees award).

⁸¹ See *id.* at para. 8-1-A.

⁸² See *Jessie v. Jerusalem Apartments*, No. 12-06-00113-CV, 2006 Tex. App. LEXIS 9142 (Tex. App. – Tyler Oct. 25, 2006, no pet.).

⁸³ HUD Family Model Lease for Subsidized Programs, at para. 17. The form lease is set forth in Appendix 4-A of *Handbook 4350.3*.

the tenant and give the tenant an opportunity for a hearing.⁸⁴ Interestingly, the opportunity for a hearing requirement is not required by the lease or *Handbook 4350.3* when the subsidy termination results because of the tenant's failure to move to a different-sized unit.⁸⁵ But, in any case in which the owner has terminated the tenant's assistance, the tenant should maintain that the tenant has a property right in the subsidy, and due process requires notice and an opportunity for a hearing prior to the termination of the subsidy.⁸⁶ If the owner terminates the subsidy on an impermissible ground or fails to comply with the proper procedures in terminating the tenant's subsidy and increasing the tenant's rent, the underlying termination of the tenant's rental subsidy is invalid and the owner should not prevail in an eviction based on nonpayment of the full fair market rent.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ See 24 C.F.R. §5.514 (2008); *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, § 1, at para. 8-7-C.

⁸⁵ See *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, § 1, at para. 8-5; HUD Family Model Lease for Subsidized Programs, at para. 17

⁸⁶ See *Holbrook v. Pitt*, 643 F.2d 1261, 1277-78 (7th Cir. 1981) (finding government action and property right in project-based Section 8s subsidy); *Anast v. Commonwealth Apartments*, 956 F. Supp. 792, 797-99 (N.D. Ill. 1994) (finding government action on part of Section 8 Substantial Rehabilitation landlord in evicting tenant); *American Property Management Co. V. Green-Talaefard*, 552 N.E.2d 14 (Ill. Ct. App. 1990)(court holds that tenant's rental subsidy may not be terminated without notice and an opportunity for hearing). The presence of a property right for an existing tenant in the subsidy is clear. See *id.* The more difficult issue is establishing the presence of sufficient governmental action to implicate the fourteenth amendment. See, e.g., *Miller v. Hartwood Apartments, Ltd.*, 689 F.2d 1239 (5th Cir. 1982); *Hodges v. Metts*, 676 F.2d 1133 (6th Cir. 1982). Although the doctrine of state action has dramatically evolved since the late 1970's and depends on the extent of the participation of the government in the particular challenged action, compare *Brentwood Academy v. Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Assn.*, 531 U.S. 288 (2001) (finding state action sufficient to implicate fourteenth amendment) with *American Mfrs. Mutual Ins. Co. v. Sullivan*, 526 U.S. 40 (1999) (finding insufficient state action to implicate fourteenth amendment), the requisite governmental action implicating due process will be present if HUD directs the termination of the subsidy. See, e.g., *Watson v. U. S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development*, 645 F. Supp. 345 (S. D. Ohio 1986) (assuming state action without discussion and focusing on existence of property right).

⁸⁷ See *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, at para. 8-1-A ("Owners are authorized to terminate

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Evictions for alleged fraud by the tenant present special issues. A common error is to label a tenant's action fraud when the action or failure to act is either negligent or unintentional. Fraud is an intentional deception resulting in payment of Section 8 funds in violation of program rules.⁸⁸ Tenant errors resulting because tenants misunderstand or forget the rules do not constitute fraud.⁸⁹ When the owner discovers that the tenant has failed to report a change in income⁹⁰ or inaccurately reported information, the owner is required to notify the tenant in writing and give the tenant ten days to meet with the owner to discuss the allegations.⁹¹ If the tenant acted unintentionally or acted based upon a misunderstanding, the owner has no basis to evict if the tenant agrees to enter into a repayment agreement.⁹² Moreover, although an unemployed tenant may have an obligation to report income from an occasional one-day job, such income should not affect the tenant's rent because it is temporary, nonrecurring, and sporadic.⁹³ When this is the case, the tenant's failure to report does

⁸⁷(...continued)

assistance only in limited circumstances and after following required procedures to ensure that tenants have received proper notice and an opportunity to respond.") *Lower East Side I Associates LLC v. Estevez*, *supra* note 79, 787 N.Y.S.2d 636 (refusing to evict tenant for untimely annual recertification when owner failed to send notices required by *Handbook 4350.3*).

⁸⁸ 24 C.F.R. Part 792 (2008); *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, § 4, at paras. 8-17 (procedures for addressing discrepancies and errors); 8-18 (procedures for addressing fraud).

⁸⁹ *See Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, § 4, at para. 8-18-B.

⁹⁰ The HUD Model Family Lease for Subsidized Owners requires tenants to immediately report that a household member has moved out, an adult family member who was reported as unemployed on the most recent certification obtains employment, or the household's income cumulatively increases by \$200 or more a month.

⁹¹ *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, § 4, at para. 8-17-C, D.

⁹² *Id.* at para. 8-17-E.

⁹³ 24 C.F.R. § 5.609 (c) (2008).

not constitute fraud, because the income, if reported, should not be counted in calculating the tenant's rent. Thus, no Section 8 subsidy would be improperly paid as a result of the failure to report the sporadic income.⁹⁴

HUD gives the following as an example of an unintentional program violation: The tenant reports his full time job but does not report a part-time job of another family member where the work is on an as-needed basis, with the income uncertain, small in amount, and infrequent.⁹⁵ In this instance, the tenant should be allowed to sign a repayment agreement and not be evicted.⁹⁶ Tenant error also occurs when the tenant obtains employment and does not promptly report it but reports it at the next annual recertification or after receiving a letter from management that it has received a report that the tenant has gone to work. Owners too often conclude this is fraud and attempt eviction on that basis. The tenant's defense here is that the action was not fraud; therefore, the landlord may only require repayment for the time period the tenant delayed in reporting the change but may not evict the tenant.⁹⁷ On the other hand, fraud is more likely if the act was done repeatedly, the tenant falsified or altered documents, or the tenant signed recertification paperwork under penalty of perjury listing some income but not other income.⁹⁸ Fraud requires that the tenant have received some increased subsidy.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ *Id.* at § 792.103.

⁹⁵ *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, § 4, at para. 8-17-E.

⁹⁶ *Id.*

⁹⁷ *See id.*

⁹⁸ *Id.*, at para. 8-17-F.

⁹⁹ 24 C.F.R. § 792.103 (2008); *Greene Avenue Associates, v. Cardwell*, 743 N.Y.S.2d 842 (N.Y. Civ. Ct. 2002) (refusing to evict tenant for fraud in not reporting presence of

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7. Evictions for Non-Rent Lease Violations and Fair Housing Act Reasonable Accommodation Defense.

Finally, especially with respect to evictions premised on misconduct, tenants may have defenses under the Fair Housing Act. Such claims may be raised as affirmative defense to the eviction.¹⁰⁰ In addition, if the tenant is a person with a mental or physical disability, the tenant may have a defense under the Fair Housing Act and Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which require that federally subsidized owners provide some accommodation for an otherwise qualified tenant's disability.¹⁰¹ Defending such evictions is discussed in some detail in an article in the September-

⁹⁹(...continued)
granddaughter because tenant received no personal gain in the form of an increased subsidy).

¹⁰⁰ See *Newell v. Rolling Hills Apartments*, 134 F. Supp. 2d 1026, 1036-39 (N.D. Iowa 2001). The Supremacy Clause of the United States Constitution requires that state courts consider federal claims or defenses. See *Flynn v. 3900 Watson Place, Inc.*, 63 F. Supp.2d 18, 23 (D.D.C. 1999); *Fayyumi v. City of Hickory Hills*, 18 F. Supp.2d 909, 912 (N.D. Ill. 1998); *Rodriguez v. Westhab*, 833 F. Supp. 425 (S.D. N.Y. 1993) (state eviction court must consider tenant's defense to eviction under Fair Housing Act).

¹⁰¹ A landlord must make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices and services to accommodate tenants with disabilities. See 42 U.S.C.A. §3604(f)(3)(B) (West 2003); 29 U.S.C.A. § 794(a) (West Pamph. Supp. 2008); 24 C.F.R. § 100.204, § 8.33 (2008); *Majors v. DeKalb Housing Authority of DeKalb, Ga.*, 652 F. 2d 454 (5th Cir. 1981) (tenant with mental disability could not be evicted for violation of no pet rule if housing authority can readily accommodate the tenant) *Roe v. Housing Authority of the City of Boulder*, 909 F. Supp. 814 (D. Colo. 1995)(eviction and reasonable accommodation); *Roe v. Sugar River Mills Associates*, 820 F. Supp. 636 (D. N.H. 1993) (eviction and reasonable accommodation); *Douglas v. Kriegsfeld Corp.*, 884 A.2d 1109 (D.C. 2005) (en banc) (tenant entitled to assert failure to grant reasonable accommodation as a defense in eviction for unsanitary housekeeping); *City Wide Associates v. Penfield, Mass.*, 564 N.E.2d 1003 (Mass. 1991) (eviction of tenant with mental disability manifested by auditory hallucinations would violate Rehabilitation Act of 1973); *Whittier Terrace Ass'n. v. Hampshire*, 26 Mass. App. Ct. 1020, 532 N.E.2d 712 (1989) (subsidized landlord required by Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to accommodate disabled tenant's need for pet cat); see also, Jennifer L. Dolak, *The FHAA's Reasonable Accommodation & Direct Threat Provisions as Applied to Disabled Individuals Who Become Disruptive, Abusive, or Destructive in Their Housing Environment*, 36 IND. L. REV. 759 (2003).

(continued...)

¹⁰¹(...continued)

If the landlord rejects a request for an accommodation and refuses to engage in an interactive back-and-forth exchange for an accommodation that would avoid an eviction, tenants should raise as a defense to the eviction, the landlord's refusal to engage in an interactive process. Although the Fair Housing Act does not include specific language imposing an obligation on landlords to engage in an interactive process for reaching appropriate reasonable accommodations, such a process does allow both parties to explore the availability and feasibility of various accommodations. *See Jankowski Lee & Associates v. Cisneros*, 91 F.3d 891, 895 (7th Cir. 1996) (suggesting landlord has duty under Fair Housing Act to engage in the interactive process); *Douglas v. Kriegsfeld Corp.*, 884 A.2d 1109, n.22 (D.C. 2005) (en banc) (citing case law on duty to engage in interactive process).

If the requested accommodation would create an undue financial or administrative burden or fundamentally alter the nature of the program, it is not reasonable and the landlord may deny the requested accommodation. *See, e.g., Geter v. Horning Brothers Management*, 537 F. Supp. 2d 206 (D.D.C. 2008) (granting judgment on the pleadings for landlord in pro se tenant's lawsuit seeking as a reasonable accommodation a change in the due date of his monthly rent payments from the first to the fifteenth and a reduction in his monthly rent from \$1,325 to \$890; explaining that plaintiff did not establish a causal link between his disability an inability to pay the rent required by the lease and could have opted to pay his rent upon his receipt of the disability payment so it was timely received by the first of the month or saved the money until payment due); *Boston Housing Authority v. Bridgewater*, 871 N.E.2d 1107 (Mass. App. Ct. 2007), *review granted*, 877 N.E.2d 599 (Mass. Nov. 29, 2007) (upholding eviction of tenant with bipolar disorder and borderline personality disorder who was found guilty of assault and batter); *Huberty v. Washington County Housing & Redevelopment Authority*, 374 F. Supp. 2d 768, 773-775 (D. Minn. 2005) (request to permit Section 8 voucher participant an indefinite extension of time to comply with recertification requirements was unreasonable because it would require the PHA to pay participant's rent, regardless of financial need); *Solberg v. Majerle Management*, 879 A.2d 1015, 1022-24 (Md. 2005) (tenant's imposition of conditions under which landlord could enter apartment to inspect that effectively precluded any inspection of the home for four years was unreasonable, and landlord was entitled to evict for breach of lease); *Andover Housing Authority v. Shkolnik*, 820 N.E.2d 815 (Mass. 2005) (request to delay eviction as accommodation for tenant's disability was not reasonable because tenant had shown no ability during pendency of the eviction to eliminate excessive noise that disturbed neighbors); *Assenberg v. Anacortes Housing Authority*, No. C05-1836RSL, 2006 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 34002 (W.D. Wash. May 25, 2006) (requests that a tenant be allowed to carry snakes throughout the premises without limitation and that he be allowed to use marijuana for medicinal purposes on the premises are not reasonable and thus may be rejected by the landlord).

¹⁰² Fred Fuchs, *Using the Reasonable Accommodation Provision of the Fair Housing Act to Prevent the Eviction of a Tenant with Disabilities*, 40 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW JOURNAL OF POVERTY LAW AND POLICY 272 (Sept.-Oct. 2007).

conduct by the tenant, a household member, guest, or other person under the tenant's control are discussed at Section K of this article.

8. Evictions Premised on Criminal Activity or Drug-Related Criminal Activity.

See discussion in article at Section K. In addition, defending such evictions is discussed in detail in an article in the May-June 2007 Clearinghouse Review titled *Wait A Minute: Slowing Down Criminal-Activity Eviction Cases to Find the Truth*.¹⁰³

C. Evictions from Apartments with Rental Subsidy under Section 8 New Construction, Section 8 Substantial Rehabilitation, or Section 8 through State Housing Agencies.

The eviction requirements differ ever so slightly for several of the federally subsidized housing programs.¹⁰⁴ These programs are Section 8 new construction¹⁰⁵, Section 8 substantial rehabilitation,¹⁰⁶ Section 8 moderate rehabilitation,¹⁰⁷ Section 8 through state housing agencies,¹⁰⁸ and

¹⁰³ Lawrence R. McDonough & Mac McCreight, *Wait a Minute: Slowing Down Criminal-Activity Eviction Cases to Find the Truth*, 41 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW JOURNAL OF POVERTY LAW AND POLICY 55 (May-June 2007).

¹⁰⁴ The regulations at 24 C.F.R. Part 247 do not apply to Section 8 project based assistance under the Section 8 new construction, Section 8 substantial rehabilitation, Section 8 through state housing agencies, and Section 8 moderate rehabilitation programs. *See* 24 C.F.R. § 247.2 (2008) (definition of *subsidized project* specifically excluding such apartment complexes from coverage under the regulations); *Handbook 4350.3* applies, except to the Section 8 moderate rehabilitation program. *Handbook 4350.3*, chp.1, at para. 1-2-B, Figure 1-1; at para 1-2-D.

¹⁰⁵ 24 C.F.R. Part 880 (2008) (program regulations).

¹⁰⁶ *Id.* at Part 881 (program regulations).

¹⁰⁷ *Id.* at § 882.401 - § 882.518 (program regulations); see also § 882.801 - § 882.810 (regulations for Section 8 moderate rehabilitation single room occupancy program for homeless individuals).

¹⁰⁸ *Id.* at Part 883 (program regulations).

Section 8 new construction set aside for section 515 rural rental housing.¹⁰⁹ The previous discussion applies to evictions from apartments receiving rental subsidies under these programs, but this section of the article will identify the ever-so-slight differences in the eviction procedures from the rental programs discussed in Part B.

The eviction requirements for the Section 8 new construction program, Section 8 substantial rehabilitation program, and the Section 8 program through state housing agencies are identical.¹¹⁰ Under these programs, the subsidized landlord is not required to serve the notice of proposed lease termination by both first class mail and delivery to the apartment.¹¹¹ The regulations require only that the owner give the family a written notice of proposed termination.¹¹² The manner of service is not specified. However, if the lease specifies the manner of service, then the subsidized owner must comply with the terms of the lease.

The notice of requirements as set forth in the regulations are slightly different from the notice requirements for evictions from the federally subsidized apartments discussed in Part B of this article.¹¹³ The regulations for these three programs require only that the notice of proposed termination state the grounds, state the tenancy is terminated on a specified date, and advise the

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* at Part 884 (program regulations).

¹¹⁰ *Compare* 24 C.F.R. § 880.607 (2008) (Section 8 new construction eviction regulations) *with* 24 C.F.R. § 881.601 (Section 8 substantial rehabilitation; applying § 880.607 by cross reference) *and* 24 C.F.R. § 883.701 (Section 8 through state housing agencies eviction; applying § 880.607 by cross reference). The eviction regulations for criminal activity, alcohol abuse, and drug-related criminal activity at 24 C.F.R. § 5.850 - 5.905 (2008) apply here also.

¹¹¹ See 24 C.F.R. § 880.607 (c)(2008); Handbook 4350.3, chp. 8, § 3, at para. 8-13-B-3, 4.

¹¹² See 24 C.F.R. § 880.607 (c)(2008).

¹¹³ *Compare* 24 C.F.R. Part 247 (2008) *with* 24 C.F.R. § 880.607 (2008).

family that it has an opportunity to respond to the owner.¹¹⁴ But, because HUD has made applicable to these programs the requirements of the notice set forth in Handbook 4350.3, the owner must also advise the tenant of the right to defend the eviction in court and give the tenant ten days to discuss the termination with the owner.¹¹⁵ The regulations for these subsidized complexes do not address the requirement of specificity in nonpayment of rent cases.¹¹⁶ The termination notice must state the grounds, but there is no requirement that the notice state the dollar amount and the date of the computation.¹¹⁷ Thus, the lease and state law will control on the specificity question for nonpayment cases.

One final significant difference is that Section 8 new construction, substantial rehabilitation, and state agency properties may rely only on the grounds cited in the termination notice, and, unlike other subsidized owners, may not rely on grounds about which the owner had no knowledge at the time the owner sent the termination notice to the tenant.¹¹⁸ This is a critical distinction in that such owners cannot add new grounds in the judicial proceeding without first serving the tenant with a new notice of lease termination for the new ground.

D. Evictions from Apartments with Rental Subsidy under Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program.

Evictions from Section 8 moderate rehabilitation subsidized apartments are governed by

¹¹⁴ 24 C.F.R. § 880.607 (2008).

¹¹⁵ See *Handbook 4350.3*, at chp.1, para. 1-2, Figure 1-1 (identifying programs subject to *Handbook*); at chp. 8, § 3, para. 8-13-B-2 (listing requirements of termination notice).

¹¹⁶ See 24 C.F.R. § 880.607 (2008).

¹¹⁷ See *id.*

¹¹⁸ 24 C.F.R. § 880.607 (c) (3); Handbook 4350.3, chp. 8, § 3, at para. 8-13-B-5-b; *Ross v. Broadway Towers, Inc.*, 228 S.W.3d 113, 120-21 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2006), *cert denied*, 128 S. Ct. 543 (2007).

procedures slightly different from the other programs described in the preceding parts if this article.¹¹⁹

First, the grounds on which the owner may terminate are different. The Section 8 moderate rehabilitation program owner may terminate for criminal activity, illegal drug activity, alcohol abuse, violation by the tenant of a condition of probation or parole imposed under federal or state law, fleeing by the tenant to avoid prosecution or confinement after conviction of a felony, violation of applicable federal, state, or local law, serious or repeated violations of the terms and conditions of the lease, or other good cause.¹²⁰

The owner cannot evict for *material non-compliance*; rather, the owner must establish a violation based on one of the grounds described above.¹²¹ Similarly, the owner may evict for violation of federal, state, or local law but not for material failure to carry out obligations under any state landlord and tenant act.¹²²

Second, the time period for the notice of termination is different. When the eviction is based on nonpayment of rent, the owner must give the tenant at least five working days notice of lease termination dating from date of the tenant's receipt of the notice.¹²³ When the eviction is based on

¹¹⁹ Compare 24 C.F.R. § 882.511 (2008) (Section 8 moderate rehabilitation eviction regulations) with 24 C.F.R. Part 247 and 24 C.F.R. § 880.607. The regulations at 24 C.F.R. Part 247 and the handbook provisions in *Handbook 4350.3* do not apply to the Section 8 moderate rehabilitation program. See 24 C.F.R. § 247.2 (excluding from applicability Section 8 moderate rehabilitation apartments); *Handbook 4350.3*, chp.1, at para. 1-2-D (noting that Handbook does not apply to Section 8 moderate rehabilitation program). But the regulations on eviction for criminal conduct, drug-related criminal activity, and alcohol abuse do apply. See 24 C.F.R. § 5.850.

¹²⁰ 24 C.F.R. § 882.511 (a), (b); § 5.858 - § 5.861 (2008).

¹²¹ See *id.*

¹²² *Id.*

¹²³ *Id.* at § 882.511(d)(1)(i).

an allegation of criminal activity, drug-related criminal activity, alcohol abuse, violation by the tenant of a condition of probation or parole imposed under federal or state law or fleeing to avoid prosecution or custody after conviction for a felony, a serious or repeated violation of the terms of the lease or violation of applicable federal, state, or local law, the date of termination must be in accordance with state and local law.¹²⁴ When the eviction is for other good cause, at least thirty days notice of termination is required.¹²⁵

Third, the notice requirements are different. The notice of termination must (1) state the reasons for the termination with the sufficient specificity to enable the family to prepare a defense and (2) advise the family that if a judicial proceeding for eviction is instituted, the tenant may present a defense.¹²⁶ The tenant is not entitled to meet to discuss the eviction.¹²⁷ Of course, if the lease gives the tenant a right to meet, then the landlord must comply with the lease. If the eviction is premised on nonpayment of rent, the termination notice must comply with the foregoing requirements; however, in nonpayment cases any state required notices may run concurrently with the notice required by the regulations.¹²⁸

Fourth, service requirements for the notice of termination differ from those for other subsidized housing. The notice of termination must be served either by mailing it to the tenant by

¹²⁴ *Id.* at § 882.511(d)(1)(ii); § 5.851(b).

¹²⁵ *Id.* at § 882.511(d)(1)(iii).

¹²⁶ *Id.* at § 882.511(d)(2)(i), (ii).

¹²⁷ *See id.* at § 882.511; Handbook 4350.3 at chp.1, para. 1-2 (Handbook does not apply to moderate rehabilitation program); *see generally Perry v. Royal Arms Apartments*, 729 F.2d 1081 (6th Cir. 1984) (per curiam) (due process does not require an administrative hearing prior to eviction for tenants of Section 8 new construction when state law provides an adequate hearing).

¹²⁸ 24 C.F.R. § 882.511(d) (3) (2008).

first-class mail (return receipt requested) or by delivering a copy to the apartment.¹²⁹ The owner need not serve the notice by both first class-mail and by hand delivery.¹³⁰ Of course, again, if the lease requires service in other ways, the owner must also comply with the lease contract.

E. Evictions from Apartments Financed under Section 515 Rural Rental Housing Program and with Rental Subsidy under Section 8 New Construction for Section 515 Rural Rental Housing Program.

The HUD regulations for owners of section 515 rural rental housing receiving a Section 8 subsidy state that the owner is responsible for evictions and that the owner may evict for the family's failure to sign consent forms for obtaining wage and claim information; for the family's failure to establish citizenship or eligible immigration status; and on the grounds set forth in 24 C.F.R. § 5.858, §5.859 and § 5.860.¹³¹

The Rural Housing Service has its own regulations on evictions.¹³² In addition to the grounds identified in the preceding paragraph, the Rural Housing Service regulations permit owners to terminate the lease for criminal activity, alcohol abuse, material noncompliance with the lease or occupancy rules, and other good cause.¹³³

Material noncompliance is defined as including substantial or repeated violations of lease

¹²⁹ *Id.* at § 882.511(d) (2) (iii).

¹³⁰ *See id.*

¹³¹ *Id.* at § 884.216.

¹³² *See* 7 C.F.R. § 3560.159 (2008) (interim final rule published at 69 Fed. Reg. 69032 (Nov. 26, 2004)). This rule on evictions replaces the previous long-standing Rural Housing Service regulation on lease termination and evictions set forth at 7 C.F.R. Part 1930, Subpart C, Exhibit B, at para. XIV (2004). *See* NATIONAL HOUSING LAW PROJECT, 35 HOUS. LAW BULL. 89, *New RHS Multi-Family Housing Regulations and Handbooks* (March 2005) (criticizing regulations and comparing the new regulations to previous regulations).

¹³³ 7 C.F.R. §3560.159(a), (d) (2008).

provisions or occupancy rules; nonpayment or repeated late payment of rent or other financial obligations due under the lease or occupancy rules; or admission by the tenant or conviction for use, attempted use, possession, manufacture, selling, or distribution of an illegal drug when such activity occurs on the apartment complex premises by the tenant, household member, the tenant's guest, or any other person under the tenant's control at the time of the activity.¹³⁴

Good cause is defined as including actions prohibited by state and local laws; actions by the tenant or household member resulting in substantial physical damage causing an adverse financial effect on the housing or the property of other persons; or actions by the tenant or household member which disrupt the livability of the housing by threatening the health and safety of other persons or the right of other persons to enjoyment of the premises and related facilities.¹³⁵ Expiration of the lease term is not sufficient ground for lease termination and eviction.¹³⁶

When terminating the tenant's occupancy in a § 515 complex, the owner must give the tenant a termination notice that includes the following information: (1) a specific date the lease will terminate; (2) a statement of the basis for the termination with specific reference to the provisions of the lease or occupancy rules that the owner alleges the tenant has violated; and (3) a statement explaining the conditions under which the owner may initiate judicial action to enforce the lease termination notice.¹³⁷

In addition, if the § 515 complex has a project-based section 8 contract, as many do, the

¹³⁴ *Id.*

¹³⁵ *Id.*

¹³⁶ *Id.* at § 3560.159(b).

¹³⁷ *Id.*

owner must comply with the notice requirements of HUD Handbook 4350.3.¹³⁸ Thus, the notice must also inform the tenant that he/she has ten days within which to discuss the termination of tenancy with the owner; that the owner may enforce the termination in court, at which time the tenant may present a defense; and that persons with disabilities have the right to request reasonable accommodations to participate in the hearing process.¹³⁹

The regulations include a special provision that if the occupancy is terminated because of conditions beyond the control of the tenant, such as required repairs, rehabilitation, or a natural disaster, the tenant is entitled to benefits under the Uniform Relocation Act and may request a letter of priority entitlement from the Rural Housing Service.¹⁴⁰

The regulations do not specify any requirements relating to the manner of the delivery of the notice of termination.¹⁴¹ Thus, the lease and state law will determine the manner of delivery.¹⁴² In addition, although the regulations do not give tenants a specific right to examine relevant documents, including the tenant's file, tenants should always request the file and cite to the tenant's right to review the file when the grievance procedure is applicable.¹⁴³ When the § 515 apartment complex has a § 8 contract in place, then the owner must permit tenants and their representatives to review the

¹³⁸ See *Handbook 4350.3*, at chp. 1, § 1-2, Figure 1-1, *Programs Subject to this Handbook*; at chp. 8, § 3, para.8-13-B-2 (listing notice requirements).

¹³⁹ *Id.* at chp. 8, § 3, para. 8-13-B-2

¹⁴⁰ *Id.* at § 3560.159(c).

¹⁴¹ See *id.* at § 3560.159.

¹⁴² See *Handbook 4350.3*, at chp. 8, § 3, para.. 8-13-B-4.

¹⁴³ *Id.* at § 3560.160(g)(4).

tenant's file.¹⁴⁴

Although tenants in section 515 rural rental housing have access to a tenant grievance procedure,¹⁴⁵ the grievance procedure does not apply to “[l]ease violations by the tenant that would result in the termination of tenancy and eviction.”¹⁴⁶ But, if the § 515 owner has a § 8 contract in place, then, as previously noted, the tenant has the right to meet with the owner to discuss the proposed termination.¹⁴⁷

When the eviction results in part because of action or inaction on the part of the owner, the tenant should request a grievance hearing and contend that the owner's actions are grievable.¹⁴⁸ For example, if the owner attempts to evict for non-payment of rent in a case in which the owner refuses to reduce the tenant's rent after the tenant suffers an income loss, the tenant should contend that the owner's refusal to reduce the rent is grievable.¹⁴⁹ Or, if the owner initiates an eviction motivated in part by illegal retaliation or discrimination for the tenant's exercise of rights, the tenant should invoke the grievance procedure.

¹⁴⁴ See *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 4, § 3, at para. 4-22-E; chp. 5, § 3 at para. 5-23-C (effective June 29, 2007).

¹⁴⁵ *Id.* at § 3560.160.

¹⁴⁶ *Id.* at § 3560.160(b)(2)(v).

¹⁴⁷ *Handbook 4350.3*, chp. 8, § 3, para. 8-13-B-2.

¹⁴⁸ See *id.* at § 3560.160(b) (grievance and appeal procedure applies to an owner's action or failure to act that adversely affects the tenant).

¹⁴⁹ See *id.* at § 3560.160(d) (acceptable reasons for filing a grievance may include the owner's violation of the lease or occupancy rules).

F. Evictions from Properties Funded through the HOME Investment Partnerships Program.¹⁵⁰

Tenants living in housing assisted with HOME funds have two special statutory protections.¹⁵¹ First, owners may not terminate the tenancy except for serious or repeated violation of the terms and conditions of the lease; for violation of applicable federal, state, or local law; or for other good cause.¹⁵² (HUD has added as an additional ground for termination the completion of the tenancy period for transitional housing.¹⁵³) Second, the owner must serve the tenant with at least thirty days written notice of tenancy termination, specifying the grounds for the termination.¹⁵⁴ The notice requirement does not differ for nonpayment of rent evictions and evictions premised on other grounds; at least thirty days notice is required.¹⁵⁵

G. Evictions from Shelter Plus Care Housing¹⁵⁶ and Supportive Housing Program.¹⁵⁷

The eviction requirements for Shelter Plus Care participants and Supportive Housing Program

¹⁵⁰ 42 U.S.C.A. § 12741 - 12756 (West 2005).

¹⁵¹ *See* 42 U.S.C.A. § 12755(b) (West 2005); 24 C.F.R. § 92.253(c) (2008).

¹⁵² 42 U.S.C.A. § 12755(b).

¹⁵³ 24 C.F.R. § 92.253(c) (2008).

¹⁵⁴ 42 U.S.C. § 12755(b) (West 2005); 24 C.F.R. § 92.253(c)(2008).

¹⁵⁵ *See id.*

¹⁵⁶ 42 U.S. C.A. § 11403 - § 11407b (West 2005); 24 C.F.R. Part 582 (2008).

¹⁵⁷ The Supportive Housing Program was authorized by title IV of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C.A. § 11381 - § 11389 (West 2005 & Supp. 2006). The regulations governing termination of housing assistance are set forth in 24 C.F.R. § 583.300(i) (2008). HUD published proposed rules in the Federal Register on July 20, 2004, that may change some of this discussion when final rules are published. *See* 69 Fed. Reg. 43,488 (July 20, 2004) (to be codified in 24 C.F.R. Part 583).

participants are very similar.¹⁵⁸ Shelter Plus Care participants enter into an occupancy agreement for a term of at least one month.¹⁵⁹ The occupancy agreement must be automatically renewable unless terminated upon prior notice by either party.¹⁶⁰ Shelter Plus Care recipients may terminate assistance to participants who violate program requirements or conditions of occupancy.¹⁶¹ But, the landlord must “exercise judgment and examine all extenuating circumstances” to ensure that assistance is terminated only in the most severe cases.¹⁶² In terminating assistance to a participant, the entity providing the housing and care must give the participant (1) written notice of the reasons for the termination, (2) an opportunity for the participant to appeal the decision to a person other than the person or a subordinate of the person who made or approved the termination, and (3) prompt written notice of the final decision.¹⁶³

Supportive Housing recipients may terminate assistance to participants who violate program requirements.¹⁶⁴ But, they are required to terminate assistance “only in the most severe cases.”¹⁶⁵ Supportive Housing recipients, like Shelter Plus Care recipients, may terminate assistance only if they provide participants written notice, provide an opportunity for review by an impartial decision-

¹⁵⁸ Compare 24 C.F.R. § 582.320 (2008) (Shelter Plus Care) with 24 C.F.R. § 583.300(i) (2008) (Supportive Housing)

¹⁵⁹ 24 C.F.R. § 582.315(a) (2008).

¹⁶⁰ *Id.*

¹⁶¹ *Id.* at § 582.320(a).

¹⁶² *Id.*

¹⁶³ *Id.* at § 582.320(b).

¹⁶⁴ *Id.* at § 583.300(i).

¹⁶⁵ *Id.*

maker, and provide prompt written notice of the final decision.¹⁶⁶

The regulations for the Shelter Plus Care Program do not require that the entity providing the shelter and care establish a tenancy. Rather, they speak in terms of an occupancy agreement.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, the Supportive Housing regulations speak of termination of housing assistance rather than in terms of termination of tenancy.¹⁶⁸ This has created some uncertainty whether a housing provider under these programs must utilize the state landlord-tenant eviction process to evict the participant.¹⁶⁹ Another issue is whether participants may lose their housing for failing to participate in required services.¹⁷⁰ If a participant fails to participate in required services, the provider may end the tenancy. But, such participants should surely have the protections of the judicial eviction process.

¹⁶⁶ *Id.*; *Vance v. Housing Opportunities Comm'n.*, 332 F. Supp.2d 832 (D. Md. 2004).

¹⁶⁷ *See* 24 C.F.R. at § 582.315 (2008); *see generally*, *Burke v. Oxford House of Oregon Chapter V*, 137 P.3d 1278 (Ore. 2006) (holding that residents of halfway house were subject to state landlord-tenant act protections on evictions because the landlord had structured the lease arrangement to avoid application of landlord-tenant laws and under Oregon law had thus subjected itself to the laws).

¹⁶⁸ 24 C.F.R. § 583.300(i) (2008); *see* 69 Fed. Reg. 43,488 (July 20, 2004) (proposed rules) (to be codified in 24 C.F.R. Part 583). The proposed rules specifically state that housing providers are not required to create a landlord-tenant relationship with participants of that supportive housing, but participants will be entitled to notice of termination and an opportunity for review of the termination decision. Proposed § 583.325.

¹⁶⁹ *See Cotton v. Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House*, Nos. 02-C-7969 & 02-C-8437, 2003 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 16023 (N.D. Ill. Sept. 11, 2003). In *Cotton*, the housing grantee/landlord providing housing under the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12901 *et. seq.*, claimed that the state forcible detainer act did not apply to an eviction of a participant because it did not have a landlord-tenant agreement with the participant. The district court ruled that it was unclear whether the forcible detainer statute applied and reconsidered and vacated an earlier opinion. *See id.* at *7. *See also Serreze v. YWCA of Western Massachusetts, Inc.*, 572 N.E.2d 581 (Mass. App. Ct. 1991) (holding that battered women living in transitional housing were protected under state landlord-tenant law from self-help eviction).

¹⁷⁰ *See Angelo J. Melillo Center for Mental Health v. Denise B.*, 777 N.Y.S.2d 830 (N.Y. Dist. Ct. March 1, 2004) (holding that a Shelter Plus Care Program provider may evict participants for failure to participate in treatment programs).

H. Evictions from Tax Credit Apartments.

Tax credit landlords may evict tenants and refuse to renew the lease at the end of the lease term only for good cause.¹⁷¹ IRS, the federal enforcement agency for the tax credit program, first issued a revenue ruling in July 2004, notifying state tax credit agencies that tax credit landlords may evict tenants only for good cause, both during the lease term and at the end of the lease term.¹⁷² Prior to this ruling by the IRS, several state appellate courts had held that tax credit landlords must have good cause to terminate the tenancy of a tenant in a tax credit unit.¹⁷³ The IRS has not required, however, that tax credit landlord include good cause language in their lease agreements with tenants;¹⁷⁴ as a result, most tax credit tenants have no idea that their landlord can refuse to renew the lease only for good cause. Thus, advocates must be especially vigilant to identify tenants facing non-renewal evictions from tax credit complexes to ensure that their tenancy is terminated only for good cause. Since good cause is required, it is implicit that the notice of lease termination state specific

¹⁷¹ 26 U.S.C. A. § 42 (h)(6)(E)(ii)(I) (West Supp. 2008); Rev. Rul. 2004-82, at A-5, 2004-35 I.R.B.350; Rev. Procedure 2005-37 (June 21, 2005); *see generally* Marc Jolin, *Good Cause Eviction and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit*, 67 U. CHI. L. REV. 521 (2000) .

¹⁷² Rev. Rul. 2004-82, at A-5, 2004-35 I.R.B. 350; Rev. Procedure 2005-37 (June 21, 2005); *see generally* NATIONAL HOUSING LAW PROJECT, *IRS Finally Clarifies Good Cause Eviction Protection for Tax Credit Tenants*, 34 HOUS. L. BULL. 208 (Oct. 2004); *Update on Good Cause Eviction Protections for Tax Credit Tenants*, 35 HOUS. L. BULL. 117 (April 2005).

¹⁷³ *See Carter v. Maryland Management Co.*, 835 A.2d 158 (Md. Ct. App. 2003); *Cimarron Village v. Washington*, 659 N.W.2d 811 (Minn. Ct. App. 2003); *Land Lease Apartment Management, LLC v. Stribling*, No. HWA30495, 2004 Conn. Super. LEXIS 2988 (Conn. Super. Ct. Sept. 8, 2004); *Bowling Green Manor Limited Partnership v. Kirk*, No. WD-94-125, 1995 Ohio App. LEXIS, at *6-14 (Ohio Ct. App. June 30, 1995) (finding tenant had property interest in her tax credit apartment and owner's actions constituted government action); *Bowling Green Manor Limited Partnership v. LaChance*, No. WD-94-117, 1995 Ohio App. LEXIS 2767, at *9-15 (Ohio Ct. App. June 30, 1995) (finding tenant had property interest in her tax credit apartment and owner's actions constituted government action)

¹⁷⁴ *See* Rev. Procedure 2005-37 (June 21, 2005).

grounds for the termination or lease non-renewal.¹⁷⁵ The lease and state law will determine the required notice period, because neither the tax credit statute nor IRS regulations address this issue. Depending on the state law pleading requirements, it may be necessary to plead as an affirmative defense that good cause is required.

I. Evictions of Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program Tenants.¹⁷⁶

1. Grounds for Eviction.

Evictions of Section 8 housing choice voucher tenants are the responsibility of the owner and not the public housing authority (“PHA”) administering the program.¹⁷⁷ A landlord may evict during the initial lease term and any extension only on the following grounds: (1) serious or repeated violation of the terms and conditions of the lease; (2) violation of federal, state, or local which imposes obligations on the tenant in connection with the occupancy of the unit; (3) criminal activity by the tenant, household member, guest, or other person under the tenant’s control that threatens the health, safety, or peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents or persons residing in the immediate vicinity; (4) violent criminal activity on or near the premises; (5) drug-related criminal activity on or near the premises; (6) alcohol abuse by the tenant or a household member that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by residents; (7) violation by the tenant or a household member of a condition of probation or parole imposed under federal or state law; (8) fleeing by the tenant to avoid prosecution or confinement after conviction of a felony; and

¹⁷⁵ *See id.*

¹⁷⁶ *See* 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437f(o)(7) (West Supp. 2008); 24 C.F.R. § 982.310 (2008); U.S.. DEPT. OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, *Housing Choice Voucher Program Guidebook 7420.10G*, at chp.15, §15.2 (April 2001).

¹⁷⁷ 24 C.F.R. § 982.310 (2008).

(9) other good cause.¹⁷⁸ The landlord is not required to evict when the tenant has violated the lease; the regulations give the landlord the right to consider all the circumstances.¹⁷⁹

During the first year of the lease term, the owner may not terminate the tenancy for *other good cause* unless the termination is based on something the family did or failed to do.¹⁸⁰ Thus, during the first year of the lease term, an owner may not terminate the tenancy on the grounds that the owner desires to use the unit for personal or family use, for a purpose other than as residential rental unit, or for a business or economic reason such as a sale of the property, renovation of the unit, or a desire to rent the unit at a higher rental.¹⁸¹ At the end of the lease term, however, an owner may terminate the tenancy or non-renew the lease without cause.¹⁸² But an owner of a multifamily apartment complex who has prepaid the mortgage or opted out of a project-based Section 8 contract may not terminate the tenancy or non-renew the lease without cause of tenants living at the complex with enhanced vouchers.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ See 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437f(o)(7) (West Supp. 2008); 24 C.F.R. § 982.310 (2008); U.S. DEPT. OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, *Housing Choice Voucher Program Guidebook 7420.10G*, at chp.15, §15.2 (April 2001).

¹⁷⁹ 24 C.F.R. § 982.310(h) (2008).

¹⁸⁰ *Id.* at § 982.310(d)(2).

¹⁸¹ *Id.*

¹⁸² See 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437f(o)(7) (West Supp. 2008); 24 C.F.R. § 982.310 (2008); *Pelham v. Formisano*, 782 N.Y.S.2d 898 (N.Y. S. Ct. 2004); *Carol Ricket & Associates v. Law*, 54 P.3d 91 (N.M. Ct. App. 2002); *Kane Realty, LLC v. Goss*, No. BRSP055613, 2004 Conn. Super. LEXIS 3860 (Conn. Super. Ct. Dec. 20, 2004). Of course, if the lease requires good cause to terminate at the end of the lease term, the landlord must show good cause.

¹⁸³ See 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437f(t)(1)(B) (West Supp. 2008); see *Jeanty v. Shore Terrace Realty Ass'n.*, No. 03 Civ 8669 (BSJ), 2004 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 15773 (S.D. N.Y. Aug. 9, 2004) (holding that landlord who opted out of project-based Section 8 contract must accept enhanced voucher)

2. Notice of Lease Termination and Right to Continued Participation in Section 8 Housing Voucher Program.

The owner must give the tenant written notice specifying the grounds for eviction.¹⁸⁴ The tenancy does not terminate before the owner gives the notice, and the notice must be given at or before commencement of the eviction in court.¹⁸⁵ The notice giving the grounds for the eviction may be included in or combined with the notice to vacate or the court pleading filed to commence the eviction lawsuit.¹⁸⁶ The requisite notice period is determined by the lease and state law, because the regulations do not address the issue.¹⁸⁷ The PHA plays no role in the eviction process, although the owner must give the PHA a copy of the notice to vacate or court complaint.¹⁸⁸ Failure of the landlord to provide a copy of the notice to the PHA is grounds for dismissal of the eviction suit.¹⁸⁹ Because the PHA is not involved in the eviction procedure, no state or government action is present.¹⁹⁰ The

¹⁸⁴ See 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437f(o)(7)(E) (West Supp. 2008); 24 C.F.R. § 982.310(e) (2008).

¹⁸⁵ 24 C.F.R. § 982.310(e)(1)(i) (2008).

¹⁸⁶ *Id.* at § 982.310(e)(1), (2).

¹⁸⁷ See *id.* at § 982.310; *Wasatch Property Mgmt. v. Degrade*, 35 Cal. 4th, 1111, 1117 (Calif. 2005) (Section 8 landlord must comply with state notice requirements); *Gallman v. Pierce*, 639 F. Supp. 472, 476-78 (N.D. Cal. 1986).

¹⁸⁸ 24 C.F.R. at § 982.310(e)(2)(ii) (2008).

¹⁸⁹ See *Lamlon Develop. Corp. v. Owens*, 533 N.Y.S.2d 186, 189-191 (N.Y. Dist. Ct. 1988); *Santouse v. Scott*, HDSP137470, 2006 Conn. Super. LEXIS 1660 (Conn. Super. Ct. June 2, 2006).

¹⁹⁰ *Cf. Miller v. Hartwood Apartments, Ltd.*, 689 F.2d 1239 (5th Cir.1982) (holding that the actions of a Section 8 New Construction apartment owner in evicting a tenant do not constitute either state or federal governmental action); *contra Anast v. Commonwealth Apartments*, 956 F. Supp. 797-99 (N.D. Ill. 1994) (finding government action on part of Section 8 Substantial Rehabilitation landlord in evicting tenant).

owner may only evict the tenant through the judicial process.¹⁹¹

All too frequently landlords will attempt to evict tenants because the PHA has not paid the housing assistance payment. The regulations are clear that nonpayment by the PHA is not grounds for termination of the tenancy by the landlord, and the owner may not terminate the tenancy during the term of the lease for nonpayment by the PHA.¹⁹²

Section 8 participants have a property right in continued participation in the Section 8 Voucher Program.¹⁹³ When the tenant is evicted for a serious violation of the lease, however, the PHA must propose termination of the family's participation in the Section 8 voucher program.¹⁹⁴ Although the regulations require termination when the tenant is evicted for a serious lease violation, they also permit the PHA to consider all the circumstances in deciding whether to terminate the family's assistance.¹⁹⁵ Thus, the PHA is obligated to propose termination of assistance, but it may decide, in considering the circumstances, not to terminate the assistance of a family that has been evicted for a serious lease violation.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ 24 C.F.R. § 982.310(f) (2008).

¹⁹² *Id.* at § 982.310(b); *Soliman v. Cepeda*, 634 A.2d 1057 (N.J. Super. Ct. Law Div. 1993); *see Sunflower Park Apartments v. Johnson*, 937 P.2d 21 (Kan. Ct. App. 1997) (landlord not entitled to recover rent judgment against tenant for PHA's unpaid housing assistance payments).

¹⁹³ *See Baldwin v. Housing Authority of Camden*, 278 F. Supp.2d 365, 377-80 (D. N.J. 2003) (finding that *applicants* for voucher program have property interest).

¹⁹⁴ 24 C.F.R. § 982.552(b)(2) (2008).

¹⁹⁵ *Id.* at § 982.552 (c) (2).

¹⁹⁶ The PHA must give the family notice and an opportunity for an administrative hearing; it may not simply terminate the tenant's participation following the eviction suit. 24 C.F.R. § 982.555(a)(1)(v); *Colvin v. Housing Authority of City of Sarasota*, 71 F.3d 864 (11th Cir. 1996).

An evicted family whose voucher assistance is not terminated is entitled to receive a voucher to locate another dwelling unit.¹⁹⁷ As previously noted, although a tenant may have been evicted, the PHA need not always terminate assistance.¹⁹⁸ In some case, the PHA may decide to continue assistance conditioned on the removal from the household of the household member responsible for the activity leading to the eviction.¹⁹⁹ Or, the PHA may condition continued assistance on completion of a supervised drug or alcohol rehabilitation program or other evidence of rehabilitation.²⁰⁰ If the family include a person with disabilities, the PHA decision is subject to consideration of a reasonable accommodation request.²⁰¹ Finally, the PHA's decision must be consistent with fair housing provisions of the law.²⁰²

In addition, in any number of circumstance, although the tenant may have been evicted, no basis may exist to terminate the voucher assistance.²⁰³ For example, when the tenant has been evicted for holding over at the end of the lease term, that is not a serious lease violation for which a PHA should be able to terminate assistance.²⁰⁴ Or, the landlord may have evicted for some other non-serious lease violation. Or, the family may have failed to answer an eviction lawsuit and the owner

¹⁹⁷ 24 C.F.R. § 982.314(b)(2) (2008).

¹⁹⁸ *Id.* at § 982.552(c)(2).

¹⁹⁹ *Id.* at § 982.552(c)(2)(ii).

²⁰⁰ *Id.* at § 982.552(c)(2)(iii).

²⁰¹ *Id.* at § 982.552(c)(2)(iv).

²⁰² *Id.* at § 982.552(c)(2)(v).

²⁰³ *See id.* at § 982.551, § 982.552, § 982.553 (identifying permissible grounds for termination of Section 8 voucher assistance).

²⁰⁴ *See id.* at § 982.551(e) (“The family may not commit any serious or repeated violation of the lease.”)

obtained a default judgment of eviction. In this case, the PHA should not be able to terminate assistance without proof at the termination hearing of the grounds supporting the eviction.²⁰⁵ The eviction may have been without merit or the tenant may have had compelling defenses.²⁰⁶ Because of the possible ramifications of an eviction on the tenant's voucher subsidy, the advocate must diligently discuss strategy choices with the tenant.

J. Public Housing Evictions.

The actions of a PHA constitute government action within the meaning of the fourteenth amendment,²⁰⁷ and the due process and equal protection clauses of the fourteenth amendment apply to the action of the PHA.²⁰⁸ Therefore, when a PHA acts arbitrarily, discriminates in its treatment of applicants or tenants, or deprives an applicant or tenant of a property right without notice or an opportunity for a hearing, potential due process and equal protections claims arise.²⁰⁹

1. Property Interest in Public Housing Apartment.

A tenant has a property interest in a public housing unit and may not be evicted except for

²⁰⁵ Cf. *Housing Authority of Grant County v. Newbigging*, 19 P.3d 1081 (Wash. Ct. App. 2001) (setting aside default judgment in public housing eviction, finding that tenant had compelling defense to eviction).

²⁰⁶ See *id.*

²⁰⁷ See e.g., *Caulder v. Durham Housing Authority*, 433 F.2d 998, 1002 (4th Cir. 1970), *cert. denied*, 401 U.S. 1003 (1971); *Holmes v. New York City Housing Authority*, 398 F.2d 262, 264-65 (2d Cir. 1968).

²⁰⁸ See *Caulder*, *supra* note 207, 433 F.2d at 1002; *Holmes*, *supra* note 207, 398 F.2d at 264-65.

²⁰⁹ See e.g., *Blatch v. Hernandez*, 360 F. Supp. 2d 595, 621-27 (S.D. N.Y. 2005) (finding due process violations in PHA's eviction procedures as applied to persons with mental disabilities).

serious or repeated violations of material terms of the lease or for other good cause.²¹⁰ Congress has codified the good cause protection by legislation that provides that PHAs may evict only for (1) serious or repeated violation of the terms or conditions of the lease; (2) other good cause; (3) criminal activity that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other tenants; (4) drug-related criminal activity on or off the premises on the part of the tenant, any member of the household, or a guest or other person under the tenant's control; (5) violation by the tenant of a condition of probation or parole; (6) the tenant's action in fleeing to avoid prosecution or confinement after conviction for a felony;²¹¹ or (7) alcohol abuse use that interferes with the health, safety, or the right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other tenants or illegal drug use.²¹²

2. Notice of Lease Termination.

In order to evict, a PHA must first serve the tenant with a notice of lease termination.²¹³ A notice to vacate required by state or local law may be combined with or run concurrently with a notice of lease termination.²¹⁴ The notice of lease termination must (1) state the specific grounds for termination; (2) inform the tenant of her right to make such reply as she may wish; (3) inform the tenant of her right to examine PHA documents relevant to the eviction; and (4) inform the tenant of the tenant's right to request a hearing in accordance with the PHA's grievance procedure when the

²¹⁰ *Caulder, supra* note 207, 433 F.2d at 1003-04; *Escalera v. New York City Housing Authority*, 425 F.2d 853, 861-64 (2d Cir.), *cert. denied*, 400 U.S. 853 (1970).

²¹¹ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437d(l)(5), (6), (7), (9) (West Supp. 2008).

²¹² *Id.* at § 13662 (West 2005) (termination for alcohol abuse and illegal drug use).

²¹³ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437d(l)(4) (West Supp. 2008) ; 24 C.F.R. § 966.4(l)(3) (2008); *New York City Housing Authority v. Harvell*, 731 N.Y.S.2d 919 (N.Y. App. Term. 2001).

²¹⁴ 24 C.F.R. § 966.4(l)(3)(iii) (2008).

PHA is required to afford the tenant an opportunity for a grievance hearing.²¹⁵ When the PHA is not required to give the tenant an opportunity for a grievance hearing on the eviction, the notice of lease termination must additionally (1) state that the tenant is not entitled to a grievance hearing; (2) specify the judicial eviction procedure the PHA will use for eviction; (3) state that HUD has determined that the eviction procedure provides the opportunity for a hearing in court that contains the basic elements of due process as defined in HUD regulations; and (4) state whether the eviction is for criminal activity or drug-related criminal activity.²¹⁶

The notice term depends upon the grounds for the eviction. In nonpayment of rent cases, the PHA must give fourteen days notice of lease termination.²¹⁷ The PHA must give “a reasonable period of time considering the seriousness of the situation (but not to exceed 30 days)” (1) when the health or safety of other tenants, PHA employees, or persons residing in the immediate vicinity of the premises is threatened; (2) if any member of the household has engaged in any drug-related criminal activity or violent criminal activity; or (3) if any member of the household has been convicted of a felony.²¹⁸ In all other cases the PHA must give thirty days notice of lease termination, except that if state or local law allows a shorter notice period, that period applies.²¹⁹

If a PHA attempts to evict for nonpayment of utility charges or repair charges, thirty days

²¹⁵ *Id.* at § 966.4(l)(3)(ii).

²¹⁶ *Id.* at § 966.4(l)(3)(v).

²¹⁷ *Id.* at § 966.4(l)(3)(i)(A); *see also Community Development Authority of Madison v. Yoakum*, 481 N.W.2d 707 (Wis. Ct. App. 1992) (unpublished limited precedent op.) (PHA could not evict for late payment of rent based on fourteen day notice of termination claiming nonpayment of rent. Failure to pay rent and failure to pay rent on time are different things. Thirty days notice of termination would have been required for late payment of rent.).

²¹⁸ *Id.* at § 966.4(l)(3)(i)(B).

²¹⁹ *Id.* at § 966.4(l)(3)(i)(c).

notice rather than fourteen days notice would be required, since the basis for the eviction is not nonpayment of “rent” but nonpayment of other charges. Obviously, the PHA must also comply with any notice periods set forth in the lease.

If state law provides an opportunity to cure a lease violation prior to eviction, the PHA must give the tenant such an opportunity to prior to filing an eviction suit.²²⁰ Of course, a state law right to cure would not apply to evictions for drug related and violent criminal activity, since Congress has preempted such laws with the enactment of the statutes imposing strict liability on tenants for such conduct. If state law does not provide an opportunity to cure, the tenant should treat the period given in the notice of lease termination as a cure period and cure the lease violation.²²¹ Tenant omissions are capable of being cured – for example, the tenant pays the rent or the tenant signs the recertification paperwork. If state law also allows for cure of non-rent violations or is ambiguous, then the tenant should attempt to cure those violations by taking whatever steps can be taken to remedy the violation. That will set up the tenant’s cure defense in court.

The PHA must strictly comply with the notice requirements. PHAs frequently fail to detail the specific factual grounds for termination but simply state conclusory grounds such as “disturbance of neighbors” or “creation or maintenance of threat to health or safety of other tenants or PHA employees.” Such notices are insufficient, because they are conclusory.²²² Similarly, notices that do

²²⁰ See *Housing Authority of City of Everett v. Terry*, 789 P.2d 745 (Wash. 1990) (en banc) (holding that public housing eviction and grievance regulations do not preempt state law cure provisions).

²²¹ See *Caro v. Housing Authority of the City of Austin*, 794 S.W.2d 901, 905-06 (Tex. App. – Austin 1990, writ denied) (indicating that the fourteen day notice of lease termination period may be a cure period but finding that federal law preempted any cure opportunity).

²²² *Escalera v. New York City Housing Authority*, *supra* note 210, 425 F.2d at 862.

not comply with the other requirements of the regulations are defective, and the PHA may not prevail in the eviction.²²³

3. Right to Administrative Grievance Hearing.

Tenants threatened with eviction have a right to avail themselves of the PHA grievance procedure, except in certain circumstances.²²⁴ The grievance procedure regulations create a right that may be enforced under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.²²⁵ If a PHA refuses to grant the tenant a hearing on a proposed eviction subject to the grievance procedure, the tenant may either seek dismissal of the eviction²²⁶ or sue affirmatively to enforce the right to a grievance hearing.²²⁷

PHAs generally specify in their termination notices that the tenant must request the grievance hearing within a specified time period or the tenant loses the right to the hearing. Tenants may have defenses to the eviction when the PHA refuses to grant a hearing on the ground the request was untimely.²²⁸ A PHA may exclude from the grievance procedure any grievance on an eviction based

²²³ See, e.g., *Housing Authority of Newark v. Raindrop*, 670 A.2d 1087 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 1996); see also *Corpus Christi Hous. Auth. v. Lara*, No. 13-07-00277-CV, 2008 Tex. App. LEXIS 5290, **9-13 (Tex. App. – Corpus Christi July 17, 2008, no pet.).

²²⁴ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437d(k) (West Supp. 2008); 24 C.F.R. § 966.51 (2008). Tenants will sometime settle a pending eviction with an agreement that the tenant will waive the right to a grievance hearing in the future on an eviction arising out of similar facts. Such agreements should be entered into with caution, because the courts are likely to enforce them when the tenant was represented by counsel. See *Whitfield v. Public Housing Agency of St. Paul*, No. 03-6096, 2004 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 24714 (D. Minn. Dec. 7, 2004).

²²⁵ *Samuels v. District of Columbia*, 770 F.2d 184 (D.C. Cir. 1985).

²²⁶ See *Housing Authority of Salt Lake v. Snyder*, 44 P.3d 724 (Utah 2002).

²²⁷ See *Conway v. Housing Authority of City of Asheville*, 239 F. Supp. 2d 593, 597-99 (W.D. N. C. 2002).

²²⁸ See, e.g., *Housing Authority of Danville v. Love*, 874 N.E.2d 893 (Ill. App. Ct. 2007). Here the PHA served the tenant with a thirty day notice of termination for failing to keep the

(continued...)

upon any criminal activity that threatens the health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises of other tenants or employees of the PHA; any violent or drug-related criminal activity on or off the PHA premises; or any criminal activity that resulted in felony conviction of a household member.²²⁹ Thus, an eviction premised on nonpayment of rent or other charges, tenant misconduct that is not criminal or drug-related, or tenant omissions is grievable.²³⁰ Moreover, if the PHA has not incorporated by reference in the tenant's lease the information about the grievance procedure and exemptions, the PHA must then give the tenant an opportunity for a grievance hearing in all cases.²³¹ In addition, if the lease gives the tenant a right to a grievance hearing in more circumstances than required under the regulations, the tenant may enforce that contractual right to a grievance hearing.²³²

In any grievance over the amount of rent which the PHA claims is due, the tenant must pay to the PHA the amount of rent the PHA states is due and payable as of the first of the month preceding the month in which the family's act or failure to act took place.²³³ Thereafter, so long as

²²⁸(...continued)
apartment clean and free of trash. The termination notice gave the tenant ten working days to request a grievance hearing. The tenant requested a grievance hearing after the ten day period had expired but within the thirty day termination period. The court reviewed 42 U.S.C. § 1437d(k)(2) and (l)(4) and read those provisions as entitling the tenant to a hearing if the tenant requests the hearing within the thirty day period. This case can be used in any eviction in which the tenant is served with a thirty day notice of termination, requests a grievance hearing after the deadline given in the notice but within the thirty day period, and the PHA denies the request as untimely.

²²⁹ 24 C.F.R. § 966.51 (a)(2)(i) (2008).

²³⁰ See, e.g., *Conway supra* note 227, 239 F. Supp. 2d 593 (W.D. N. C. 2002).

²³¹ 24 C.F.R. § 966.52(b) (2008); *Housing Authority of Salt Lake supra* note 226, 44 P.3d 724 (Utah 2002).

²³² *Housing Authority of Jersey City v. Jackson*, 749 F. Supp. 622, 634 (D. N.J. 1990).

²³³ 24 C.F.R. § 966.55(e) (2008).

the grievance is pending, the tenant is required to deposit the same amount of monthly rent in escrow.²³⁴

A tenant who complains of a rent redetermination must deposit the amount in dispute in escrow in order to be entitled to a grievance hearing.²³⁵ The escrow deposit is not required, however, before the informal meeting required under the grievance procedure regulations; it is due prior to the formal hearing.²³⁶ Moreover, a PHA must waive the escrow requirement where required by the hardship exemption from the minimum rent requirement or the regulations on the effect of welfare reduction in calculation of family income.²³⁷ The escrow requirement poses a problem for the tenant in those cases on nonpayment of rent after a decrease in income. In such a case, a tenant who has failed to pay the rent because of a decrease in income obviously will not be able to pay into escrow the amount the PHA claims is due. The best procedure in such a case is to pay the monthly rent the tenant claims is correct into escrow and argue with the PHA that to require more would violate due process and the intent of the regulations.

The tenant has a right to copy all relevant PHA documents before the formal grievance hearing.²³⁸ The tenant also has a right to representation by an advocate and has a right to a private

²³⁴ *Id.* at. § 966.55(e)(1).

²³⁵ *See Head v. Jellico Housing Authority*, 870 F.2d 1117, 1122-23 (6th Cir. 1989) (holding that a tenant who complains of a rent redetermination must make an escrow deposit to receive a grievance hearing).

²³⁶ *Conway*, *supra* note 227, 239 F. Supp.2d 593, 599-600 (W.D. N.C. 2002).

²³⁷ 24 C.F.R. § 966.55(e)(2) (2008).

²³⁸ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437d(k) (3); § 1437d(l)(7) (West Supp. 2008); 24 C.F.R. § 966.4(m), § 966.56(b) (2008).

hearing, unless a public hearing is requested.²³⁹ The private hearing right can be extremely important in small communities where PHA Board members might be interested in attending the hearing as a way of influencing the hearing official. The tenant has the right to confront and cross examine adverse witnesses, but, interestingly, the PHA does not have the same right under the regulations.²⁴⁰ Thus, a tenant may rely on written statements, but a PHA may not. The tenant has the burden of first showing an entitlement to the relief sought; the PHA must then sustain the burden of justifying the PHA action.²⁴¹ The tenant may at his expense arrange for a hearing transcript.²⁴² The PHA must provide reasonable accommodations for person with disabilities to participate in the hearing.²⁴³

The panel or hearing officer must prepare a written decision and give the tenant a copy.²⁴⁴ The panel or hearing officer may order all necessary remedies, including equitable relief and money damages.²⁴⁵ The decision is binding on the PHA, unless the PHA Board determines that (1) the grievance does not concern PHA action or failure to act in accordance with the tenant's lease and PHA regulations which adversely affect the tenant's rights, or (2) the decision of the hearing officer

²³⁹ 24 C.F.R. § 966.56(b)(2), (3) (2008).

²⁴⁰ *Id.* at § 966.56(b)(4).

²⁴¹ *Id.* at § 966.56(e).

²⁴² *Id.* at § 966.56(g).

²⁴³ *Id.* at § 966.56(h); *Blatch v. Hernandez*, 360 F. Supp. 2d 595, 621-27 (S.D. N.Y. 2005) (finding due process violations in PHA's eviction procedures as applied to persons with mental disabilities); *see also Padilla v. Martinez*, 752 N.Y.S.2d 28 (N.Y. App. Div. 2002) (when it is clear tenant has a mental disability that renders her incapable of representing herself adequately at grievance hearing, the hearing violates due process).

²⁴⁴ 24 C.F.R. § 966.57 (2008).

²⁴⁵ *Samuels v. District of Columbia*, 650 S. Supp. 482 (D.D.C. 1986).

or panel is contrary to applicable law or regulations.²⁴⁶ A PHA may not, however, nullify a hearing officer's decision simply because the PHA determines that it is not practicable or economical to implement.²⁴⁷ A tenant who is unsuccessful in the grievance process is entitled to a de novo hearing in state court.²⁴⁸

4. Evictions for Serious Lease Violations or Other Good Cause.

HUD has implemented the statutory grounds given by Congress as grounds for eviction.²⁴⁹ HUD gives as examples of serious or repeated violations of material terms of the lease (1) failure to make payments due under the lease and (2) failure of the tenant to fulfill household obligations described at 24 C.F.R. 966.5(f).²⁵⁰ HUD has also added as an additional ground for lease termination having income in excess of the income limit for public housing.²⁵¹ HUD has defined *other good cause* as including (1) criminal activity or alcohol abuse, (2) discovery after admission of facts that made the tenant ineligible; (3) discovery of material false statements or fraud by the tenant in connection with an application or reexamination of income; (4) failure of a family member to comply with the community service requirements of 24 C.F.R. 960.600 - 960.609, but only as grounds for non-renewal at the end of a one year lease term; and (5) failure of the tenant to accept a revision to

²⁴⁶ 24 C.F.R. § 966.57(b) (2008).

²⁴⁷ *Samuels v. District of Columbia*, 669 F. Supp. 1133, 1143-44 (D.D.C. 1987).

²⁴⁸ 24 C.F.R. §966.57(c) (2008).

²⁴⁹ *See* 24 C.F.R. § 966.4(f)(12); (1), (2), (5) (2008).

²⁵⁰ *Id.* at § 966.4(1)(2)(i) .

²⁵¹ *See* 69 Fed. Reg. 68791 (Nov. 26, 2004) (codified in the 2008 C.F.R. at 24 C.F.R. § 966.4(1)(2)(ii)). But a PHA may not evict a family for being over the income limit if the family currently receives the earned income disregard. 24 C.F.R. § 960.261(b) (2008).

the lease duly adopted by the PHA.²⁵²

The right to evict a family for discovery of facts after admission that made the tenant ineligible is troubling. If the family provides truthful information during the application process, the PHA should not be able to evict the family if it later discovers information that makes the family ineligible.²⁵³ But, at least one court has upheld the eviction of a convicted sex offender who was convicted before moving into public housing.²⁵⁴ Convicted sex offender cases, however, are in a category of their own and can be distinguished from other cases in which information is discovered, because Congress has specifically prohibited registered sex offenders from receiving federal housing assistance.²⁵⁵ Courts are likely to be sympathetic to equitable arguments in evictions based on information that the tenant truthfully provided during the application process.²⁵⁶ But, if an applicant misrepresents his criminal history upon application, courts may be likely to uphold a subsequent eviction based on the criminal history that occurred prior to admission.²⁵⁷

²⁵² 24 C.F.R. § 966.4(l)(2)(iii) (2008).

²⁵³ See *Bennington Housing Authority v. Bush*, 933 A.2d 207 (Vt. 2007) (holding that PHA had failed to prove that tenant had knowingly failed to reveal during the application process prior convictions for burglary and sale of controlled substance; reversing trial court judgment of eviction).

²⁵⁴ See *Archdiocesan Housing Authority v. Demmings*, No. 46157-5-I, 2001 Wash. App. LEXIS 2276 (Wash. Ct. App. Oct. 15, 2001) (upholding eviction of convicted sex offender who had been convicted before moving into public housing unit.); *but see*, HUD Notice H-2002-22, *Screening and Eviction for Drug Abuse and Other Criminal Activity – Final Rule* (October 29, 2002) (“Households already living in Federally-assisted housing units are not subject to the provisions in the regulations at 24 C.F.R. 5.856.”) (notice applies only to project-based section 8).

²⁵⁵ 42 U.S.C. A. § 13663 (West 2005).

²⁵⁶ See *Bennington Housing Authority v. Bush*, 933 A.2d 207 (Vt. 2007).

²⁵⁷ See, e.g. *Ross v. Broadway Towers, Inc.*, 228 S.W.3d 113, 121 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2006),

(continued...)

5. Nonpayment Evictions.

A public housing tenant may have many defenses in a nonpayment of rent case that a tenant living in privately owned housing does not have, because tenants have a legitimate claim that their rent not exceed the amount established by Congress.²⁵⁸ One, the PHA may have incorrectly calculated the tenant's rent and may be overcharging the tenant. For example, the PHA may have overestimated anticipated income; failed to give the tenant all deductions to which the tenant is entitled under the law; or based the calculation on erroneous information from the tenant's employer.²⁵⁹ Two, the PHA may have included income not actually received by the family.²⁶⁰ For example, frequently PHAs include child support the family is not actually receiving. If the tenant is being overcharged, the tenant has a defense. Three, the tenant may have suffered a loss of earned income, disability benefits, child support, or other income and be entitled to a rent reduction. PHAs are required to reduce a family's rent when the family suffers an income loss.²⁶¹ Four, the PHA may

²⁵⁷(...continued)
cert denied, 128 S. Ct. 543 (2007).

²⁵⁸ *See McGee v. Housing Authority of the City of Lanett*, 543 F. Supp. 607, 608 (M.D. Ala. 1982) (public housing tenants have a legitimate claim that they should receive the benefits of low-cost housing at the rental rate prescribed by Congress.)

²⁵⁹ *See* 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437a(b)(5) (West 2003) ("adjusted income"); 24 C.F.R. § 5.609 (2008) (defining annual income); § 5.611 (defining deductions to annual income).

²⁶⁰ *See* 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437a(b)(4) (West 2003) ("any amounts not actually received by the family ... may not be considered as income. ..."). One court has held that when child support payments are automatically deducted from social security benefits, the PHA must use the gross amount of the social security payment prior to the deduction in calculating rent, because the term "received" includes constructive receipt of benefits. *See Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority v. Edwards*, 881 N.E.2d 325 (Ohio Ct. App. 2007).

²⁶¹ 24 C.F.R. § 960.257(b) (2008); *see Maxton Housing Authority v. McLean*, 328 S.E.2d 290 (N.C. 1985); *Housing Authority of St. Louis County v. Boone*, 747 S.W.2d 311, 314-16 (Mo. Ct. App. 1988) (holding that a remaining spouse is liable for future rent calculated upon the

(continued...)

have failed to reduce the tenant's rent following a reduction in the tenant's welfare grant.²⁶² The rent reduction should be retroactive to the month following the loss of income.²⁶³ Five, the PHA may have illegally assessed the tenant for repair charges²⁶⁴ that the PHA should pay or may have failed to provide an adequate utility allowance.²⁶⁵ Six, the PHA may have included maintenance charges as part of the rent payment, demanded payment of all or none, and then sued claiming nonpayment of rent.²⁶⁶

Some PHAs provide in their leases that the tenant may be evicted if the tenant pays rent late

²⁶¹(...continued)
household's new income level).

²⁶² 24 C.F.R. 5.615 (2008). The PHA is required to reduce the tenant's rent because of a reduction in the welfare grant unless the welfare grant has been reduced because of welfare fraud or because of noncompliance with economic self-sufficiency requirements. *Id.*

²⁶³ UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, *Public Housing Occupancy Guidebook*, chp. 13, at para. 13.3 (June 2003) ("Rent decreases usually go into effect the first of the month following the reported change.").

²⁶⁴ The PHA is required to pay for all repairs resulting from normal wear and use. 24 C.F.R. § 966.4(e)(3), (f)(10) (2008). A PHA may not assess a tenant for damages to the apartment unit without first finding fault on the part of the tenant, providing notice of the grounds for assessment, and notice of an opportunity to challenge the assessments. *Id.* at § 966.4(b)(4); *Chavez v. Santa Fe Housing Authority*, 606 F.2d 282 (10th Cir. 1979).

²⁶⁵ The PHA must provide a utility allowance sufficient to approximate a reasonable consumption of utilities by an energy-conservative household of modest circumstances consistent with the requirements of a safe, sanitary, and healthful living environment. *Id.* at § 965.505(a). A tenant may also have a claim against a PHA under the lease for utility overcharges. *Nelson v. Greater Gadsden Housing Authority*, 802 F.2d 405, 408-09 (11th Cir. 1986). *See also Amone v. Aeiro*, 226 F.R.D. 677 (D. Hawaii 2005) (certifying class of disabled public housing tenants whose special needs require excess consumption of utilities in lawsuit challenging PHA's refusal to increase the allowance as a reasonable accommodation under Section 504).

²⁶⁶ *See Lorain Metropolitan Housing Authority v. Noel*, No. 06CA009006, 2007 Ohio App. LEXIS 2640 (Ohio Ct. App. 2007) (finding PHA could not evict for nonpayment of rent when PHA had demanded full payment of rent and maintenance charges).

three or more times during a twelve-month period. At least one court upheld such a provision, ruling that three late payments during a twelve-month period can constitute a serious or repeated violation of material terms of the lease.²⁶⁷ In such a case, advocates should have the tenant testify on the reasons for the late payment. Even when the tenant's rent has been correctly calculated, family emergencies or other unexpected high expenses may have contributed to the late payment, and the court can apply equity to avoid the forfeiture.

Tenants may also have defenses to nonpayment based on (1) the PHA's failure to give the tenant the earned income disregard;²⁶⁸ (2) the PHA's failure to offer the tenant the choice between the flat rent and an income-based rent, resulting in the payment by the tenant of higher rent than the tenant would have paid with a flat rent;²⁶⁹ (3) the PHA's failure to offer the family the opportunity to switch from a flat rent to an income-based rent because of a financial hardship;²⁷⁰ and (4) the PHA's failure to give a minimum rent tenant a hardship exemption from payment of the minimum rent.²⁷¹ The PHA must affirmatively notify a family of the hardship exemption from the minimum

²⁶⁷ See *Delaware State Hous. Auth./Clark's Corner v. Justice of the Peace Court 16*, No. 07A-11-004-WLW, 2008 Del. Super. LEXIS 300, *17-18 (Del. Super. Ct. August 8, 2008).

²⁶⁸ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437a(d) (West 2003); 24 C.F.R. § 960.255 (2008). The earned income disregard is also applicable to families with a member who is a person with disabilities in the Housing Choice Voucher Program, HOME Investment Partnerships Program, Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS, and Supportive Housing Program. See 24 C.F.R. § 5.617 (2008).

²⁶⁹ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437a(a)(2) (West 2003); 24 C.F.R. § 960.253 (2008).

²⁷⁰ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437a(a)(2)(c) (West 2003); 24 C.F.R. § 960.253(f) (2008). See discussion on the minimum rent and hardship exemptions at Part B of this article. Unlike subsidized owners who must set the minimum rent at \$25, PHAs may set the minimum rent at any amount between \$0 and \$50. 24 C.F.R. § 5.630(a)(2) (2008).

²⁷¹ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437a(a)(3)(B); 24 C.F.R. § 5.630(b). See discussion on hardship exemption from minimum rent in Section B-4.

rent requirement.²⁷² Its failure to do so should be an affirmative defense to an eviction for nonpayment of the minimum rent. Because the flat rent, earned income disregard, and hardship exemption from the minimum rent, and hardship exemption from the flat rent are all relatively new statutory protections enacted as part of the Housing Quality and Work Responsibility Act of 1998,²⁷³ reported case law appears to be non-existent. Thus, this is a fertile area for imaginative and assertive advocacy to ensure PHA compliance with federal law. Space considerations preclude further discussion of these possible defenses here. Suffice it to say that every case must be examined for these possible defenses. Finally, filing Chapter 13 bankruptcy may be proper to stop an eviction.²⁷⁴

K. Evictions Premised on Criminal Activity or Drug Related Criminal Activity of Household Members, Guests, or Other Persons Under Tenant’s Control – Federally Subsidized Housing, Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, and Public Housing.

This section of the article applies to evictions from federally subsidized housing, public housing, and the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. There is much to discuss, but this is

²⁷² UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, *Public Housing Occupancy Guidebook*, chp. 13, at para. 13.1 (June 2003).

²⁷³ Pub. L. No. 105-276, 112 Stat. 2461 (October 21, 1998) (flat rent, earned income disregard, and hardship exemption provisions codified in 42 U.S.C. § 1437a)

²⁷⁴ See e.g., *Stoltz v. Brattleboro Housing Authority (In re Stoltz)*, 315 F.3d 80 (2d Cir. 2002); *Brattleboro Housing Authority v. Stoltz (In re Stoltz)*, 197 F.3d 625 (2d. Cir. 1999; *Biggs v. Hous. Auth. of City of Pittsburgh*, supra note 77; *In re: Kelly*, 356 B.R. 899 (Bankr. S.D. Fla. 2006) (holding that a public housing tenant is entitled to remain in her apartment under § 525(a) even if she discharges, rather than cures, her prepetition rent default) . Use of Chapter 13 bankruptcy as a tool to defend evictions is a topic onto itself and beyond the scope of this article. The new bankruptcy act effective October 17, 2005, provides that an eviction against a debtor involving residential property is not stayed if the landlord has obtained a final judgment for possession prior to the filing of the bankruptcy petition. See 11 U.S.C.A. § 362(b)(21) (West Supp. 2008). But, the stay should apply if the judgment is on appeal. See *id.* The eviction judgment may also be stayed in certain limited circumstances set forth in the statute. *Id.* § 362(l)(2).

only a very brief overview. In addition to a detailed discussion on defending such evictions in the National Housing Law Project Greenbook referenced at the very beginning of this article, an article in the May-June 2007 Clearinghouse Review titled *Wait A Minute: Slowing Down Criminal-Activity Eviction Cases to Find the Truth*²⁷⁵ discusses the defense of such evictions in detail.

With respect to public housing, Congress has mandated that PHAs use leases that provide for termination of tenancy for criminal activity²⁷⁶ that threatens health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other tenants, PHA employees, or other persons residing in the immediate vicinity of the premises, or any drug-related criminal activity **on or off** such premises, engaged in by the tenant, any member of the tenant's household, or any guest or other person under the tenant's control.²⁷⁷

With respect to multifamily apartment owners with project-based Section 8 contracts, Congress has mandated leases that provide for termination of tenancy for any criminal activity that threatens health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other tenants; any criminal activity that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of their residences by persons residing in the immediate vicinity of the premises; or any drug-related criminal activity **on or near** such premises, engaged in by the tenant, any member of the tenant's household, or any guest or other

²⁷⁵ Lawrence R. McDonough & Mac McCreight, *Wait a Minute: Slowing Down Criminal-Activity Eviction Cases to Find the Truth*, 41 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW JOURNAL OF POVERTY LAW AND POLICY 55 (May-June 2007).

²⁷⁶ Courts have held that actions of a minor that are defined as delinquent under state law can constitute criminal activity under the lease. *See Housing Authority v. Williams*, 784 A.2d 621, 625-26 (Md. Ct. App. 2001); *Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority v. Browning*, No. C-010055, 2002 Ohio App. LEXIS 155 (Ohio Ct. App. Jan. 18, 2002).

²⁷⁷ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437d(1) (West Supp. 2008) (emphasis added); 24 C.F.R. § 966.4(f)(11), (12), § 966.4 (1) (2008).

person under the tenant's control.²⁷⁸

With respect to the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, Congress has mandated that PHAs require that owners use leases that provide for termination of tenancy for any criminal activity that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other tenants; any criminal activity that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of their residences by persons residing in the immediate vicinity of the premises; or any violent or drug-related criminal activity **on or near** the premises, engaged in by the tenant, any member of the tenant's household, or any guest or other person under the tenant's control.²⁷⁹

Although Congress mandated that PHAs use lease provisions allowing for eviction for criminal activity that threatens health, safety, or peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other tenants and drug-related activity, this does not permit a PHA to include language in the lease allowing for eviction if any family member is convicted of a felony.²⁸⁰ Subsidized landlords and PHAs sometimes try to evict the tenant for criminal activity that occurred prior to admission to the apartment complex. But, as set forth above, the criminal activity must threaten the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents. One court concluded that an eviction by a subsidized landlord based on a felony forgery conviction occurring less than one- and one-half years before the PHA gave the tenant notice of termination adequately stated a claim for eviction for

²⁷⁸ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437f(d) (West 2003) (emphasis added); 24 C.F.R. § 5.850 - § 5.861.

²⁷⁹ 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437f(o)(7) (West Supp. 2008) (emphasis added); 24 C.F.R. § 982.310.

²⁸⁰ See *Cabrini-Green Local Advisory Council v. Chicago Housing Authority*, No. 96 C 6949, 2007 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 6520 (N.D. Ill. Jan. 29, 2007) (striking PHA lease provision that permitted eviction upon conviction of any family member for a felony).

criminal activity.²⁸¹ Such reasoning is simply not persuasive. The court was likely influenced by the tenant's failure to reveal the conviction at the time of application.²⁸²

Although drug-related criminal activity is grounds for eviction, possession of drug paraphernalia does not constitute "drug-related criminal activity" under the governing federal regulations.²⁸³ HUD defines *drug* for purposes of *drug-related criminal activity* as "a controlled substance defined in section 102 of the Controlled Substances Act (21 (U.S.C. 802))."²⁸⁴ Congress defined the term "controlled substance" as meaning "a drug or other substance, or immediate precursor, included in schedule I, II, III, IV, or V of part B of this subchapter."²⁸⁵ The referenced schedules do not include drug paraphernalia in the definition. Thus, a tenant caught with drug paraphernalia may not be evicted for allegedly engaging in drug-related criminal activity.

HUD has defined *guest* as meaning "a person temporarily staying in the unit with the consent of a tenant or other member of the household who has express or implied authority to consent on behalf of the tenant."²⁸⁶ HUD distinguishes *other person under the tenant's control* as a person, although not staying as a guest in the unit, is, or was as the time of the activity in question, on the premises because of an invitation from the tenant or other member of the household who has express

²⁸¹ *Ross v. Broadway Towers, Inc.*, 228 S.W.3d 113, 120 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2006), *cert denied*, 128 S. Ct. 543 (2007).

²⁸² *See id.* at 121.

²⁸³ *See* 24 C.F.R. § 5.100 (2008) (definitions of *drug* and *drug-related criminal activity*).

²⁸⁴ *Id.*

²⁸⁵ *See* 21 U.S.C.A. § 802 (West 1999).

²⁸⁶ 24 C.F.R. § 5.100 (2008) (definitions).

or implied authority to so consent on behalf of the tenant.²⁸⁷

Following the enactment by Congress of the requirement of lease provisions allowing eviction without fault by the tenant, the courts struggled with the concept of the eviction of innocent tenants for action of household members or guests.²⁸⁸ The United States Supreme Court resolved the constitutionality of the no-fault lease provision in *Department of Housing and Urban Development v. Rucker*,²⁸⁹ holding that 42 U.S.C. §1437d(1)(6) “requires lease terms that give local public housing authorities the discretion to terminate the lease of a tenant when a member of the household or a guest engages in drug-related activity, regardless of whether the tenant knew, or should have known, of the drug-related activity.”²⁹⁰ In so holding, the court reversed the Ninth Circuit decision in *Rucker v. Davis*,²⁹¹ *Rucker* is both sweeping and narrow. It is narrow in that it merely affirms the authority of Congress to require that PHAs (and by implication, subsidized landlords) use lease terms giving the PHA discretion to evict a tenant when a member of the household or a guest engages in drug-related activity, regardless of whether the tenant knew, or should have known, of the drug-related activity. It is sweeping in that the unrestrained exercise of that discretion can have devastating consequences

²⁸⁷ *Id.*

²⁸⁸ For a discussion of the various cases, see the following articles: Barclay Thomas Johnson, *The Severest Justice in not the Best Policy: The One-Strike Policy in Public Housing*, 10 JOURNAL OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING 234 (Spring 2001); Nelson H. Mock, *Punishing the Innocent: No-Fault Eviction of Public Housing Tenants for the Actions of Third Parties*, 76 TEX. L. REV. 1495 (May 1998).

²⁸⁹ 535 U.S. 125 (2002).

²⁹⁰ *Id.* at 136.

²⁹¹ 237 F.3d 1113 (9th Cir. 2001) (en banc).

on otherwise innocent poor families.²⁹²

Given the unjust consequences that can flow from strict enforcement of such no-fault lease provisions, HUD fairly quickly sent out a letter to all PHAs after *Rucker* was decided, urging them to be “guided by compassion and common sense in responding to cases involving the use of illegal drugs;” and to “[c]onsider the seriousness of the offense and how it might impact other family members;” and exhorting that “[e]viction should be the last option explored, after all others have been exhausted.”²⁹³ Notwithstanding that directive, many PHAs pursue eviction regardless of the particular facts of the case and the resulting consequences for the family.²⁹⁴

The PHA and subsidized owner may evict the tenant regardless of whether the covered person has been arrested or convicted; proof in the eviction case is based on a preponderance of the evidence standard and not the more exacting “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard required in a criminal case.²⁹⁵ But, if a PHA intends to evict based on criminal activity as shown by a criminal record, it must provide the tenant and the subject of the record with a copy of the record before trial of the eviction.²⁹⁶

HUD regulations specifically give discretion to PHAs, project-based Section 8 landlords,

²⁹² See *Boston Housing Authority v. Garcia*, 871 N.E.2d 1073, 1080 (Mass. 2007) (finding that *Rucker* eliminated innocent tenant defense under Massachusetts law, but writing that “a housing authority should consider the circumstances presented by a tenant, or otherwise known to the housing authority, including the extent of the tenant’s knowledge, or lack thereof, of the illegal drug activity and the tenant’s ability to control or prevent the activity.”)

²⁹³ Letter from Mel Martinez, Secretary of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, dated April 16, 2002 (on file with the National Housing Law Project).

²⁹⁴ See generally NATIONAL HOUSING LAW PROJECT, *Post-Rucker Decisions: Three Years Later*, 35 HOUS. L. BULL. 257 (November/December 2005).

²⁹⁵ 24 C.F.R. § 5.861; § 966.4(l)(5)(iii) (2008).

²⁹⁶ *Id.* at § 966.4(l)(5)(iv).

and Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher landlords on whether to proceed with eviction for activity of household members or guests.²⁹⁷ In addition, *Rucker* does not require the eviction courts to ignore legal or equitable defenses, such as waiver, illegal discrimination, failure to grant a reasonable accommodation under the Fair Housing Act, unclean hands, estoppel, and other defenses under the lease, state law, or common law.²⁹⁸ But, courts have held that *Rucker* does preempt state law right to cure provisions.²⁹⁹

In defending evictions based on conduct by alleged guests, it is necessary first to determine whether the person of whose actions the PHA or landlord complains falls within the definition of a *guest or other person under the tenant's control*. The tenant's liability is different under the regulations, depending on whether the person was a guest or merely someone under the tenant's

²⁹⁷ 24 C.F.R. § 966.4(l)(5)(vii) (public housing); § 982.310(h) (Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program); § 5.852 (project-based Section 8 landlords); *see Oakwood Plaza Apartments v. Smith*, 800 A. 2d 265, 267-71 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 2002) (recognizing that *Rucker* does not mandate eviction and remanding for Section 8 landlord to consider circumstances).

²⁹⁸ *See e.g., Pratt v. District of Columbia Housing Authority*, 942 A.2d 656 (D.C. 2008) (holding that where eviction is sought based only on a lease provision that does not incorporate the statutory prohibition against criminal activity, the District of Columbia statute allowing tenants an opportunity to cure a lease violation is not preempted); *Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority v. Hairston*, 790 N.E.2d 828 (Ohio Cleveland Municipal Ct. 2003) (PHA waived right to evict tenant for possession of marijuana when it continued to accept tenant's rent for seven months after it became aware of the breach of lease); *Joseph v. Beaumont Housing Authority*, 99 S.W.3d 765 (Tex. App.-- Beaumont 2003, no pet.) (PHA could not evict for conduct occurring prior to signing of new lease); *Gallatin Housing Authority v. Montesillo*, No. M2001-02260-COA-R3-CV, 2002 Tenn. App. LEXIS 574 (Tenn. Ct. App. August 7, 2002)(unpublished) (PHA waived right to evict by signing new lease); *Superior Housing Authority v. Foote*, 455 N.W.2d 679 (Wis. Ct. App. 1990) (unpublished limited precedent opinion) (PHA waived right to evict by signing new lease).

²⁹⁹ *See, e.g., Scarborough v. Winn Residential L.L.P./Atlantic Terrace Apartments*, 890 A.2d 249 (D.C. 2006); *but see Pratt v. District of Columbia Hous. Auth.*, 942 A.2d 656 (D.C. 2008) (holding that where eviction is sought based only on a lease provision that does not incorporate the statutory prohibition against criminal activity, the District of Columbia statute allowing tenants an opportunity to cure a lease violation is not preempted).

control at the time of the incident. For example, a project-based Section 8 landlord may evict a tenant for any drug-related activity *on or near* the premises by a *guest*, but if the person is not a guest but *a person under the tenant's control*, then the activity must have occurred on the premises.³⁰⁰ Similarly, a PHA may evict a tenant for a *guest's* drug-related criminal activity on or off the premises but may evict a tenant for the drug-related criminal activity of *a person under the tenant's control* only if the person engaged in the activity on the premises.³⁰¹ In addition, tenants may have defenses to an eviction on the basis that the offending conduct was not committed by a member of the tenant's household, guest or other person under the tenant's control.³⁰² Tenants may also not be evicted merely because a guest has a criminal record.³⁰³ And, tenants with Section 8 vouchers or living in Project-based Section 8 may have defense based on the fact that the drug-activity did not occur near the premises.³⁰⁴

Tenants who are victims of domestic violence are protected from *Rucker* no-fault evictions with the enactment of amendments to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) signed into law on January 5, 2006.³⁰⁵ With the passage of that legislation, Congress prohibited public housing

³⁰⁰ 24 C.F.R. § 5.858 (2008).

³⁰¹ *Id.* at § 966.4(l)(5)(i)(B).

³⁰² *See Boston Housing Authority v. Bruno*, 790 N.E.2d 1121 (Mass. App. Ct. 2003) (finding public housing authority not entitled to evict tenant for drug activity of son because son was not a member of the household at the time he engaged in the activity).

³⁰³ *Wellston Housing Authority v. Murphy*, 131 S.W.3d 378 (Mo. Ct. App. 2004).

³⁰⁴ HUD gave this interpretation of “on or near” when it published the implementing federal regulations: “In general, this standard would cover drug crime in a street or other right of way that adjoins the project or building where a Section 8 unit is located.” 60 Fed. Reg. 34660, 34673 (July 3, 1995).

³⁰⁵ *See* Pub. L. No. 109-162, §§ 606, 607, 119 Stat. 2960 (2006) (codified at 42 U.S.C.A.

(continued...)

authorities, federally subsidized landlords with project-based Section 8 contracts, and Section 8 housing voucher landlords from evicting tenants who are victims of criminal activity directly related to domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking.³⁰⁶ In addition, Congress specifically authorized covered landlords to bifurcate a lease in order to permit the victim to remain and to evict the perpetrator of the violence.³⁰⁷ When an eviction has domestic violence overtones, this statutory protection must be asserted as an affirmative defense.

HUD enacted an interim rule on the VAWA protections on November 28, 2008.³⁰⁸ The interim regulations make it clear that an incident of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking may not be construed as a serious or repeated lease violation by the victim for which the tenancy of the victim may be terminated.³⁰⁹ The interim regulations also provide that criminal activity directly related to domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking, engaged in by a member of the tenant's household or any guest or other person under the tenant's control, shall not

³⁰⁵(...continued)

§ 1437d(l)(5) (West Supp. 2008) (public housing); § 1437f(d) (1)(B)(ii), (iii) (West Supp. 2008) (project-based Section 8 landlords); § 1427f(o)(7)(C), (D) (West Supp. 2008) (Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program)); *see generally* NATIONAL HOUSING LAW PROJECT, *HUD Begins VAWA Implementation*, 36 HOUS. L. BULL. 181 (Sept. 2006).

³⁰⁶ *Id.*

³⁰⁷ *Id.*

³⁰⁸ *See* 73 Fed. Reg. 72336 (Nov. 28, 2008) (interim rule effective December 29, 2008) (conforming HUD's regulations to the self-implementing statutory protections for victims of domestic violence)(to be codified generally at 24 C.F.R. § 5.2001 - § 5.2009) (comments due Jan. 27, 2009).

³⁰⁹ *See* 73 Fed. Reg. 72336, 72341, at § 5.2005 (to be codified in 24 C.F.R. at § 5.2005(a)).

be cause for termination of the tenancy if the tenant or immediate family member is the victim.³¹⁰

Under the statute and HUD's interpretation in the interim regulation, victims of domestic violence may self-certify that they are victims and must then be afforded the VAWA statutory protections from eviction.³¹¹ Form HUD-50066 for self-certification is currently available on HUD's website at: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/adm/hudclips/forms/files/50066.doc>

Self-certification is a powerful tool. It seems to mean that even if an individual is arrested and charged with domestic violence, he/she can self-certify that he/she is in fact the victim and obtain the protections of the Act. That would preclude eviction by the PHA or subsidized owner.

In a case premised on alleged criminal activity, some possible resolutions to explore, depending on the facts, include the following. A PHA may be willing to settle an eviction based on criminal or drug-related conduct by a guest or a household member short of evicting the entire family. For example, it might agree to allow the family to remain in exchange for an agreement to bar the offending guest from the premises or an agreement that the responsible household member will move.³¹² In a drug-usage eviction, the PHA might agree to allow the tenant to remain in exchange for an agreement that the offending household member will enter a drug rehabilitation program.³¹³ A PHA might also agree not to proceed with eviction in exchange for a lease probation agreement.³¹⁴

L. Evictions from Project-Based Voucher Program Housing.

³¹⁰ *Id.* at 72341, § 5.2005(b).

³¹¹ *Id.* at § 5.2007.

³¹² 24 C.F.R. § 966.4(l)(5)(vii)(C) (2008).

³¹³ *Id.* at § 966.4(l)(5)(vii)(D).

³¹⁴ *See id.* at § 966.4(l)(5)(vii)(B).

Project-based voucher³¹⁵ tenants have slightly different protections from evictions.³¹⁶ The tenant-based housing voucher eviction regulations at 24 C.F.R. 982.310 generally apply with the exception of the provision allowing termination for a business or economic reason or desire to use the unit for an individual, family, or non-residential purpose.³¹⁷ The provisions at 24 C.F.R. § 5.858 - § 5.861 on eviction for drug and alcohol abuse also apply.³¹⁸ The regulations permit an owner, upon lease expiration, to refuse to renew the lease for good cause or to refuse to renew the lease without good cause.³¹⁹ But, if the owner refuses to renew the lease without good cause, the public housing authority must provide the family with a tenant-based voucher, and the unit is removed from the HAP contract.³²⁰ The landlord must comply with the tenant-based housing voucher notice provisions in terminating a tenancy.³²¹

M. Conclusion.

Tenants threatened with eviction who live in federally assisted or public housing or who rent with the assistance of a Section 8 voucher have much at stake.³²² Poor families and disabled families

³¹⁵ See 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437f(o)(13) (West Supp. 2008); 24 C.F.R. Part 983 (2008); see 70 Fed. Reg. 59892 (October 13, 2005) (effective November 14, 2005) (replacing project-based certificate regulations with project-based voucher regulations and codifying the changes in the 2006 C.F.R. at Part 983).

³¹⁶ See 24 C.F.R. 983.257 (2008).

³¹⁷ *Id.* § 983.257(a) (2008).

³¹⁸ *Id.*

³¹⁹ *Id.* at § 983.257(b).

³²⁰ *Id.*

³²¹ See *id.* at § 983.257(a).

³²² See, e.g., *Villas at Parkside Partners v. City of Farmers Branch*, No. 3:06-CV-2371-L, (continued...)

are very vulnerable: a family emergency, a medical illness, a lost job, a grandson gone awry. This can happen to anyone. Homelessness and the hardships that accompany it are the consequences for a family that loses its housing. Evictions must be hard-fought to ensure the protections granted by Congress. Rights that exist “on the books” are meaningless without vigilant enforcement of those rights.

³²²(...continued)

2007 U.S. Dist. Lexis 36918, at *31–32 (N.D. Tex. May 21, 2007) (threat of eviction if anti-immigrant ordinance enforced constitutes irreparable harm); *Garrett v. City of Escondido*, 465 F. Supp. 2d 1043, 1052 (S.D. Cal. 2006) (same); *Lozano v. City of Hazleton*, 459 F. Supp. 2d 332, 335 (M.D. Pa. 2006) (threat of eviction from home constitutes irreparable injury sufficient for temporary restraining order); *Mitchell v. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*, 569 F. Supp. 701, 704–5 (N.D. Cal. 1983) (Clearinghouse No. 35,106) (scarcity of public housing constitutes irreparable harm sufficient to preliminarily enjoin eviction); *Bloodworth v. Oxford Village Townhouses*, 377 F. Supp. 709, 719 (N.D. Ga. 1974) (effective increase of 50 percent in housing costs may be tantamount to eviction or may impose substantial financial hardships on family sufficient to constitute irreparable harm).