

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **A warning from the Houston Housing Authority to public housing and Housing Choice Voucher applicants regarding internet fraud**

*Beware of online scams targeting individuals and families seeking affordable housing!*

**HOUSTON** – Please be aware that con artists are actively developing phony web sites that offer assistance in signing up for the Housing Choice Voucher (formally known as Section 8) wait list, while in truth they are collecting fees and taking personal information (such as your Social Security number) from their victims.

These 'Section 8 scams' prey on home-seekers and use web sites that appear to be real registration sites for waiting list lotteries – they sometimes even have Equal Housing Opportunity logos. Once money and information are collected from victims, the fees and data go straight to the scammers' bank accounts and your personal information can be used to commit identity theft.

Other web sites list Section 8 housing supposedly available and claim that you can rent the property if you provide the first month's rent via a credit card or wire transfer. Because the ads are fakes, any money sent is immediately lost.

Take note of the following tips and 'red flags' to avoid falling victim to an affordable housing scam:

- **There are no Housing Authorities that charge fees to be on a wait list or to apply for public housing.** If a particular web site states a fee is required, that is a huge 'red flag'.
- **Housing Authorities won't reach out to you by phone or email to suggest you join a waiting list.** Housing typically notify the general public when their Section 8 wait lists reopen by announcement via local radio/television/print media as well as at their agency web site and/or social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- **Don't wire money or use a prepaid debit card.** Scammers often pressure people into wiring money or putting cash on a prepaid debit card. Why? It's like sending cash: once it's gone, you can't



trace it or get it back. Government agencies do not typically ask for money using these forms of payment, so consider that a 'red flag'.

- **Be a skeptical search engine user.** Just because something appears high in search engine results does not necessarily mean it's legitimate. Be sure to double-check the web site's URL or type it in directly if making a purchase or sharing personal information online.

If you have seen these types of scams, be sure to file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

### **ABOUT HHA:**

The Houston Housing Authority provides affordable homes and services to more than 60,000 low-income Houstonians, including over 17,000 families housed through the Housing Choice Voucher Program and another 5,500 living in 25 public housing and tax credit developments around the city. HHA also administers the nation's third largest voucher program exclusively serving homeless veterans. More information about HHA can be found at [www.housingforhouston.com](http://www.housingforhouston.com).

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