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February 20, 2024

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The Honorable Gregg Hart, Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Legislative Office Building, 1020 N Street, Room 107
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: State Audit Request on Orange County Section 8

Dear Chair Hart,

I am requesting the Joint Legislative Audit Committee to support an audit related to section 8 vouchers, focused on Orange County. I ask that special focus be aimed at examining the allocation and distribution of vouchers, the application process, and associated timelines. Additionally, I would like to have a comprehensive demographic breakdown of the applicants, both those receiving vouchers and those who are not.

Background

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a housing choice voucher program is the federal government's top program to assist very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to help afford decent and safe housing in the private market¹. These vouchers are administered locally by county-level public housing agencies (PHA) using federal funds from HUD. Upon selection for a voucher, families are responsible for finding suitable housing units, with the PHA subsidizing rent payments directly to landlords.

The current application process for Section 8 in California is often marred by lengthy waiting periods, creating a barrier to accessing housing assistance. Over 300,000 Californian households are using Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, a little over 2% of California's population receiving benefits from HUD for rental assistance. On average, each HUD household in California consists of two or more members.

Orange County Housing Authority (OCHA) is in charge of distributing multiple federally funded programs to provide rental assistance to members of the community in privately owned rental housing. Last year, Orange County had 12,000 applicants on their waitlist alone and were placed in a random selection pool². If selected, the certification process may take several months. Once approved,

¹ https://www.hud.gov/topics/housing_choice_voucher_program_section_8

² <https://www.ochousing.org/2023-waiting-list-opening>

participants are given a position number and a further wait time to receive a voucher to be sent to an agreeing landlord.

Request and Scope of the Audit

I respectfully request the Joint Legislative Audit Committee approve an audit of Orange County's Section 8 program, encompassing the overall amount of vouchers, operational procedures, waitlist management, and overall process efficiency from application to voucher issuance or denial. The audit would, at a minimum, address questions as well as provide a clear picture of the demographics of those applying, including who is approved or not for a voucher.

- 1) What are the overall number of vouchers received for the County of Orange, those processed for approval as well as the timelines from application to acceptance and securing housing?
- 2) What is the demographic breakdown of those receiving vouchers, such as ethnicity, age, income, and family size?
- 3) How many applications are denied? What are the reasons they have been denied? What is the breakdown by demographic of those denied?
- 4) What is the average rate of acceptance for the housing subsidy program? What is the breakdown by demographic of those accepted and provided with vouchers?
- 5) According to Orange County's Public Notice, the waitlist opened on September 18, 2023, at 8 a.m., and remained open through September 29, 2023. This gave low-income families only eleven days to apply for rental assistance³. How did the County inform not only possible applicants, but organizations that assist high-risk groups?
- 6) What are the restraints that lead to having extensive wait-lists as well as long time lines between opening the waitlist?
- 7) Is there a process for emergency housing? If so, what is the process and timeline for securing housing?
- 8) Is there a process for foster youth or former foster youth? If so, what is the process and timeline?

I appreciate your consideration of this request. If you have any questions about this request, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

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³ <https://www.ocgov.com/press/oc-housing-authority-opens-housing-choice-voucher-program-waiting-list>