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## **Section 8 Vouchers Scarce Despite Increasing Demand**

### **Two Reports Detail Increasing Challenges of Finding Affordable Rental Housing in Metro Area**

**St. Paul, Minn. (November 24, 2008)** – Today, HOME Line and the Minnesota Housing Partnership (MHP) each released reports showing that Section 8 vouchers for low-income renters are becoming harder to obtain, despite increasing demand due to the housing and economy crises.

The [HOME Line report](#) is an annual survey that measures landlord acceptance of Section 8 vouchers in Anoka, Dakota, and suburban Hennepin counties. Of the 65,887 rental units covered by the survey, representing over 54 percent of the rental housing in the surveyed area, only one quarter of those units were available to Section 8 program participants—this is down from 36.2 percent availability just two years ago.

The [MHP report](#) presents the key findings of an original face-to-face survey of over 150 people applying for Section 8 vouchers during a recent opening of the waiting list for the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority. 12,000 people applied for vouchers over a 2-day period in June.

On top of a shrinking pool of rental possibilities, both reports find that significant challenges exist to getting into the Section 8 program in the first place. On average, households interested in obtaining a Section 8 voucher in the Metro Area can expect to wait 7 years—about 4 years for a housing authority to open its list to new tenants and 3 years of sitting on the list waiting for a voucher to become available.

“[A]dding names to the list of potential of Section 8 voucher recipients has an element of drama to it, which is perhaps unique among benefits such as child care assistance, health care benefits, or food stamps,” says the MHP report on the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority’s Section 8 waiting list opening in June. This is due to the fact that waiting lists are only open for new applicants periodically, and sometimes housing authorities limit the size of the waiting lists. Limited levels of federal funding guarantees that many needy families will not receive a voucher.

Given these barriers to program participation, it is not surprising that Section 8 applicants view obtaining a voucher as akin to winning the lottery. One woman surveyed by MHP said if she got a voucher, “I’d be able to live in a better neighborhood for the sake of my grandson. It would be safer for him. It would be like a gift.” Another person surveyed told MHP, “I’m about to go in a

shelter with my kids because I'm losing my place. If I got a Section 8 voucher, everything would change, literally. I might not be able to save anything, but at least I could keep up with the bills." Notably, 57 percent of households surveyed by MHP had children in the home.

Both reports indicate that current economic and housing conditions are reflected in the demand for assistance like Section 8 vouchers. The HOME Line report says that the vacancy rate for all rental units in the Twin Cities has dropped to 3.7 percent, while the average rent for a 2-bedroom apartment increased \$121 from last year.

The connection between a tightening rental market and the pending housing and economy woes was confirmed by MHP's survey, which said one third of the people interviewed said that they or someone they know has been impacted by a foreclosure. One young woman told MHP that she had lost three apartments to foreclosure and was amid her fourth. "My daughter and I aren't stable right now. This will be the fourth time this has happened to me. And I'm only 18!" the woman exclaimed. Another respondent, a now-homeless middle aged man who had been laid off from his construction job, responded matter-of-factly when asked how a voucher would benefit him. "It would help me keep a roof over my head," the man stated.

Furthermore, MHP's survey findings indicate that many applicants are having a hard time meeting their basic nutritional needs. The most common way that people responded to questions about the way they would spend money saved with a voucher was to buy additional food. One mother trying to earn her college degree while doubling up with a friend explained the choices she had to make regularly. "Do I pay for gas or milk? It's hard to decide," the woman said.

The HOME Line report attributes much of the Section 8 shortage to federal law changes enacted in 2004 that resulted in the loss of over 150,000 vouchers nationwide. Although there has been legislation proposed to fix the damage done four years ago (Section 8 Voucher Reform Act, or SEVRA), the initiative is caught-up in a stalemate between Congress and the outgoing presidential administration. The report strongly encourages the next Congress and administration to address this issue immediately in January.

The HOME Line Section 8 report can be found online at [www.homelinemn.org](http://www.homelinemn.org).

The Minnesota Housing Partnership Section 8 report can be found online at [www.mhponline.org](http://www.mhponline.org).

HOME Line provides free legal, organizing, education and advocacy services so that tenants throughout Minnesota can solve their own rental housing problems. We work to improve public and private policies relating to rental housing by involving affected tenants in the process.

The Minnesota Housing Partnership is a statewide nonprofit organization that advances the preservation and creation of housing affordable to low- and moderate-income people as a means of strengthening communities and families. MHP provides local governments and nonprofit housing organizations access to loans, grants, and technical expertise to plan and construct housing, in addition to advocating and educating people on sound housing policies. MHP's work in Greater Minnesota is primarily supported by The McKnight Foundation.

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