

Environmental/Natural Resource Economics (03.0204). *A program that focuses on the application of economic concepts and methods to the analysis of issues such as air and water pollution, land use planning, waste disposal, invasive species and pest control, conservation policies, and related environmental problems. Includes instruction in cost-benefit analysis, environmental impact assessment, evaluation and assessment of alternative resource management strategies, policy evaluation and monitoring, and descriptive and analytic tools for studying how environmental developments affect the economic system.* This field of study, as described in the NCES definition, is comprised of STEM disciplines such as research, innovation, or development of new technologies using natural sciences and mathematics.

#### Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA)

Eligible students are required to submit a Form I-765, "Application for Employment Authorization," to request employment authorization and an Employment Authorization Document, and a Form I-983, "Training Plan for STEM OPT Students," to ensure that they are receiving the academic and training benefits of the STEM OPT extension. Consistent with the PRA, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has previously approved the collection of information contained on the current Form I-765 (OMB Control No. 1615-0040) and Form I-983 (OMB Control No. 1653-0054).

Although there could be a slight increase in the number of filings for both the Form I-765 and Form I-983 because of this notice, the number of filings currently contained in the OMB annual inventory is sufficient to cover any additional filings. Accordingly, there is no further action required under the PRA.

**Alejandro N. Mayorkas,**

Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

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## DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

[Docket No. FR-6466-N-01]

### Request for Information; Direct Rental Assistance

**AGENCY:** Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and Research, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian

Housing, Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD.

**ACTION:** Request for information.

**SUMMARY:** In the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, rental housing subsidies are provided on behalf of an eligible low-income renter to the landlord of a rental unit. Recently, some researchers, advocates, policymakers, and public housing agencies have expressed interest in testing a "direct rental assistance" model. The model would provide a rental housing subsidy directly to the renter, rather than providing it to the landlord. The approach is similar to what HUD did 50 years ago in its Experimental Housing Allowance Program (EHAP). While HUD is not currently providing direct rental assistance, and this Notice does not provide any funding to do so, HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) and Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH) are releasing this Request for Information (RFI) to seek public input on the concept to inform future policy development.

**DATES:** Comments are requested on or before August 30, 2024. Late-filed comments will be considered to the extent practicable.

**ADDRESSES:** Interested persons are invited to submit comments responsive to this RFI. All submissions must refer to the docket number and title of the RFI. Commenters are encouraged to identify the number of the specific question or questions to which they are responding. Responses may include the name(s) of the person(s) or organization(s) filing the comment; however, because any responses received by HUD will be publicly available, responses should not include any personally identifiable information or confidential commercial information.

There are two methods for submitting public comments.

1. **Electronic Submission of Comments.** Interested persons may submit comments electronically through the Federal eRulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

2. **Submission of Comments by Mail.** Comments may be submitted by mail to the Regulations Division, Office of General Counsel, Department of Housing and Urban Development, 451 7th Street SW, Room 10276, Washington, DC 20410-0500.

HUD strongly encourages commenters to submit their feedback and recommendations electronically. Electronic submission of comments allows the commenter maximum time to prepare and submit a response, ensures timely receipt by HUD, and enables

HUD to make comments immediately available to the public. Comments submitted electronically through the <http://www.regulations.gov> website can be viewed by other commenters and interested members of the public. Commenters should follow the instructions provided on that site to submit comments electronically.

To receive consideration as public comments, comments must be submitted through one of the two methods specified above. Again, all submissions must refer to the docket number and title of the RFI.

**Public Inspection of Public Comments.** HUD will make all properly submitted comments and communications available for public inspection and copying during regular business hours at the above address. Due to security measures at the HUD Headquarters building, an advance appointment to review the public comments must be scheduled by calling the Regulations Division at (202) 708-3055 (this is not a toll-free number). HUD welcomes and is prepared to receive calls from individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as individuals with speech or communication disabilities. To learn more about how to make an accessible telephone call, please visit <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/telecommunications-relay-service-trs>. Copies of all comments submitted are available for inspection and downloading at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Paul Joice, Program Demonstration Division, Office of Policy Development and Research, Department of Housing and Urban Development; telephone number 312-913-8597 (this is not a toll-free number), or via email at [DirectRentalAssistance@hud.gov](mailto:DirectRentalAssistance@hud.gov). HUD welcomes and is prepared to receive calls from individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as individuals with speech or communication disabilities. To learn more about how to make an accessible telephone call, please visit <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/telecommunications-relay-service-trs>.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

##### I. Background

Developing relevant evidence and using rigorous research are essential for HUD's mission of creating strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality, affordable homes for all. PD&R is responsible for supporting innovation in housing policy, improving HUD programs through evaluations and demonstrations, and conducting

rigorous research to fill key evidence gaps in the field. HUD's *Learning Agenda: 2022–2026*<sup>1</sup> aligned with the Department's *Fiscal Year 2022–2026 Strategic Plan*<sup>2</sup> frames a multiyear agenda ensuring a robust pipeline of research, including research opportunities that we highlight for Congress in the Department's budget, as well as efforts HUD launches in-house and with external research partners. The Learning Agenda draws on extensive stakeholder engagement and input from practitioners, advocates, people with lived experience in HUD programs, researchers, and policymakers at the Federal, State, and local levels. The *Learning Agenda: 2022–2026* includes several research questions about how HUD can effectively meet needs for high-quality, rent-assisted housing that supports housing security and economic advancement, including a research question about the potential effect of providing tenant-based rental assistance directly to the tenant.

In 2023, the PD&R also published a post on the *PD&R Edge*<sup>3</sup> identifying HUD's interest in learning about direct rental assistance programs. In the post, PD&R leadership called attention to the Philadelphia Housing+ program, a direct rental assistance program in Philadelphia, and other guaranteed income pilots across the country. PD&R expressed interest in partnering with public housing agencies, philanthropies, and other local groups to learn about direct rental assistance programs. In response to the post on the *PD&R Edge*, a range of stakeholders reached out to HUD expressing support for the concept, underscoring the broad interest in learning about this type of assistance.

Consideration of a direct rental assistance program has deep roots at HUD. In the 1970s, HUD ran the Experimental Housing Allowance Program (EHAP) to test tenant-based housing subsidies. The program ultimately helped to inform the design of the HCV program, although the HCV program differs from historic housing allowances on several important dimensions. One notable feature of EHAP, which was not adopted by the HCV program, was that the subsidy was paid directly to the assisted household, rather than being paid to the landlord. One reason that HUD is now interested in direct rental assistance is to better understand the implications of that policy design choice.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/HUD-Learning-Agenda.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/CFO/documents/FY2022-2026HUDStrategicPlan.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-firm-asst-sec-090523.html>.

A growing number of stakeholders have expressed general interest in the direct rental assistance concept, but many details about the program design remain unresolved. Among those details are the method of calculating the subsidy, the mode for conducting the housing inspection, and the role of PHAs in the process. While HUD has not committed to a specific set of design choices, PD&R leadership has outlined a possible program design.<sup>4</sup> A forthcoming article in *Cityscape*<sup>5</sup> also considers program design choices.

HUD's interest in research on direct rental assistance is fundamentally tied to it being a *rental assistance* program, not an unrestricted cash transfer. For direct rental assistance to support HUD's evidence-based policy development and program improvement goals, HUD believes it should align with the HCV program in certain ways. Specifically:

- The subsidy should be provided to the renter, and the renter would be required to use the subsidy for housing. The rental subsidy should not exceed the recipient's total gross rent.
- The subsidy should be provided to low-income households eligible for the HCV program, and the amount of the subsidy should be roughly equivalent to the HCV subsidy.
- Any test of direct rental assistance should be administered in partnership with PHAs to ensure that the program draws HCV-eligible households from the PHA waitlists, but the PHAs would have no direct contractual relationships with landlords renting to direct rental assistance recipients.
- A housing quality requirement of some type should ensure that direct rental assistance recipients occupy decent, safe, and sanitary housing.

HUD is interested in learning about the effect of direct rental assistance on the following outcomes:

- How likely are households offered direct rental assistance to complete all necessary steps to receive the assistance? What is the length of time from an offer of assistance to receipt of assistance?
- What types of burdens—for tenants, landlords, and PHAs—are associated with the administration of direct rental assistance?
- How willing are landlords to rent to tenants receiving direct rental assistance?
- Do renters have access to a broad range of units and neighborhoods using direct rental assistance?

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdredge/DRA-proposal-9-5-23.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/cityscape.html>.

- What is the quality of housing when tenants are using direct rental assistance?

- Do tenants make timely rent payments using direct rental assistance?

## II. Purpose of This Request for Information

The purpose of this RFI is to solicit information regarding the direct rental assistance concept, including the potential advantages and disadvantages of such a program. HUD is not currently developing a direct rental assistance demonstration or pilot, but may do so in the future under the Moving to Work (MTW) Demonstration program or under other new legislative authority if provided by Congress. There may also be PHAs, funders, researchers, and other partners interested in developing pilot programs independent of HUD. Responses to this RFI will inform HUD and other stakeholders interested in direct rental assistance. Comments from housing providers, renters, PHAs, and other organizations that serve low-income renters would be particularly helpful.

## III. Specific Information Requested

While HUD welcomes all comments relevant to the direct rental assistance concept, HUD is particularly interested in receiving input from interested parties on the questions outlined below.

1. What policies or procedures should be in place to ensure that direct rental assistance payments are used by recipients for rental housing costs?
2. What steps should be taken to ensure that direct rental assistance is not treated as income for the purposes of taxes and other public benefit programs?
3. How would the behaviors or engagement of housing providers, tenants or other stakeholders be expected to respond to direct rental assistance?
4. How should direct rental assistance subsidies be calculated?
5. How could a direct rental assistance program ensure that recipients have decent, safe, and sanitary housing, without creating a burden on landlords that might deter them from accepting tenants with the direct rental assistance subsidy?
6. What aspects of existing rental assistance programs, beyond those noted above, should be preserved in a

direct rental assistance pilot or demonstration?

**Solomon Greene,**

*Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and Research.*

**Dominique Blom,**

*General Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing.*

[FR Doc. 2024-16114 Filed 7-22-24; 8:45 am]

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**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**Fish and Wildlife Service**

[Docket No. FWS-R7-ES-2024-0054; FXES111607MRG01-245-FF07CAMM00]

**Marine Mammals; Incidental Take During Specified Activities; Proposed Incidental Harassment Authorization for Southcentral Alaska Stock of Northern Sea Otters in Whittier, AK; Draft Environmental Assessment**

**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of receipt of application and proposed authorization; notice of availability of draft environmental assessment; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), in response to a request under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended, from Turnagain Marine Construction, propose to authorize nonlethal, incidental take by harassment of small numbers of Southcentral Alaska stock northern sea otters (*Enhydra lutris kenyoni*) from July 19, 2024, to July 18, 2025. The applicant has requested this authorization for take by harassment that may result from activities associated with pile driving and marine construction activities on the western shore of Passage Canal in Whittier, Alaska. We estimate that this project may result in the nonlethal incidental take by harassment of up to 162 northern sea otters from the Southcentral stock. This proposed authorization, if finalized, will be for up to 17 takes of northern sea otters by Level A harassment and 145 takes of northern sea otters by Level B harassment. Neither the applicant nor the FWS anticipated any lethal take, and the FWS does not propose to authorize any lethal take. We invite comments on the proposed incidental harassment authorization and the accompanying draft environmental assessment from the public, and local, State, Tribal and Federal agencies.

**DATES:** Comments must be received by August 22, 2024.

**ADDRESSES:** *Document availability:* You may view the application package, supporting information, the draft environmental assessment, and the list of references cited herein at <https://www.regulations.gov> under Docket No. FWS-R7-ES-2024-0054, or you may request these documents from the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

*Comment submission:* You may submit comments on the proposed authorization by one of the following methods:

- *Internet:* <https://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments to Docket No. FWS-R7-ES-2024-0054.

- *U.S. mail:* Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. FWS-R7-ES-2024-0054, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS: PRB (JAO/3W), 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803.

We will post all comments at <https://www.regulations.gov>. You may request that we withhold personal identifying information from public review; however, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. See Request for Public Comments for more information.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Charles Hamilton, by email at [R7mmmregulatory@fws.gov](mailto:R7mmmregulatory@fws.gov), or by telephone at 1-800-362-5148 or 1-907-786-3800. Individuals in the United States who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability may dial 711 (TTY, TDD, or TeleBraille) to access telecommunications relay services. Individuals outside the United States should use the relay services offered within their country to make international calls to the point-of-contact in the United States.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

**Background**

Section 101(a)(5)(D) of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (MMPA; 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to allow, upon request, the incidental, but not intentional, taking by harassment of small numbers of marine mammals in response to requests by U.S. citizens (as defined in title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) in part 18, at 50 CFR 18.27(c)) engaged in a specified activity (other than commercial fishing) in a specified geographic region during a period of not more than 1 year. The Secretary has delegated authority for implementation of the MMPA to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS, or we).

According to the MMPA, the FWS shall allow this incidental taking by harassment if we make findings that the total of such taking for the 1-year period:

1. Is of small numbers of marine mammals of a species or stock;
2. Will have a negligible impact on such species or stocks; and
3. Will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of these species or stocks for taking for subsistence use by Alaska Natives.

If the requisite findings are made, we issue an authorization that sets forth the following, where applicable:

1. Permissible methods of taking;
2. Means of effecting the least practicable adverse impact on the species or stock and its habitat and the availability of the species or stock for subsistence uses; and
3. Requirements for monitoring and reporting of such taking by harassment, including, in certain circumstances, requirements for the independent peer review of proposed monitoring plans or other research proposals.

The term “take” means to harass, hunt, capture, or kill, or to attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal. “Harassment” means any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which (i) has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild (the MMPA defines this as “Level A harassment”), or (ii) has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering (the MMPA defines this as “Level B harassment”).

The terms “negligible impact” and “unmitigable adverse impact” are defined in 50 CFR 18.27 (*i.e.*, regulations governing small takes of marine mammals incidental to specified activities) as follows: “Negligible impact” is an impact resulting from the specified activity that cannot be reasonably expected to, and is not reasonably likely to, adversely affect the species or stock through effects on annual rates of recruitment or survival. “Unmitigable adverse impact” means an impact resulting from the specified activity: (1) that is likely to reduce the availability of the species to a level insufficient for a harvest to meet subsistence needs by (i) causing the marine mammals to abandon or avoid hunting areas, (ii) directly displacing subsistence users, or (iii) placing physical barriers between the marine mammals and the subsistence hunters; and (2) that cannot be sufficiently mitigated by other measures to increase