

EMERGENCY TRANSFER PLAN FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, DATING VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT, AND STALKING

The **Pinellas County Housing Authority (PCHA)** is concerned about the safety of its tenants, and such concern extends to tenants who are victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. In accordance with the Violence Against Women Act of 1994, as amended (“VAWA”), PCHA allows any tenant who is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking to request an emergency transfer from the tenant’s current unit to another unit. VAWA protections are not limited to women and are available regardless of age or actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, sex, or marital status. Victims cannot be discriminated against on the basis of any protected characteristic, including race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity), familial status, disability, or age. HUD-assisted and HUD-insured housing must also be made available to all otherwise eligible individuals and families regardless of age, or actual or perceived gender identity, sexual orientation, or marital status.

This plan identifies tenants who are eligible for an emergency transfer, the documentation needed to request an emergency transfer, confidentiality protections, how an emergency transfer may occur, and guidance regarding safety and security. The plan is based on Federal regulations at 24 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 5, subpart L, related program regulations, and the model emergency transfer plan published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD is the Federal agency that oversees that the **Housing Choice Voucher Program, Public Housing Program, Multifamily Housing Program, HOME Investment Partnership (HOME) Program, and the Housing Trust Fund Program** is in compliance with VAWA.

Definitions

- **External emergency transfer** refers to an emergency relocation of a tenant to another unit where the tenant would be categorized as a new applicant; that is, the tenant must undergo an application process in order to reside in the new unit.
- **Internal emergency transfer** refers to an emergency relocation of a tenant to another unit where the tenant would not be categorized as a new applicant; that is, the tenant may reside in the new unit without having to undergo an application process.
- **Safe unit** refers to a unit that the victim of VAWA violence/abuse believes is safe.
- **VAWA violence/abuse** means an incident or incidents of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, as those terms are defined in 24 CFR 5.2003 and “Certification of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, or Stalking” (Form HUD-5382).

Eligibility for Emergency Transfers

A tenant may seek an emergency transfer to another unit if they or their household member is a victim of VAWA violence/abuse, as outlined in the “Notice of Occupancy Rights Under the Violence Against Women Act,” Form HUD-5380. This emergency transfer plan provides further information on emergency transfers, and the PCHA must provide a copy if requested. The PCHA may ask for submission of a written request for an emergency transfer, such as form HUD-5383, to certify eligibility for the emergency transfer.

A Tenant is eligible for an emergency transfer if:

1. The tenant (or their household member) is a victim of VAWA violence/abuse;
2. The tenant expressly requests the emergency transfer; **AND**
3. **EITHER**
 - a. The tenant reasonably believes that there is a threat of imminent harm from further violence, including trauma, if they or (their household member) stays in the same dwelling unit; **OR**
 - b. If the tenant (or their household member) is a victim of sexual assault, either the tenant reasonably believes that there is a threat of imminent harm from further violence, including trauma, if the tenant (or their household member) were to stay in the unit, or the sexual assault occurred on the premises and the tenant requested an emergency transfer within 90 days (including holidays and weekend days) of when that assault occurred.

The PCHA, in response to an emergency transfer request, should not evaluate whether the tenant is in good standing as part of the assessment or provision of an emergency transfer. Whether or not a tenant is in good standing does not impact their ability to request an emergency transfer under VAWA.

A tenant requesting an emergency transfer must expressly request the transfer in accordance with the procedures described in this plan.

Emergency Transfer Policies

Internal transfers when a safe unit is immediately available:

If a tenant requests an emergency transfer as described in this plan, the PCHA will attempt to assist the tenant with moving to a safe unit quickly. The PCHA will make exceptions as required to policies restricting moves.

The tenant may request an internal transfer within the same single or scattered site property in which the tenant resides or may request an external move to move out of the property in which they reside.

At tenant's request, the PCHA will provide referrals to organizations that may be able to further assist them.

Internal transfers when a safe unit is not immediately available:

The PCHA will allow the tenant to make an internal transfer when a safe unit is not immediately available. The owner defines *immediately available* as a vacant unit, ready for move-in within a reasonable period of time based on local factors. The PCHA will ensure that requests for internal emergency transfers under VAWA are given the same priority already provided to other types of emergency transfer requests. The tenant will be offered the first available vacant unit ready for move-in in the same property or in another building that is part of the same scattered-site property in accordance with this plan. The victim will be allowed to assess the availability of the units and the suitability according to the individual circumstances of the household. If the first unit offered is not suitable due to these circumstances, the PCHA will continue to make every effort to provide an alternative unit as soon as one is available that meets the criteria for the household. If an internal transfer is not viable, the PCHA will discuss transfer options for external moves with the victim in accordance with this plan.

The victim may request both an internal transfer and an external move concurrently if an internal safe unit is not immediately available. The PCHA will make all reasonable efforts to assist tenants with requesting both internal and external transfers.

External transfers:

A tenant may also request an emergency transfer to the following programs to which households are required to apply for assistance:

- Public housing program

- HCV tenant-based program
- HCV project-based assistance
- Other programs administered by the PCHA (such as state housing programs)

Emergency transfers will not take priority over waiting list admissions for these types of assistance. At tenant's request, the PCHA will refer the tenant to organizations that may be able to further assist them.

An external move may be requested when a unit that meets the victim's safety standard is not available at the current property or is not immediately available. If an external move is required, the PCHA will, at a minimum, provide the victim with contact information for relevant local service providers, government agencies, and other affordable housing developments in the area.

Note that qualifying for an emergency transfer does not guarantee either continued assistance under the current program or an external move to another covered housing program. VAWA provisions do not supersede any eligibility or occupancy requirements that may apply under a covered housing program. Tenants must still meet the eligibility criteria for the property to which they are moving. The PCHA may be unable to transfer a tenant to a particular unit if the tenant cannot establish eligibility for that unit.

Emergency Transfer Request Documentation

To request an emergency transfer, the tenant shall contact **the VAWA Coordinator at (727) 443-7684 ext. 3044** and submit a written request for a transfer to the **PCHA Office located at 11479 Ulmerton Road, Largo, FL 33778**. If the PCHA does not already have documentation of the occurrence of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, the PCHA may ask for this documentation in accordance with 24 CFR 5.2007. Unless the PCHA receives documentation that contains conflicting information, as described in 24 CFR 5.2007(b)(2), the PCHA cannot require third-party documentation to determine status as a VAWA victim for emergency transfer eligibility. The PCHA will provide reasonable accommodations to this policy for individuals with disabilities.

The tenant's written request for an emergency transfer should include either:

1. A statement expressing that the tenant reasonably believes that there is a threat of imminent harm from further violence, including trauma, if the tenant (or household member) were to remain in the same dwelling unit; OR
2. In the case of a tenant (or household member) who is a victim of sexual assault, **either** a statement that the tenant reasonably believes there is a threat of imminent harm from further violence or trauma if the tenant (or household member stays in the same dwelling unit), **or** a statement that the sexual assault occurred on the premises and the tenant requested an emergency transfer within 90 days (including holidays and weekend days) of when the assault occurred.

Form HUD-5383 may be used for making a written request for an emergency transfer.

Any request for documentation of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking will be in writing, will specify a deadline of 14 business days following receipt of the request, will describe the three forms of acceptable documentation, will provide explicit instructions on where and to whom the documentation must be submitted, and will state the consequences for failure to submit the documentation or request an extension in writing by the deadline.

The PCHA may, in its discretion, extend the deadline for 10 business days. In determining whether to extend the deadline, the PCHA will consider factors that may contribute to the victim's inability to provide documentation in a timely manner, including cognitive limitations, disabilities, limited English proficiency, absence from the unit, administrative delays, the danger of further violence, and the victim's need to address health or safety issues. Any extension granted by the PCHA will be in writing.

Once the victim provides documentation, the PCHA will acknowledge receipt of the documentation within 10 business days.

The PCHA has the discretion to provide benefits to an individual based solely on the individual's statement or other corroborating evidence—i.e., without requiring formal documentation of abuse in accordance with 24 CFR

5.2007(b). HUD recommends documentation in a confidential manner when a verbal statement or other evidence is accepted.

If the PCHA accepts an individual's statement or other corroborating evidence (as determined by the victim) of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking, the PCHA will document acceptance of the statement or evidence in the individual's file.

Confidentiality

If a tenant inquires about or requests any VAWA protections or represents that they or a household member are a victim of VAWA violence/abuse entitled to VAWA protections, the PCHA must keep any information they provide concerning the VAWA violence/abuse, their request for an emergency transfer, and their or a household member's status as a victim strictly confidential. This information should be securely and separately kept from tenant files. All the information provided by or on behalf of the tenant to support an emergency transfer request, including information on the Certification Form (HUD-5382) and the Emergency Transfer Request Form (HUD-5383) (collectively referred to as "Confidential Information") may only be accessed by PCHA employees or contractors if explicitly authorized by the PCHA for reasons that specifically call for those individuals to have access to that information under applicable federal, State, or local law.

Confidential information must not be entered into any shared database or disclosed to any other entity or individual, except if:

- Written permission by the victim in a time-limited release;
- Required for use in an eviction proceeding or hearing regarding termination of assistance; or
- Otherwise required by applicable law.

In addition, HUD's VAWA regulations require emergency transfer plans to provide strict confidentiality measures to ensure that the location of the victim's dwelling unit is never disclosed to a person who committed or threatened to commit the VAWA violence/abuse. Accordingly, the PCHA will take the following specific measures to ensure confidentiality:

Limit Access to Address Information

Ensure that only authorized personnel (e.g., property manager or VAWA coordinator) have access to the addresses of individuals who request emergency transfers.

- Use secure databases with role-based access control.
- Train staff to avoid discussing or displaying transfer details in shared spaces.

Confidential Documentation Storage

Keep VAWA-related documents (emergency transfer requests, supporting evidence, etc.) in locked file cabinets or encrypted digital systems that are separate from general tenant files.

- Label them generically to avoid drawing attention.
- Restrict access to VAWA documents only to designated staff.

Private Communication Channels

Communicate with the victim using a method they choose and control (e.g., personal email, private phone, P.O. box).

- Never leave voicemails or send mail to the unit address without consent.
- Include communication preferences in the emergency transfer plan.

Anonymous or Internal Transfers

If the victim is transferred within the same housing program, ensure their name is not on a public list or bulletin.

- Use unit numbers only and keep names off posted rosters.
- Avoid assigning units that can be easily located or identified.

Staff Training

Provide regular training on confidentiality rules and VAWA requirements.

- Include real-world scenarios and confidentiality breaches.
- Emphasize zero-tolerance for sharing victim information without permission.

Confidentiality Agreements

Have staff and contractors sign confidentiality agreements acknowledging they understand and will follow VAWA confidentiality rules.

Emergency Transfer Procedure

The PCHA cannot specify how long it will take from the time a transfer request is approved until the tenant can be placed in a new, safe unit. The PCHA will, however, act as quickly as possible to assist a tenant who qualifies for an emergency transfer. If the PCHA identifies an available unit and the tenant believes that unit would not be safe, the tenant may request a transfer to a different unit. The PCHA may be unable to transfer a tenant and their household to a particular unit if the tenant and their household has not established or cannot establish eligibility for that unit.

If the PCHA does not have any safe and available units for which the tenant is eligible, the PCHA will assist the tenant in identifying other covered housing providers who may have safe and available units to which the tenant could move. At the tenant's request, the PCHA will also assist the tenant in contacting the local organizations offering assistance to victims of VAWA violence/abuse.

Making the Emergency Transfer Plan Available

The PCHA will post a copy of the Emergency Transfer Plan in its offices and on its website. It will also make the information readily available to anyone who requests it.

All materials will ensure effective communication with individuals with disabilities, including making materials available in alternative accessible formats, as well as providing reasonable accommodations.

Additionally, the PCHA will make VAWA forms available in the language(s) outlined in PCHA's language access plan to meet limited English proficiency (LEP) obligations.

Safety and Security of Tenants

When the PCHA receives any inquiry or request regarding an emergency transfer, the PCHA will encourage the person making the inquiry or request to take all reasonable precautions to be safe, including seeking guidance and assistance from a victim service provider. However, tenants are not required to receive guidance or assistance from a victim service provider.

Resources:

For additional information on VAWA: <https://www.hud.gov/vawa>

Additional Local Organizations:

The following local organizations offer assistance to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

- Bay Area Legal Services provides free civil legal services to low-income residents residing in Pinellas County who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. To apply for services call (800) 625-2257 or apply online at <https://bals.org/>
- For help regarding sexual assault: 24 Hour Rape Crisis Hot Line at (727) 530-RAPE (7273) or the Abuse Hotline at (800) 962-2873.
- Victims of stalking seeking help may contact Community Action Stops Abuse (CASA) 24/7 Hotline: (727) 895-4912, TTY/TDD: (727) 828-1269, 24/7 online chat: www.casapinellas.org/chat, Website: <https://www.casapinellas.org/>, Fax: (727) 821-7101, or Hope Villages of America – The Haven 24/7 Hotline: (727) 442-4128, TTY/TTD: (727) 446-2148, Fax: (727) 461-4702, Website: <https://hopevillagesofamerica.org/>