

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Of

THE PEEKSKILL HOUSING AUTHORITY

1. Definitions applicable to the Grievance Procedure

- (a) Grievance: Any dispute which Tenant may have with respect to PHA action or failure to act in accordance with the individual Tenant's Lease or PHA regulations which adversely affects the individual Tenant's rights, duties, welfare or status.
- (b) Complainant: Any Tenant (as defined below) whose grievance is presented to PHA (at the central office or the project office) in accordance with the requirements presented in this procedure.
- (c) Elements of due process; An eviction action or a termination of tenancy in a State of local court in which the following procedural safeguards are required:
 - (1) Adequate notice to Tenant of the grounds for terminating the tenancy and for eviction;
 - (2) Right of Tenant to be represented by counsel;
 - (3) Opportunity for Tenant to refute the evidence presented by PHA, including the right to confront and cross examine witnesses and to present any affirmative legal or equitable defense which Tenant may have;
 - (4) A decision on the merits.
- (d) Hearing Officer: A person selected in accordance with this procedure to hear grievances and render a decision with respect thereto.
- (e) Hearing Panel: A three (3) member panel selected in accordance with this procedure to hear grievances and render a decision with respect thereto.
- (f) Tenant: The adult person (or persons) (other than a live-in aide): (1) Who resides in the unit, and who executed the Lease with PHA as lessee of the dwelling unit, or, if no such person now resides in the unit, (2) Who resides in the unit, and who is the remaining head of the household of Tenant's family residing in the dwelling unit;
- (g) Resident Organization: An organization of residents, which also includes a resident management corporation.

2. Applicability of This Grievance Procedure

In accordance with the applicable Federal regulations this grievance procedure shall be applicable to all individual grievances (as defined in Section 1 above) between Tenant and PHA with the following two (2) exceptions:

- (a) Because HUD has issued a due process determination that the law of the State of New York requires that Tenant be given the opportunity for a hearing in court which provides the basic elements of due process (as defined in Section 1 above) before eviction from the dwelling unit, the grievance procedure shall not be applicable to any termination of tenancy or eviction that involves:
 - (1) Any criminal activity that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises of other residents or employees of PHA, or
 - (2) Any drug-related criminal activity on or near such premises.
- (b) PHA grievance procedure shall not be applicable to disputes between tenants not involving PHA or to class grievances. The grievance procedure is not intended as a forum for imitating or negotiating policy changes between a group or groups of tenants and PHA's Board of Commissioners.

This grievance procedure is incorporated by reference in all tenant dwelling leases and will be furnished to each tenant.

Any changes proposed in this grievance procedure must provide for at least thirty (30) days-notice to tenants, setting forth the proposed changes and providing an opportunity to present written comments. Comments submitted shall be considered by PHA before any revisions are made to the grievance procedure.

3. Informal Settlement of a Grievance

Any grievance must be personally presented, in writing, to PHA's office within ten (10) days after the grievable event. Grievances received by PHA's office will be referred to the appropriate staff.

As soon as the grievance is received, it will be reviewed by the management office to be certain that neither of the exclusions in paragraph 2 above applies to the grievance. Should one of the exclusions apply, the complainant will be notified in writing that the matter raised is not subject to PHA'S grievance procedure, with the reason therefor.

If neither of the exclusions cited above apply, the complainant will be contacted to arrange a mutually convenient time within ten (10) working days to meet so the grievance may be discussed informally and settled without a hearing. At the informal hearing the complainant will present the grievance and the office person designated will attempt to settle the grievance to the satisfaction of both parties.

Within twenty (20) working days following the informal discussion, PHA shall prepare and either give or mail to Tenant a summary of the discussion that must specify the names of the participants, the dates of meeting, the nature of the proposed disposition of the complaint and the specific reasons therefor, and shall specify the procedures by which a formal hearing under this procedure may be obtained if the complainant is not satisfied. A copy of this summary shall also be placed in Tenant's file.

4. Formal Grievance Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the settlement arrived at the informal hearing, the complainant must submit a written request for a hearing to the PHA office no later than ten (10) working days after the summary of the informal hearing is received. A receipt signed by the complainant or a return receipt for delivery of certified mail, whether or not signed, will be sufficient proof of time of delivery for the summary of the informal discussion.

The written request shall specify:

- (a) The reasons for the grievance; and
- (b) The action or relief sought from PHA.

If the complainant requests a hearing in a timely manner, PHA shall schedule a hearing on the grievance at the earliest time possible for the complainant, PHA and the Hearing Officer, but in no case later than thirty (30) working days after the PHA received the complainant's request.

If the complainant fails to request a hearing within ten (10) working days after receiving the summary of the informal hearing, PHA's decision rendered at the informal hearing becomes final and PHA is not obligated to offer the complainant a formal hearing unless the complainant can show good cause why he/she failed to proceed in accordance with this procedure.

Failure to request a grievance hearing does not affect the complainant's right to contest PHA's decision in court hearing.

5. Selecting Hearing Panel

A grievance hearing shall be conducted by an impartial person appointed by PHA as described below:

- (a) PHA shall nominate a slate of impartial persons to sit as Hearing Officers. Such persons may include PHA Board Members, PHA staff members, residents, or others. The initial slate of nominees should be at least nine (9) persons.

PHA will check with each nominee to determine whether there is an interest in serving as a potential Hearing Officer, whether the nominee feels fully capable of impartiality, whether the nominee can serve without compensation, and what limitations on the nominee's time would affect such service.

Nominees will be informed that they will be expected to disqualify themselves from hearing grievances that involve personal friends, other residents of projects in which they work or reside, or grievances in which they have some personal interest.

Nominees who are not interested in serving as Hearing Officers or whose time is too limited to make service practical will be withdrawn.

- (b) A slate of potential Hearing Officers nominated by PHA shall be submitted to PHA's tenants. Written comments from them shall be considered by PHA before the nominees are appointed as Hearing Officers.
- (c) When the comments from have been received and considered, the nominees will be informed that they are PHA's official grievance hearing committee. PHA will subsequently contact committee members in random order to request their participation as Hearing Officers.

6. Escrow Deposit Required for a Hearing Involving Rent

Before a hearing is scheduled in any grievance involving the amount of rent which PHA claims is due under the Lease, the complainant shall pay to PHA an amount equal to the rent due and payable as of the first of the month preceding the month in which the act or failure to act took place. The complainant shall, thereafter, deposit the same amount of the monthly rent in an escrow account monthly until the complaint is resolved by decision of the Hearing Officer. This requirement will not be waived by PHA.

7. Scheduling Hearings

When a complainant submits a timely request for a grievance hearing, PHA will immediately contact a member of the hearing committee to schedule the hearing within the following thirty (30) working days.

Once the Hearing Officer has agreed upon the hearing date and time, the complainant, PHA and Hearing Officer shall be notified in writing. Notice to the complainant shall be in writing, either personally delivered to complainant or sent by mail, return receipt requested.

The written notice will specify the time, place and procedures governing the hearing.

8. Procedures Governing the Hearing

The hearing shall be held before a Hearing Officer as described above in Section 7. The complainant shall be afforded a fair hearing, which shall include:

- (a) The opportunity to examine before the hearing any PHA documents, including records and regulations, that are directly relevant to the hearing.
Tenant shall be allowed to copy any such document at Tenant's expense. If PHA does not make the document available for examination upon request by the complainant, PHA may not rely on such document at the grievance hearing.
- (b) The right to be represented by counsel or other person chosen as Tenant's representative and to have such person make statements on Tenant's behalf.
- (c) The right to a private hearing unless the complainant requests a public hearing. The right to present evidence and arguments in support of Tenant's complaint to controvert evidence relied on by PHA, and to confront and cross-examine all witnesses upon whose testimony or information PHA relies: and
- (d) A decision based solely and exclusively upon the facts presented at the hearing.

The Hearing Officer may render a decision without proceeding with the hearing if he/she determines that the issue has been previously decided in another proceeding.

At the hearing, the complainant must first make showing of an entitlement to the relief sought and, thereafter, PHA must sustain the burden of justifying PHA's action or failure to act against which the complaint is directed.

The hearing shall be conducted informally by the Hearing Officer. Oral or documentary evidence pertinent to the facts and issues raised by the complaint may be received without regard to admissibility under the rules of evidence applicable to judicial proceedings.

The Hearing Officer shall require PHA, the complainant, counsel and other participants or spectators to conduct themselves in an orderly fashion. Failure to comply with the directions of the Hearing Officer to obtain order may result in exclusion from the proceedings or in a decision adverse to the interests of the disorderly party and granting or denial of the relief sought, as appropriate.

The complainant or PHA may arrange in advance, and at expense of the party making the arrangement for a recording of the hearing.

If a Hearing Officer fails to disqualify himself/herself as required in Section 5(a), PHA will remove the Officer from the hearing committee, invalidate the results of the hearing and schedule a new hearing with a new Hearing Officer.

9. Failure to Appear at the Hearing

If the complainant or PHA fails to appear at the scheduled hearing, the Hearing Officer may make a determination to postpone the hearing for not to exceed ten (10) business days, or may make a determination that the party has waived his/her right to a hearing.

Both the complainant and PHA shall be notified of the determination by the Hearing Officer; provided, that a determination that the complainant has waived his/her right to a hearing shall not constitute a waiver of any right the complainant may have to contest PHA's disposition of the grievance in court.

10. Decision of the Hearing Officer

The Hearing Officer shall prepare a written decision, together with the reasons for the decision within thirty (30) working days after the hearing. A copy of the decision shall be sent to the complainant and PHA.

PHA shall retain a copy of the decision in Tenant's folder. A copy of the decision with all names and identifying references deleted, shall also be maintained on file by PHA and made available for inspection by a prospective complainant, his representative, or the Hearing Officer.

The decision of the Hearing Officer shall be binding on PHA which shall take all actions, or refrain from any actions, necessary to carry out the decision unless PHA's Board of Commissioners determines within thirty (30) working days, and promptly notifies the complainant of its determination, that:

- (a) The grievance does not concern PHA action or failure to act in accordance with or involving the complainant's Lease or PHA regulations, which adversely affect the complainant's rights, duties, welfare or status.
- (b) The decision of the Hearing Officer is contrary to applicable-Federal, State or local law, HUD regulations, or requirements of the annual contribution contract between HUD and PHA.
- (c) A decision by the Hearing Officer or Board of Commissioners in favor of PHA or which denies the relief requested by the complainant in whole or in part shall not constitute a waiver of, nor affect in any way, the rights of the complainant to a trial or judicial review in any judicial proceedings, which may thereafter be brought in the matter.