

BUSINESS

Almost 18,000 in San Bernardino County sign up for Section 8 vouchers

New applicants first will be vetted, with those who applied four years ago getting top priority.



The application deadline for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development rental assistance passed Monday, Feb. 25 with 17,860 households signed up for what is commonly known as Section 8 vouchers. (Photo by Cindy Yamanaka, Orange County Register/SCNG)

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A last-day rush pushed the tally of subsidized housing applicants in San Bernardino close to 18,000, a considerably lower sum than signups four years ago.

The application deadline for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development rental assistance passed Monday, Feb. 25 with 17,860 households signed up for what is commonly known as Section 8 vouchers. Those applications will be vetted, with a lottery to place households on a waiting list likely following in June.

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Some 2,000 people already on the waiting list — applicants back in 2015 — will be prioritized, pushing the new lottery out four months, according to Ana Gamiz, director of policy and public relations for the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino.

Gamiz said 1,221 applications were received before the 4 p.m. deadline Monday.

In 2015, 25,000 San Bernardino County households applied for what is officially called the Tenant-Based Voucher Program. Gamiz said county officials were surprised at this year's application decline.

"We still don't have an indication as to why it isn't higher," Gamiz said. "But 18,000 is still a lot of applicants, considering that it's households. It could be one person or it could be a family of four or five."

Tracking voucher application volume is complex because there are 3,000 housing authorities nationwide, according to HUD spokesman Brian Sullivan. Cities and counties also are allowed to set different parameters for gathering applications.

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For example, Riverside County does not have sign-up periods, and households are allowed to seek assistance at any time. A county official recently said the wait time there could run as long as 12 years. The county has [some 80,000 people on its voucher list](#).

Sullivan did say the national average wait time was 26 months and 38 months in California. An estimated 306,500 households in the state rely on vouchers to meet their housing needs, he said.

In San Bernardino, housing officials will spend the next four months reviewing recent applicants to get a better idea of their current economic status. Applications also will be vetted to weed out duplicates or those that are obviously invalid, Gamiz said.

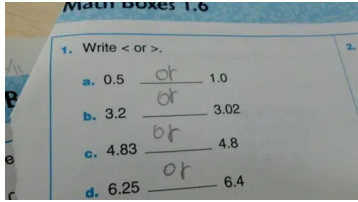
New applicants will be entered into a computerized lottery to determine who gets called in for interviews to receive rent assistance. Typically it takes several years before applicants get that call.

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