



THE BRIDGE

SPECIAL EDITION

JUNE 15, 2012

WELCOME TO *"The Bridge"*

Welcome to "The Bridge" Newsletter, an internal publication to connect housing counseling information seekers with information providers throughout the Office of Housing and the Department of HUD. While "The Bridge" is a work in progress and its format is evolving, features of interest, general information and announcements are welcomed. Respond to thebridge@hud.gov with comments, articles, questions or

BREAKING NEWS!!

THE OFFICE OF HOUSING COUNSELING IS APPROVED!!

On May 31, 2012, the Congress of the United States approved HUD's request to establish the Office of Housing Counseling. While, 70 full time equivalent (FTE) personnel were requested for the new office, 67 FTE were approved. This approval represents the end of one laborious process and marks the beginning of another – that of putting people in place to carry out the work mandated by the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act.

THE OHC REORGANIZATION – WHAT’S NEXT?

Union Negotiations

Article 5 notification was provided to the various unions on June 7, 2012. Bargaining proposals, if there are any, are expected on or about June 17, 2012. Management and labor will commence any necessary negotiations following that date.

Manager Reassignments

The process for reassigning managers to positions in the Office of Housing Counseling and the Office of Single Family Housing has begun. While managers are expected to know what their reassignments will be by the end of June, performing in reassigned positions will not commence until staff has been reassigned and their effective dates established.



Implementation Schedule

The following implementation schedule has been established to provide estimated timeframes when milestones will be accomplished. Dates are subject to change in response to unforeseen delays.

Milestones	Dates
Issue Memorandum to Solicit Expressions of Interest from Managers	June 2012
Receive Expressions of Interest from Managers	June 2012
Managers Notified of Reassignments	July 2012
Issue Memorandum to Solicit Expressions of Interest from Staff	July 2012
Receive Expressions of Interest from Staff	July 2012
Staff Notified of Reassignments	July 2012
Target Effective Date of Reassignments	July 2012*
Transition Period	August – September 2012
Realigned Single Family and OHC Fully Operational	October 2012

INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW



ASK EMELDA

Q. Will the number of current HUD staff be reduced as a result of the OHC Reorganization?

A. No. The number of staff assigned to work on housing counseling tasks will be reduced. However, the staff no longer working on housing counseling tasks will be given other assignments.

Q. How many staff will be assigned to the OHC and where will they be located?

A. There will be 67 staff assigned to the OHC. They will remain at their current location.

Q. Is reassignment an option?

A. While staff may express a preference whether to be reassigned or not, the decision will be made by management who could take action contrary to the preference expressed.

Q. Could staff be reassigned to a different city or state that would require relocation?

A. No. There will be no staff relocation.

Q. Why is staff reassignments limited to Single Family staff?

A. Congress only approved five (5) new FTE for the OHC. The remaining 62 positions were to be filled by current Program Support Division staff since this is the staff currently performing housing counseling functions.

Q. Is there going to be a Reduction in Force (RIF) in Single Family or the Homeownership Centers (HOCs) as a result of the OHC reorganization?

A. No.

Q. Will any OHC staff be located in Field Policy Management (FPM) and/or be directed to perform work for FPM?

A. No, staff will not be directed to work for FPM. However, OHC will have a cooperative relationship with both PSD and FPM. The respective roles of all three (3) entities will evolve and become clear during the transition period when overlap in assignments is contemplated.

Q. Will OHC staff remain in the current seating location?

A. Possibly. They will remain in the same city/state office location. However, internal space moves might be required in order for OHC staff to sit in close proximity.

Q. Will staff have new position descriptions (PDs) established when they are reassigned?

A. Not all staff will have new PDs. The PDs will be regarded as living documents that will become clearly defined as all functions in the OHC are accounted for and the office fully launched.

Q. Why can't housing counseling remain in PSD in the Office of Single Family Housing?

A. The Congress, our stakeholders, our partners and the general public have expressed confidence in the value of housing counseling to families in need of guidance, direction and information to obtain, maintain and/or preserve housing. They also recognize that an entity without any other agenda or interest in the outcomes is needed. The OHC will provide that valuable resource and expects to make a difference in the lives of people facing challenges in finding and keeping suitable quality housing that they can afford.

Note: Emelda Kennerly is a member of the OHC Transition Team.

This FAQ segment is designed to respond to specific question that you have. Please provide your feedback on the benefit of this column to thebridge@hud.gov

BEYOND HOUSING



Office of Housing Counseling – Who’s Making It Happen

FHA’s roving reporter (RR) recently sat down with Sarah Sheon Gerecke, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Housing, to discuss *standing up* the Office of Housing Counseling (OHC).

RR: Ms. Gerecke, what sparked your career-long interest in affordable housing?

SSG: My passion for urban planning and housing policy blossomed because of my mother and grandmother, role models who were active in the “war on poverty” movement and with various community action groups. Of course, our family moved frequently when I was growing up – I’ve lived in 25 different places – teaching me from an early age that a safe, secure “home” means everything to one’s sense of well being.

RR: Creation of an Office of Housing Counseling is mandated by the Dodd Frank Act. What has been the most/least satisfying aspect of your involvement as “team lead” in its launch?

SSG: Professionally, I have been most impressed with the high level of commitment to Housing’s mission from the people in the field and at headquarters. And personally, after enduring lengthy commutes to previous work assignments in New York City, I love living so close to the office here in DC. The flip side of my fantastic situation in Washington is missing my family – my two daughters and my husband – back home in New York.

RR: Is the housing counseling program going to change once the OHC is set up?

SSG: Actually, field and headquarters staff has already made important program changes. For example, everyone involved agreed that the process to apply for counseling funds was burdensome. HUD staff was able to replace an extremely complex process with a streamlined application after convincing the right people it was the right thing to do.

Another example is increased visibility for housing counseling. In March, the White House recognized housing counselors as “Champions of Change.” You can [watch the ceremony](#) on the White House website. A dozen counselors, representing thousands of HUD-approved counselors and agencies, received certificates of appreciation for their efforts to help people gain confidence and make better decisions about their housing and financial choices.

RR: Any final thoughts regarding your role in establishing this important new Office?

SSG: When Acting FHA Commissioner Galante first described the position to me I told her, “*You’ve just described my dream job.*” After six months I still feel the same way – excited and energized to be here as team leader. In the months ahead, I expect to elevate and expand partnerships with key stakeholders including Congress, State and local counseling agencies. Thank you for helping us spread the good news about the Office of Housing Counseling!

Former Senator Kit Bond, Bipartisan Policy Center, Jack Kemp Foundation Host Housing Forum in St. Louis Featuring Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis President James Bullard

On June 5, 2012, former U.S. Senator Kit Bond joined the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) Housing Commission and Jack Kemp Foundation in holding a public forum in St. Louis, Mo to discuss the importance of public-private partnerships in addressing the nation's housing challenges. Sarah Gerecke, Senior Advisor to the Acting FHA Commissioner, presented during the forum and provided critical information informed by recent studies on the need for and effectiveness of housing counseling.

Read Ms. Gerecke's speech by visiting the link below:

[Sarah Gerecke's Speech](#)

The all-day event featured Missouri Representatives Lacy Clay (D-MO) and Russ Carnahan (D-MO), Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis President and CEO James Bullard and St. Louis County Executive Charlie Dooley. Local and national housing experts also spoke about the need for comprehensive resident services, homebuyer education programs, and rental housing preservation to protect and support renters and homeowners going forward.

Panelists encouraged more robust homebuyer education programs to help low-to-moderate-income individuals make better decisions about whether to purchase homes and for those who buy, make homeownership more sustainable. Last month, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released two studies that found that housing counseling from a HUD-approved counseling organization greatly improved outcomes for both first-time homebuyers and existing homeowners facing foreclosure. In the case of existing homeowners, the reports found that after receiving a counselor's help, nearly 70 percent of distressed homeowners obtained a mortgage remedy to stay in their home and 56 percent became current on their mortgages.

Read the entire article on the event at:

[Former Senator Kit Bond, Bipartisan Policy Center, Jack Kemp Foundation Host Housing Forum in St. Louis](#)

For insight on today's economic outlook, read the James Bullard presentation by visiting the link below:

[James Bullard Presentation.pdf](#)

CHAMPIONS OF SERVICE – Inside and Out

Beginning with the July Issue, the Bridge will recognize Champions of Service who have provided exemplary service in the Housing Counseling arena. Nominations of persons both inside and outside of HUD are welcomed. Each issue will feature one champion inside HUD and one champion outside HUD. Please send your nominations by the 20th of each month to thebridge@hud.gov.

On Thursday, March 1st, the White House honored eleven housing counselors and HUD-approved organizations as Champions of Change for their hard work, perseverance and dedication to their communities. From helping homeowners avoid foreclosure to making sure tenants understand their rights to working with borrowers to restore their credit, housing counselors work tremendously hard, each and every day, to help families realize the American dream. The honorees were:



Ruben Andrade Jr.
NeighborWorks America
(Waco, TX)



Dotty Acampora
Virginia Beach Community
Development Corp.



Tehiji Crenshaw
Community Action
Program of Evansville (IN)
and Vanderburgh Co., Inc



Larry Douglas
Chester (PA) Community
Improvement Project



Terry Galligan
Old Pueblo Community
Services (AZ)



Hee Joo Yoon
Korean Resource Center
(CA)



Stella Matadama
Consumer Credit
Counseling of Orange
County (CA)



Charlotte O'Donnell
CHAC



Sheila Reddig
Jonesboro (ARK) Urban
Renewal, HA & HCD



Stephanie Stiene
Brighton Center, Inc. (KY)



Helen Taylor
Northeast Denver
Housing Center