



July 2024

RENTAL HOUSING

Opportunities Exist to Improve Oversight of Assistance to Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault

Why GAO Did This Study

Domestic violence and sexual assault can contribute to housing instability. The 2013 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act expanded protections for survivors in HUD-assisted rental housing. The Act was reauthorized in 2022.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 Joint Explanatory Statement, includes a provision for GAO to review housing providers' emergency transfer plans. This report examines (1) the extent to which selected housing providers adopted emergency transfer plans, (2) challenges to and strategies for completing emergency transfers, and (3) HUD's support and oversight of housing providers' efforts.

GAO analyzed emergency transfer policies from a nongeneralizable sample of 60 housing providers, randomly selected within size and urban and rural classifications. GAO reviewed HUD policies, procedures, and training related to the 2013 and 2022 reauthorizations and compared HUD's monitoring against relevant regulations and agency policies. GAO also visited three sites and interviewed 20 housing providers and nine interest groups (such as housing industry and survivor advocacy groups).

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes seven recommendations to HUD, including providing directions on how to implement emergency transfers and revising the form used to assess private property managers' compliance with Violence Against Women Act requirements. HUD agreed with all the recommendations.

View [GAO-24-106481](#). For more information, contact Jill Naamane at (202) 512-8678 or naamanej@gao.gov.

RENTAL HOUSING

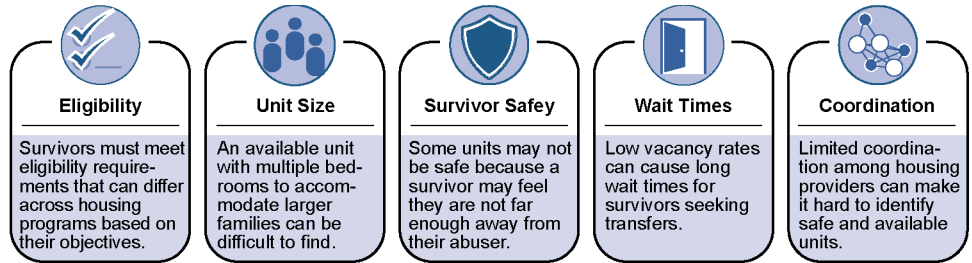
Opportunities Exist to Improve Oversight of Assistance to Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault

What GAO Found

Most housing providers (45 of 60) in GAO's nongeneralizable sample adopted emergency transfer plans for relocating victims of domestic violence or sexual assault (survivors), as required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Violence Against Women Act regulation. But these providers—public housing agencies and private property managers under contract with HUD—often did not specify how transfers would take place. Three providers also required survivors to provide additional information in order to be eligible for a transfer (although inconsistent with the regulation), which might delay a transfer approval and put survivors at risk.

Challenges to transferring survivors include differing program eligibility requirements based on program objectives, limited coordination among housing providers on vacant units, and a limited number of appropriate units, according to housing providers and interest groups GAO interviewed. To address these challenges, some housing providers said they used strategies such as sharing data on vacant units, prioritizing survivors from waitlists, and streamlining application processes.

Example of Potential Challenges in Making Emergency Transfers between HUD-Assisted Housing Programs



Source: GAO analysis of interviews with housing providers and officials from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); GAO (icons). | GAO-24-106481

HUD has planned training and begun monitoring some housing providers on emergency transfers, but opportunities remain to improve oversight in this area. The 2022 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act included multiyear funding for training and technical assistance. In January 2024, the agency established a multiyear training and technical assistance workplan to address needs expressed by housing providers. In 2023, it also began monitoring public housing agencies' compliance with Violence Against Women Act requirements. However, HUD has provided limited written instruction on implementing emergency transfers and inconsistently monitored private property managers with HUD contracts. For example, notices to housing providers did not include direction on coordinating transfers across programs. HUD regional officials noted that reviews of private property managers did not consistently check compliance with Violence Against Women Act requirements, because the review form did not include questions specific to emergency transfers. Without additional instruction and monitoring from HUD, housing providers may struggle to transfer survivors.

Contents

Letter		1
	Background	4
	Selected Housing Providers Generally Had Emergency Transfer Plans, but Did Not Always Meet Requirements for Them	9
	Housing Providers Face Challenges Making Emergency Transfers, and Some Have Implemented Strategies for Improvement	18
	HUD Has Provided Limited Support to Housing Providers on Emergency Transfers and Has Not Formalized PBRA Monitoring	28
	Conclusions	40
	Recommendations for Executive Action	41
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	42
Appendix I	Objectives, Scope, and Methodology	44
Appendix II	Comments from the Department of Housing and Urban Development	51
Appendix III	GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments	54
Tables		
	Table 1: Emergency Transfer Plans and Policies among Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers, as of July 2023	10
	Table 2: Emergency Transfer Plans or Policies among Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers, by Size, as of July 2023	11
	Table 3: Did Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers Require Additional Documentation from Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault Requesting an Emergency Transfer, as of July 2023?	12
	Table 4: Did Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers Prioritize Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault for Internal Transfers, as of July 2023?	14
	Table 5: Did Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers Prioritize Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault for External Transfers, as of July 2023?	14

Table 6: Did Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers Document Policies for Internal Transfers When a Safe Unit Was Not Immediately Available, as of July 2023?	15
Table 7: Did Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers Have Documented Policies for External Transfers, as of July 2023	16

Figures

Figure 1: Largest HUD Rental Assistance Housing Programs	5
Figure 2: Comparison of Language in External Emergency Transfer Policies and HUD Model Plan	17
Figure 3: HUD's Violence Against Women Act Compliance Checklist for Public Housing Agencies	34
Figure 4: HUD's Management and Occupancy Review Form for the Project-Based Rental Assistance Program	36

Abbreviations

FHEO	Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
Multifamily	Office of Multifamily Housing Programs
PBRA	Project-Based Rental Assistance
PHA	public housing agency
PIH	Office of Public and Indian Housing
VAWA	Violence Against Women Act

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July 11, 2024

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Chair
The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Steve Womack
Chair
The Honorable Mike Quigley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Domestic violence and sexual assault are significant contributors to family homelessness and a leading cause of housing instability, according to the National Network to End Domestic Violence. In 2022, almost 1 million people experienced domestic violence or sexual assault in the United States, according to the Department of Justice.¹ The National Network to End Domestic Violence noted survivors of domestic violence are often punished for the actions of their abusive partners and can face eviction or denial of housing benefits for reasons related to the violence they experienced. Survivors also may be unemployed, have no or poor credit, or poor rental history due to the abuse. These economic barriers can make finding safe and stable housing harder for many survivors. Further, because the demand for housing assistance generally exceeds the supply, survivors commonly encounter long waitlists for rental housing in Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs.

Congress provided protections for survivors through the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA). The 2013 reauthorization of VAWA expanded protections for victims of domestic and dating violence, sexual

¹Alexandra Thompson and Susannah N. Tapp, *Criminal Victimization, 2022*, NCJ 307089 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, September 2023).

assault, and stalking—hereafter, survivors—in federally subsidized housing programs, including HUD-assisted programs. As part of the reauthorization, Congress required HUD to (1) create a model emergency transfer plan (which, in part, outlines steps for the relocation of survivors from their current subsidized housing unit to another subsidized unit), and (2) establish policies and procedures for such transfers. HUD issued a regulation implementing these requirements in 2016.²

Questions have been raised about whether differences exist in how various types of housing providers have implemented emergency transfer plans, resulting in potential inequalities in the protections afforded to survivors across the country. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 Joint Explanatory Statement, includes a provision for GAO to identify public housing agencies (PHA) with effective transfer plans and report on their processes for creating and implementing their plans, weaknesses and strengths of the plans, and any best practices that other PHAs could adopt. You asked that we review the same topics, including potential disparities in how housing providers implemented emergency transfer plans.

This report examines (1) the extent to which selected housing providers have adopted emergency transfer plans and policies, (2) any challenges selected housing providers identified that they experienced with emergency transfers and strategies for addressing these challenges, and (3) the extent to which HUD supports and monitors housing providers' efforts.

Throughout this report, references to emergency transfer plans and emergency transfers refer to VAWA-related ones.³ We focused our review on HUD's Public Housing and Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) programs. We also considered how local administrators of these programs used Housing Choice Vouchers to facilitate emergency transfers. We focused on these programs, because they are HUD's largest rental housing assistance programs.

For the first objective, we analyzed documentation of emergency transfer plans and policies from a nongeneralizable sample of housing providers, comprising 30 PHAs and 30 PBRA properties. These documents were

²VAWA was reauthorized again in 2022.

³Other reasons for emergency transfers include physical hazards (such as fire damage or a gas leak), natural disasters, or a verified medical condition of a life-threatening nature.

the most current available as of July 2023. We selected the providers randomly, stratified by size and urban or rural status, which we identified using HUD administrative data.⁴

For the second objective, we conducted 20 structured interviews with representatives of housing providers (10 PHAs and 10 PBRA property management companies from the above sample). We judgmentally selected these housing providers to represent a variety of characteristics in terms of size, urban or rural classification, and geography (states in which they were located). We also conducted site visits with PHAs and PBRA property management companies, HUD field office staff, and housing advocacy groups in San Francisco and Oakland, greater Boston, and Chicago.⁵ In addition, we interviewed nine interest groups (including housing industry groups and survivor and housing advocacy groups).⁶ The information collected from these groups cannot be generalized to the larger population of all PHAs, PBRA property management companies, housing advocates, or interest groups.

For the third objective, we reviewed the VAWA statute, regulatory notices, and HUD documentation. Specifically, we reviewed HUD's written instructions, training materials, and technical assistance materials for PHAs and PBRA providers on developing and implementing emergency transfer plans. We also compared HUD's current and draft model emergency transfer plans, written instructions for PHAs and PBRA providers, monitoring of PHAs and PBRA providers, and current and planned data collection efforts against VAWA and HUD regulations and policies, as applicable. We also interviewed HUD officials about these issues. See appendix I for more detailed information on our scope and methodology.

⁴To assess the reliability of these data, we interviewed HUD officials with knowledge of the data and manually tested for missing data and obvious errors. We determined the data were reliable for selecting a nongeneralizable sample. There are about 3,300 PHAs and 17,500 PBRA properties.

⁵We selected these locations (based on input from HUD staff, survivor advocacy groups, and housing interest groups) because they were areas with local strategies for addressing emergency transfer plan implementation.

⁶For housing industry groups, we selected national organizations with large memberships or those that provided VAWA training to housing providers. For survivor and housing advocacy groups, we selected national organizations with research or policy statements on housing issues related to domestic violence or sexual assault.

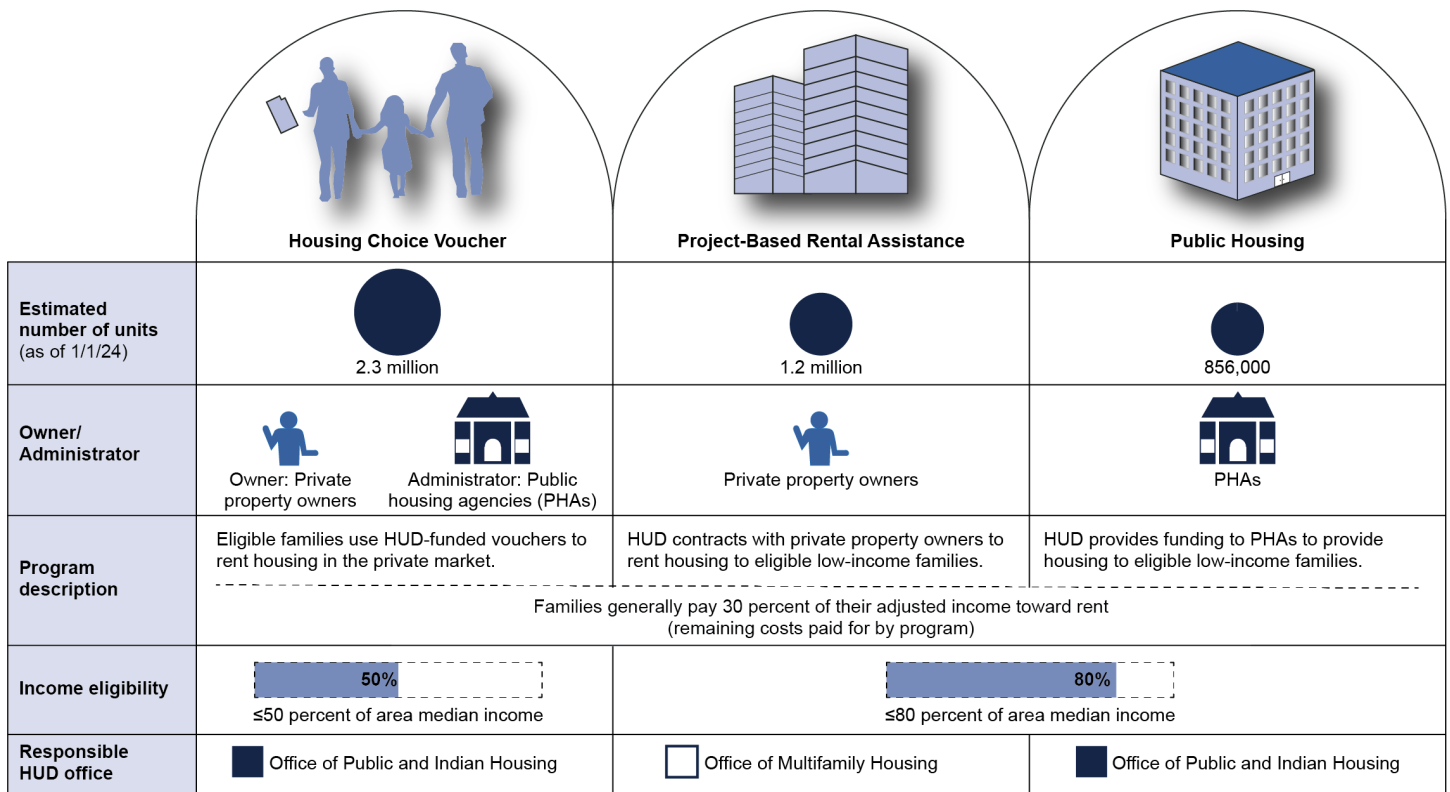
We conducted this performance audit from December 2022 to July 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

HUD-Assisted Rental Housing Programs

HUD administers several rental housing assistance programs that allow families to pay affordable, income-based rents. As of January 2024, HUD provided assistance to roughly 4.4 million low-income households through its three largest rental housing assistance programs: Housing Choice Voucher, PBRA, and Public Housing (see fig. 1). The Housing Choice Voucher program provides subsidies for eligible households to select and rent a housing unit in the private rental market. Under PBRA, HUD provides subsidies to make privately owned multifamily properties affordable to eligible low-income households (assistance is tied to specific units). Through the Public Housing program, HUD provides capital and operating subsidies to approximately 3,300 PHAs, which own and operate rental housing designated for eligible low-income households. PHAs generally administer Housing Choice Vouchers and public housing. PBRA properties may be managed by owners or property management companies.

Figure 1: Largest HUD Rental Assistance Housing Programs



Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). | GAO-24-106481

VAWA Implementing Regulation

In November 2016, HUD published a final rule implementing the requirements in the 2013 VAWA reauthorization. Under both the statute and regulation, survivors qualify for an emergency transfer if they reasonably believe there is a threat of imminent harm by remaining in the same unit, or, for survivors of sexual assault, if the assault occurred on the premises within 90 calendar days preceding the date of the transfer request.

Covered housing programs. The rule applies to several HUD programs, including Public Housing, Housing Choice Vouchers, and PBRA.⁷ In addition, HUD programs that provide housing for older adults, persons

⁷24 C.F.R. § 5.2003.

with disabilities, and persons living with HIV/AIDS are subject to VAWA requirements.

Internal and external transfers. The rule defines emergency transfers as either internal (moving a survivor to a unit for which they would not be considered a new applicant) or external (moving a survivor to a unit for which they would be considered a new applicant). For example, moving a survivor from one public housing unit to another public housing unit managed by the same PHA would be considered an internal transfer, because the survivor would not have to complete a new application for admission. But moving a survivor from public housing to a PBRA property would be considered an external transfer, because the survivor would have to apply and meet eligibility requirements for admission.

Transfers between programs administered by the same PHA or between PBRA properties are generally considered external. For example, a PHA transferring a survivor from one of the programs it administers to another (such as from public housing to the Housing Choice Voucher program) is an external transfer. For PBRA, properties generally operate under their own contract with HUD. Therefore, a transfer between PBRA properties that have different owners is also considered an external transfer, because the survivor must re-apply and be approved under that contract.⁸

Documentation. Survivors can verbally request an emergency transfer from their housing provider.⁹ The housing provider can accept the survivor's oral statement or ask for a written request. In addition, the housing provider may ask the survivor to document the incidence of

⁸Under HUD's single-asset entity rule, properties in the Federal Housing Administration multifamily mortgage insurance program must be the only asset of the borrower entity and there may not be more than one borrower entity. Entities can create limited liability companies or other partnerships for each property. No restrictions prohibit any portion or member of the limited liability company or partnership from creating a different business entity with others to purchase another property under the single asset entity rule, as long as it is not the same borrower entity.

⁹The emergency transfer plan must provide that a tenant receiving rental assistance through, or residing in a unit subsidized under, a HUD covered housing program who is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking qualifies for an emergency transfer if (1) the tenant expressly requests the transfer; and (2) the tenant reasonably believes there is a threat of imminent harm from further violence if the tenant remains within the same unit currently occupied or for victims of sexual assault, the tenant reasonably believes there is a threat of imminent harm from further violence if the tenant remains within the same unit currently occupied or the sexual assault occurred on the premises during the 90 calendar days preceding the date of the request for transfer. 24 C.F.R. § 5.2005(e)(2).

domestic violence or sexual assault for which they are seeking an emergency transfer. In response, the survivor may choose to provide any one of four different kinds of documents, including a self-certification form.¹⁰ If the housing provider receives documentation that contains conflicting information, the housing provider may require the survivor to submit third-party documentation of being a survivor.

Emergency transfer plans. The VAWA regulation includes a model emergency transfer plan and requires that housing providers create and adopt their own plans. It further requires that the plans allow survivors to make internal transfers when a safe unit is immediately available, describe policies for assisting survivors in making internal transfers when a safe unit is not immediately available, and describe reasonable efforts for assisting survivors in making external transfers when a safe unit is not immediately available. The plans also must include documentation requirements, confidentiality measures to protect survivors' information regarding their new unit, and any priority given to survivors seeking internal or external emergency transfers.

Priority. An admissions preference (or priority) is a policy that establishes the order of applicants or transfers on a waiting list. The VAWA regulation does not require housing providers to prioritize survivors but requires that internal transfers receive at least the same priority as other emergency transfer requests. Otherwise, housing providers can make their own decisions on how to prioritize survivors, if at all. The VAWA regulation does not include a requirement for housing providers to prioritize external transfers. That is, housing providers that receive applications for admission from survivors are not required to prioritize them for admission above other applicants.

¹⁰Other forms of documentation permissible include (1) a document signed by both the applicant or tenant and an employee, agent, or volunteer of a victim service provider, attorney, or medical or mental health professional from whom the victim has sought assistance relating to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, or the effects of the abuse, and that specifies under penalty of perjury that the professional believes in the occurrence of the incident that is grounds for protection and remedies under VAWA and that the incident meets the definition of VAWA violence or abuse; or (2) a record of a Federal, State, tribal, territorial or local law enforcement agency, court, or administrative agency; or (3) at the discretion of a covered housing provider, a statement or other evidence provided by the applicant or tenant. 24 C.F.R. § 5.2007(b)(1).

VAWA 2022 Reauthorization

The 2022 reauthorization of VAWA strengthened housing protections for survivors in several ways.¹¹

Definition of domestic violence. The act expanded the definition of domestic violence to include economic and technological abuse. It defines economic abuse in the context of domestic violence and dating violence to include restricting a person’s access to money, assets, credit, or financial information and exerting undue influence over a person’s financial decisions. It defines technological abuse to include an act or pattern of behavior that occurs within domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking and is intended to control or monitor another person, using technology, such as through mobile devices, cameras, or location tracking devices.

Compliance review process. The act required HUD to establish a compliance review process, using its existing compliance review process where possible. It required that HUD issue a regulation detailing this process by March 15, 2024.

Prohibition on retaliation. The act prohibits retaliation by covered housing providers related to VAWA. It is illegal for a housing provider to discriminate against a person because that person has opposed any act or practice made unlawful by VAWA’s housing provisions or because that person testified, assisted, or participated in any related matter.

Relevant HUD Offices and Roles

Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH). This office helps low-income families by providing rental assistance through three programs (as previously noted, our review focused on Public Housing and Housing Choice Vouchers).¹² PIH is organized into six geographic networks, each with several field offices.

Office of Multifamily Housing Programs (Multifamily). This office manages HUD’s portfolio of multifamily properties and provides rental

¹¹Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act of 2022, Pub. L. No. 117-103, Div. W, 136 Stat. 840 (2022).

¹²PIH also provides rental assistance through Native American programs, which provide block grants and loan guarantees to tribal entities for housing development and assistance.

assistance through several programs, including the PBRA program.¹³ Multifamily has 12 field offices across five geographic regions.

Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO). This office is responsible for enforcing various federal civil rights laws, including the Fair Housing Act. In this role, FHEO processes and investigates complaints alleging civil rights violations and conducts compliance reviews of HUD-assisted housing providers. The 2022 VAWA reauthorization required HUD to implement and enforce the housing provisions of VAWA consistent with the Fair Housing Act. As of October 2022, individuals who believe their VAWA rights have been violated may file complaints with FHEO to investigate, using HUD’s existing Fair Housing Act complaint process.

Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity. In October 2021, HUD hired a Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity, who is a political appointee in the Office of the Secretary. The Director serves as a senior advisor and lead coordinator for the agency on policy matters involving gender-based violence.

Selected Housing Providers Generally Had Emergency Transfer Plans, but Did Not Always Meet Requirements for Them

Most Selected Housing Providers Met the Requirement to Have an Emergency Transfer Plan, but Some Did Not

Most of the PHAs and PBRA providers in our nongeneralizable document review sample of 60 had emergency transfer plans (see table 1). Some housing providers included their plan as a chapter or appendix of their

¹³Multifamily also oversees the Federal Housing Administration’s multifamily mortgage insurance on loan originations and administers supportive housing for older adults and programs for persons with disabilities.

administrative plans or tenant selection plans.¹⁴ But 10 (eight PHAs and two PBRA providers) did not have documented plans or policies.¹⁵

Table 1: Emergency Transfer Plans and Policies among Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers, as of July 2023

	PHA	PBRA	Total
Stand-alone emergency transfer plan	14	23	37
Emergency transfer plan embedded in other documents	5	3	8
No plan, but emergency transfer policies in other programmatic documents	3	2	5
No emergency transfer plan or policies	8	2	10
Total	30	30	60

Source: GAO analysis of documents from a nongeneralizable sample of public housing agencies (PHA) and Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) properties. | GAO-24-106481

The extent to which selected housing providers had emergency transfer plans varied by property size, as shown in table 2. All large housing providers in our sample had some form of plan or relevant emergency transfer policies. In contrast, seven medium-sized providers and three small providers did not.¹⁶

¹⁴HUD requires PHAs to have administrative plans, which must include policies for operation (such as selection and admission of applicants), admission preferences, processes for issuing or denying vouchers, and any special rules for available funds. HUD requires PBRA providers to develop tenant selection plans for properties, which must include descriptions of the preferences, eligibility requirements, and income limits for admission.

¹⁵HUD's VAWA regulation required housing providers to adopt a plan no later than June 14, 2017.

¹⁶We consolidated HUD's six predetermined size categories for PHAs into three: small (1–100 units), medium (101–999 units), and large (1,000 units or more). HUD did not categorize PBRA properties by size, so we defined PBRA provider size, based on the total number of units in the PBRA property, as small (1–50 units), medium (51–100 units), and large (101 units or more).

Table 2: Emergency Transfer Plans or Policies among Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers, by Size, as of July 2023

	Large			Medium			Small			Total
	PHA	PBRA	Subtotal	PHA	PBRA	Subtotal	PHA	PBRA	Subtotal	
Stand-alone emergency transfer plan	3	8	11	6	4	10	5	11	16	37
Plan embedded in other documents	2	0	2	2	2	4	1	1	2	8
No plan but emergency transfer policies in other programmatic documents	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	5
No emergency transfer plan or policies	0	0	0	5	2	7	3	0	3	10
Total	6	8	14	14	9	23	10	13	23	60

Source: GAO analysis of documents from a nongeneralizable sample of public housing agencies (PHA) and Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) properties. | GAO-24-106481

Notes: We consolidated HUD’s six predetermined size categories for PHAs into three: small (1–100 units), medium (101–999 units), and large (1,000 units or more). HUD did not categorize PBRA properties by size, so we defined PBRA provider size, based on total number of units in the PBRA property, as small (1–50 units), medium (51–100 units), and large (101 units or more).

Some of the Selected Housing Providers Required Documentation for Emergency Transfers That Was Contrary to HUD Regulation

Based on our document review, most selected housing providers (45 of 60) did not require additional documentation when the survivor had provided an emergency transfer request (see table 3). However, five housing providers required documentation in addition to that specified by HUD’s regulation. For example, documents from three of these providers stated survivors may be required to provide evidence of their need for an emergency transfer through police reports or court records.¹⁷ HUD’s VAWA regulation permits housing providers to require certain documentation from a tenant seeking an emergency transfer. Housing providers are not allowed to require any third-party documentation in

¹⁷One housing provider’s documents stated that it required this information for all emergency transfer requests, while two noted they required, at their discretion, additional third-party verification, such as a police report, in order for a tenant to be eligible for an emergency transfer.

order to determine whether a tenant seeking an emergency transfer is eligible for an emergency transfer, except in certain cases.¹⁸

Table 3: Did Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers Require Additional Documentation from Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault Requesting an Emergency Transfer, as of July 2023?

	PHA	PBRA	Total
Yes	4	1	5
No	18	27	45
Did not specify	8	2	10
Total	30	30	60

Source: GAO analysis of documents from a nongeneralizable sample of public housing agencies (PHA) and Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) properties. | GAO-24-106481

One PHA and one PBRA provider we interviewed stated that requests for documents from survivors have not been consistent. Representatives from a PBRA property management company told us they had become aware that tenants of various properties they managed were given different information on emergency transfer requests. To avoid such inconsistencies, they hired a coordinator to be a single point of contact for VAWA-related information or emergency transfer requests. In addition, representatives from a PHA told us some of their staff did not know what documents tenants needed or did not need to provide to request a transfer. The PHA held training sessions for staff on these issues.

¹⁸The emergency transfer plan may require documentation from a tenant seeking an emergency transfer. The plan may require the tenant's submission of a written request where the tenant certifies that they meet the criteria for an emergency transfer under HUD's regulation. Housing providers also may ask in writing an individual seeking an emergency transfer to document the occurrence of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. The individual may submit any of the following forms of documentation, where it is at the discretion of the individual which one of the following forms of documentation: (1) the HUD certification form; (2) documentation signed by the individual and a victim service provider, an attorney, a medical professional, or a mental health professional in which the professional declares under penalty of perjury that the professional believes in the occurrence of the incident and that the incident meets the definition of VAWA violence or abuse; (3) a record of a law enforcement agency, court, or administrative agency; (4) at the discretion of a housing provider, a statement or other evidence provided by the individual. If the housing provider receives documentation that contains conflicting information, the housing provider may require the survivor to submit third-party documentation of being a survivor in order to document occurrence of VAWA violence or abuse.

Requiring survivors to provide written information that is not required by HUD can negatively affect survivors, according to housing advocacy groups and HUD officials. Representatives from four housing advocacy groups told us that some survivors felt pressured to provide documentation that made them uncomfortable or jeopardized their safety, such as police reports. In addition, officials from HUD's San Francisco field office told us that requiring additional documentation from survivors could delay the approval for an emergency transfer and could require a survivor to remain in an unsafe living situation.

Most Selected Housing Providers' Documents Prioritized Survivors in Internal Transfers

Documents from providers in our nongeneralizable sample more frequently prioritized requests for emergency transfers from current tenants (internal transfers) than requests from new applicants (external transfers).¹⁹ The VAWA regulation addresses prioritization for internal and external transfers differently. It does not require providers to prioritize survivors but does require that internal VAWA emergency transfers receive at least the same priority as other emergency transfers.²⁰

Internal transfers. For internal transfers, documents from two-thirds of selected housing providers (37 of 60) stated that the provider gave priority to survivors (see table 4). In other words, these providers would place survivors who were existing tenants on a waitlist for an available unit above some tenants requesting transfers for other reasons.²¹ Documents from 13 selected housing providers did not clearly specify whether survivors received priority, meaning it was unclear if VAWA emergency transfers received priority over other transfers or all new applications from the waitlist. For example, a document might outline a point system for priority but might not state what categories of applicants would receive those points. The results were consistent between PHAs and PBRA providers in our nongeneralizable sample.

¹⁹An admissions preference (or priority) is a policy that provides certain categories of applicants priority on a waiting list for new units as they become available.

²⁰Other reasons for emergency transfers can include physical hazards (such as fire damage or a gas leak), natural disasters, or a verified medical condition of a life-threatening nature. HUD's notices to PHAs and PBRA providers on the VAWA regulation state that HUD strongly encourages these housing providers to prioritize survivors in external transfers.

²¹Our analysis of prioritization for internal transfers included housing providers that give any prioritization to existing tenants seeking a VAWA internal transfer relative to other internal transfers. Survivors did not have to receive the top priority.

Table 4: Did Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers Prioritize Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault for Internal Transfers, as of July 2023?

	PHA	PBRA	Total
Yes	20	17	37
No	7	3	10
Did not specify	3	10	13
Total	30	30	60

Source: GAO analysis of documents from a nongeneralizable sample of public housing agencies (PHA) and Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) properties. | GAO-24-106481

Note: Internal transfers are those for which a survivor of domestic violence or sexual assault would not be considered a new applicant for housing.

External transfers. For external transfers, documents from nearly one-third of selected housing providers (17 of 60) stated that they gave priority to survivors (see table 5). In other words, if the housing provider had a waiting list, they would give priority to applicants making VAWA-related emergency transfers.²² PHAs and PBRA had the same rates of prioritization. Representatives from the National Affordable Housing Management Association said they estimated that over half of PBRA providers prioritized survivors in admissions and transfers. In addition, representatives from the Council of Large Public Housing Authorities told us that most of its 80 members prioritize survivors in transfers and admissions from waitlists.

Table 5: Did Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers Prioritize Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault for External Transfers, as of July 2023?

	PHA	PBRA	Total
Yes	10	7	17
No	17	17	34
Did not specify	3	6	9
Total	30	30	60

Source: GAO analysis of documents from a nongeneralizable sample of public housing agencies (PHA) and Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) properties. | GAO-24-106481

Note: External transfers are those for which a survivor of domestic violence or sexual assault would be considered a new applicant for housing.

²²Our analysis of prioritization for external transfers included housing providers that give survivors any prioritization on a waitlist for new applicants or other external transfers. Survivors did not have to receive the top priority.

In some instances, selected housing providers' documents stated the providers prioritized external emergency transfers with stipulations. For example, three providers would only give priority admission to survivors who submitted evidence from a third party or certified that the abuser would not reside in the same residence. According to some stakeholders we interviewed, requiring additional documentation for prioritization may create an additional burden for survivors.

Plans We Reviewed Often Did Not Describe Specific Efforts to Implement Emergency Transfers

Emergency transfer plans are required to describe the policies or reasonable efforts housing providers will take to help survivors make internal and external transfers. However, many housing providers in our nongeneralizable sample did not document descriptions of such policies or efforts. In addition, emergency transfer policy language was often general or a direct copy of the language in HUD's model plan (which we illustrate later in this section).

Internal transfers. Of the 60 selected housing providers, documentation for most (42) did not describe policies for making internal transfers when a safe unit was not immediately available (see table 6).²³ Documentation for 11 providers included some description of their policies, such as locating and paying for interim housing or bifurcating a lease.²⁴

Table 6: Did Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers Document Policies for Internal Transfers When a Safe Unit Was Not Immediately Available, as of July 2023?

	PHA	PBRA	Total
Yes	10	1	11
No	17	25	42
Did not specify ^a	3	4	7
Total	30	30	60

Source: GAO analysis of documents from a nongeneralizable sample of public housing agencies (PHA) and Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) properties. | GAO-24-106481

Note: Internal transfers are those for which a survivor of domestic violence or sexual assault would not be considered a new applicant for housing.

^aThe housing provider listed general actions for tenants seeking transfers, but it was unclear if these actions apply to survivors or internal transfers.

²³This included 10 housing providers that did not have emergency transfer plans or policies.

²⁴Bifurcating means to divide a lease as a matter of law so that certain tenants can be evicted or removed while the remaining family members' lease and occupancy rights generally remain intact.

External transfers. Of the 60 selected housing providers, documentation for most described policies for external transfers (see table 7). Documentation for 43 providers included some description of policies for assisting survivors in making such a transfer. Examples included creating memorandums of understanding with other properties or providers or providing survivors with a list of other HUD-assisted housing providers in the same jurisdiction with unit availability.

Table 7: Did Selected PHAs and PBRA Providers Have Documented Policies for External Transfers, as of July 2023?

	PHA	PBRA	Total
Yes	18	25	43
No	12	5	17
Did not specify ^a	-	-	-
Total	30	30	60

Source: GAO analysis of documents from a nongeneralizable sample of public housing agencies (PHA) and Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) properties. | GAO-24-106481

Note: External transfers are those for which a survivor of domestic violence or sexual assault would be considered a new applicant for housing.

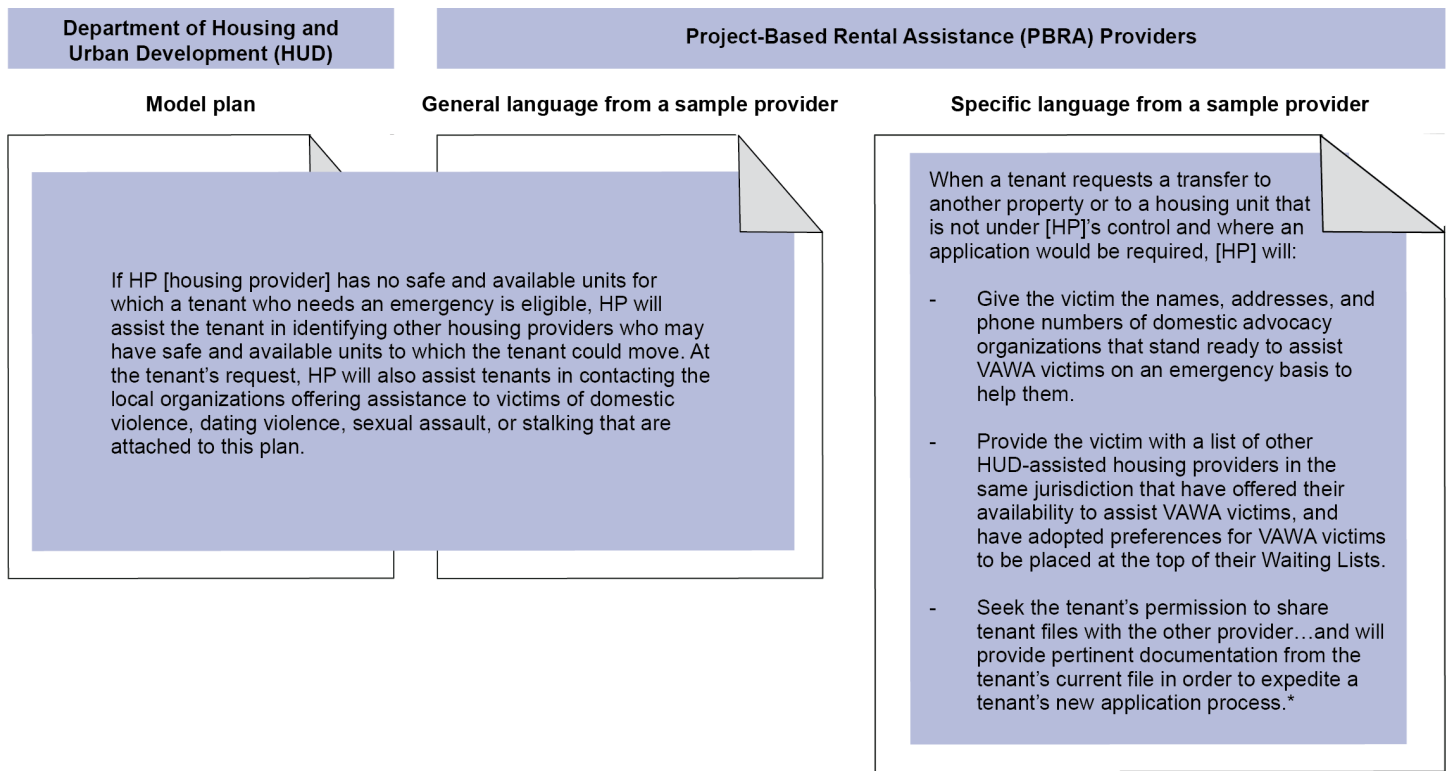
^aThe housing provider listed general actions for tenants seeking transfers, but it was unclear if these actions apply to survivors or external transfers.

Language in provider plans. Although some providers in our nongeneralizable sample documented policies for external transfers, most (54 of 60) did not describe specific efforts they would take to complete external transfers.²⁵ For example, they often used general language when discussing external transfers, such as “assisting a tenant in identifying other housing providers.”

Moreover, documentation for half of the selected housing providers copied this general language from HUD’s model plan or from another sample plan (such as one developed by a third-party consultant) without including any relevant specifics (see fig. 2). HUD’s model plan also used general language to describe reasonable efforts to assist survivors making external transfers.

²⁵This included 10 housing providers that did not have emergency transfer plans or policies.

Figure 2: Comparison of Language in External Emergency Transfer Policies and HUD Model Plan



*Emergency transfer plan language reformatted for readability

Source: GAO analysis. | GAO-24-106481

Note: We removed the names of the housing providers from these excerpts.

In contrast, documentation for six housing providers (five PHAs and one PBRA) more specifically described the actions they would take to help survivors make external transfers. For example, documentation for one provider stated it would offer survivors a list of vacant units at other HUD-assisted properties and share tenant files with the new property manager to reduce survivors' paperwork burden during the process.

Housing Providers Face Challenges Making Emergency Transfers, and Some Have Implemented Strategies for Improvement

Housing providers and interest groups we interviewed identified multiple challenges in making emergency transfers, including differing housing program eligibility requirements, limited coordination among providers, and the limited stock of and long wait times for affordable housing. They also noted provider staff may lack expertise and training and that transfers are labor-intensive and can entail costs for providers. Some housing providers shared strategies they have used to coordinate with other providers, decrease emergency transfer times, and improve support for survivors.

Selected Housing Providers Reported Facing Challenges Transferring Survivors to Other Properties and Programs

Transfers present multiple challenges, which can limit the number of units available for survivors to transfer, according to PHAs, PBRA providers, and interest groups we interviewed. This is especially true for external transfers (those in which survivors must submit a new application for housing).

Differing Eligibility Requirements Among Programs and Properties

Representatives from three interest groups told us it is challenging to move a survivor between housing programs, such as from public housing to a PBRA property, because each program has unique eligibility requirements (such as those related to income or family size).²⁶ Survivors must meet the specific eligibility requirements for the program into which they transfer. For example, to be eligible for public housing, a family must have an annual income that is no more than the low-income limit for the jurisdiction, generally 80 percent of area median income.²⁷ The PBRA program has similar low-income limits, but income-related eligibility requirements for each PBRA property can vary, depending on the property's contract with HUD.²⁸ As a result, a survivor may be income-eligible for one program but have too high an income for another.

Units within a property also can have differing eligibility requirements because of layered financing (funding from various sources). Each

²⁶HUD program regulations dictate some eligibility requirements (such as income or immigration status). Housing providers also have flexibility to add requirements.

²⁷24 C.F.R. § 960.201(a).

²⁸HUD executes Housing Assistance Payment contracts with PBRA owners. These contracts can be renewed in 1-, 5-, or 20-year increments. Tenants pay a percentage of their monthly adjusted income for rent and utilities, and HUD pays the owner the difference between the contract rent and the rent paid by the tenant.

funding source may have its own set of eligibility requirements that can make emergency transfers complicated, such as units set aside for people with disabilities or people experiencing homelessness. Representatives from a PBRA property management company told us some properties must adhere to requirements for four or five sources of financing. For example, two of 10 PHAs and four of 10 PBRA providers we interviewed also received Low-Income Housing Tax Credits.²⁹ This program has its own requirements that can vary by state and may include requirements for the housing provider to set aside a specific number of units for families that meet specific criteria. For example, a property receiving Low-Income Housing Tax Credits may be required to set aside units for tenants with less than 20 percent of the area median income. As a result, a survivor may be eligible for a limited number of units in a property.

PBRA properties (even those under the same management) also can have unique eligibility requirements. PBRA properties are privately owned and generally have individual Housing Assistance Payment contracts with HUD.³⁰ Emergency transfers between PBRA properties are therefore generally treated as external transfers, even if the properties are under the same management. In addition, PBRA owners have some discretion in setting eligibility requirements and may adopt additional requirements in their tenant selection plan that tenants must meet, such as those related to credit score, certain types of crime on a criminal record, or rental history. As a result, a survivor who qualifies for their current PBRA property may not be eligible at a different PBRA property.

Navigating different eligibility requirements can be confusing and burdensome for survivors. For example, some stakeholders expressed concern that when a survivor wishes to move from one PBRA property to another, they generally must apply again as an external transfer. A representative from the National Housing Law Project said requiring

²⁹The Internal Revenue Service administers the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program, which provides tax credits typically through state and local housing finance agencies to developers and private investors to develop affordable housing. Projects awarded tax credits must remain affordable to qualifying low-income households for at least 30 years.

³⁰HUD officials told us there are multiple reasons PBRA properties must be separately owned, one of which is the single-asset entity rule. This rule provides that properties financed through a Federal Housing Administration multifamily mortgage insurance program must be the only asset of the borrower entity and there may not be more than one borrower entity. However, according to HUD officials, some Housing Assistance Payment Contracts may include more than one PBRA property. In these cases, an emergency transfer may be considered internal.

PBRA survivors to reapply treats them as new admissions, which presents a barrier to those who need to move quickly. Staff from one housing advocacy group we interviewed said survivors need help navigating the process for emergency transfers, but understanding the differing eligibility requirements can be difficult even for organizations that focus on assisting survivors.

Limited Coordination among Providers on Available Units

Providers generally did not coordinate with each other, according to many housing providers and interest groups we interviewed. This contributed to challenges identifying safe and available units for survivors outside their own portfolio, such as when an internal transfer was not possible due to long waitlists or proximity to an abuser. Many PHAs and PBRA providers we interviewed said they did not coordinate external emergency transfer efforts across other HUD-assisted housing programs or providers. Most interest groups we interviewed (seven of nine) also said there is generally a lack of coordination among housing providers.

Of the 20 PHAs and PBRA providers we interviewed, 14 said they did not have formalized relationships with other HUD-assisted housing providers. But about half said they had informal relationships with other providers in their area. For example, staff from one PHA said they had developed informal relationships with other housing providers at conferences or training events and felt they could call them if they needed assistance transferring a survivor.

Some stakeholders told us there was a lack of HUD direction on how programs can coordinate. For example, representatives from one housing advocacy group told us HUD had not provided clear instruction to housing providers on how to coordinate for external transfers, which resulted in inconsistencies across providers. Representatives from a PBRA property management company also said the lack of information from HUD on coordination had left housing providers to figure it out on their own. We discuss HUD's written instructions on implementing external transfers later in this report.

Limited Housing Stock

According to some stakeholders that we interviewed, the limited stock of affordable housing creates additional challenges to finding safe and available units for survivors. This is challenging for both internal and external transfers. The challenges can be exacerbated depending on geographic location or household needs.

- **Rural areas.** Emergency transfers in rural areas are difficult because there are generally fewer units of affordable housing. As an example,

rural PHAs sometimes only operate one property, according to HUD officials.

- **Larger units.** Some housing providers and HUD field office officials said it was challenging to find available units with multiple bedrooms to accommodate larger families. Representatives from an urban PBRA property management company said most of the properties in their portfolio have only studio units.
- **Accessibility features.** Finding accessible housing can be a challenge for households that have a member with a disability. Fully accessible units are limited in number, and, according to the 2019 American Housing Survey, the majority of rental units predate certain accessible design requirements.³¹ For example, representatives from one PHA said their city's housing stock is old and often not accessible to people with disabilities.

Limited public housing and PBRA vacancies can contribute to long wait times for survivors seeking transfers. For example, staff from two PHAs said it could take from 6 months to a year to transfer a survivor from one public housing unit to another because there were no available units. Even when PHAs and PBRA providers prioritized survivors for an emergency transfer, wait times still could be long due to low vacancy rates. For example, the Boston Housing Authority gives survivors the highest level of priority for available units.³² Even so, its representatives told us they still did not have many safe or available units for VAWA-related transfers. Representatives from two PBRA property management companies we interviewed said they also had long wait times, and one told us it could take 6 months or longer to find housing for an emergency transfer.

Due to the low vacancy rates and long wait times, some PHAs and PBRAs closed their waitlists, including to emergency transfers. For example, representatives from one PBRA property management company said they do not allow survivors to apply for an emergency transfer at their properties with closed waitlists.

³¹GAO, *HUD Rental Assistance: Serving Households with Disabilities*, [GAO-23-106339](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 29, 2023).

³²Boston Housing Authority uses a point system to direct the order of processing for new admissions from a waiting list. Applicants making VAWA-related transfers are considered super-priority and receive more points in the priority system than other categories of priority applicants (such as tenants displaced by a natural disaster) or standard applicants (those who do not qualify for any priority category).

Finally, long wait times, among other things, could cause challenges for survivors (see text box). Specifically, survivors may need to pay for interim housing or remain in a household with their abuser while waiting for a new unit. Half of the PHAs and PBRA providers (10 of 20) in our structured interviews told us they referred survivors to service providers that may find them domestic violence shelters or interim housing such as hotels. However, according to representatives from one survivor advocacy group, shelters often lack available beds.

Challenges Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault Can Face in Emergency Transfers

Housing providers and interest groups we interviewed said the emergency transfer process poses challenges for survivors, including the following:

- **Knowledge of right to transfer.** Survivors may not know they have a right to request an emergency transfer, according to representatives from five of the nine interest groups with whom we spoke.
- **Safety concerns.** Survivors may fear they might be in danger if their abuser found out about their request for transfer.
- **Paperwork burden.** Survivors must complete repeat applications when transferring to a new program or property, which can impose a paperwork burden. Similarly, representatives from one housing advocacy group told us that meeting application and documentation deadlines could be challenging for survivors actively fleeing violence.
- **Effects of financial abuse.** Because financial abuse can be a component of domestic violence, some survivors with past-due rent payments or poor credit history may have trouble finding owners or landlords to accept their applications.
- **Moving costs.** Moving expenses, including security deposits and moving boxes, can be a financial barrier to survivors making a transfer, according to staff from six interest groups.
- **Life adjustments.** When housing is not safe or available in survivors' immediate community, they may become destabilized by moving to another area. For example, survivors may need to change schools for their children, change jobs, or face a longer commute.

Source: GAO analysis of interviews with interest group and public housing agency representatives. | GAO-24-106481

Some Housing Providers and Advocates Identified Limited Staff Knowledge and Resource Burdens as Challenges

During our site visits, PHAs, PBRA providers, and housing advocacy groups noted administrative challenges to implementing emergency transfers. These challenges include limited training to date on transfer requirements, limited staff skill in managing the survivor experience, resource burdens, and staff attrition.

Limited Training to Date and Staff Skills

Most housing providers told us they would benefit from additional training on the emergency transfer process. Eleven of 20 PHAs and PBRA providers we interviewed told us they needed additional training from HUD on developing and implementing emergency transfer plans. In addition, representatives from four PHAs and PBRA providers we visited told us they needed more information from HUD about the specific documents they can request from survivors seeking an emergency transfer. As previously discussed, some providers may require these survivors to provide documents such as police reports or restraining orders, contrary to HUD requirements. We discuss HUD's training efforts

and written instructions on implementing emergency transfers later in this report.

HUD officials, housing providers, and housing advocacy groups noted that housing providers needed to build skills related to domestic violence and sexual assault, so they can assist survivors with an informed approach. Representatives from four housing providers and HUD field office officials told us that survivors of domestic violence are often stigmatized, which can result in housing provider staff being skeptical of requests for emergency transfers. More specifically, these four providers discussed examples of staff thinking survivors made false claims about domestic violence to obtain a new unit. Representatives from four interest groups told us that housing providers need more training on emergency transfer policies and on the complexities of domestic violence and sexual assault to reduce judgment.

Housing advocates also told us that some housing providers needed training on practices for maintaining survivor confidentiality. Representatives from one housing advocacy group told us they often need to remind housing providers in their community about confidentiality requirements. The representatives noted an example of an abuser who obtained a survivor's new address from the housing provider by providing the answers to security questions. Officials from HUD's Boston field office told us that some survivors have expressed concern over potential confidentiality issues when completing emergency transfers. However, they were not aware of specific breaches of survivor confidentiality.

Resource Burdens and Staff Attrition

Some PHAs and PBRA providers we interviewed said administering emergency transfers required considerable staff time.³³ Four housing providers we visited said the volume of emergency transfer requests was challenging to manage. According to staff from one PHA, the average emergency transfer case can take up 30 staff hours. In addition, representatives from a PBRA property management company said they needed additional full-time staff to exclusively address emergency transfers. In addition, officials from HUD's San Francisco field office said

³³HUD does not collect data on the number of emergency transfer requests housing providers receive per year. The number of requests varied considerably among the PHAs and PBRA providers we interviewed. For example, representatives from one large PHA told us they received 100 requests per year, while representatives from two small PHAs said they had not received any.

repeat transfers can be taxing for housing providers because they are already short-staffed.

PHAs and PBRA providers told us that making emergency transfers also required financial resources. For example, four of 20 PHAs and PBRA providers we interviewed also told us they provided financial assistance directly to survivors during the transfer process. These providers said the direct assistance was intended to pay for moving costs or security deposits.

Representatives from two housing providers and HUD field office officials told us that trauma associated with emergency transfers can lead to burnout and high turnover rates among housing provider staff. For example, staff from one PHA and one PBRA property management company told us staff sometimes struggled to manage the trauma of the survivor experience. In addition, representatives from a PBRA property management company said their office had experienced staff attrition due to the stress of managing VAWA cases.

Some Housing Providers Have Participated in Coordination Efforts and Used Other Strategies to Address Challenges

PHAs, PBRA providers, and housing advocacy groups we interviewed told us about strategies some housing providers have used to address challenges to implementing emergency transfers. The examples they cited include formally coordinating efforts with other PBRA providers, using vouchers to supplement public housing portfolios, increasing staff expertise, and improving support for survivors.³⁴ In addition to these provider strategies, HUD posted some best practices on its VAWA website for specific programs, including for persons experiencing homelessness and Indigenous survivors.

Establishing Coordination among PBRA Providers

In March 2023, HUD's Chicago field office partnered with The Network, a housing advocacy group, to begin implementing a strategy to coordinate emergency transfers across PBRA properties and owners. Specifically, the field office established a statewide pilot program that created a database of available units, streamlined the application process, prioritized survivors on waiting lists, and established a management add-

³⁴We did not evaluate the effectiveness of the various strategies providers described to us.

on fee for participants.³⁵ The database includes data on the number of vacant units at participating PBRA properties and maintains all emergency transfer notes in a central location. For example, representatives from the HUD field office said they can see communication between housing providers and survivors and dates of referral for emergency transfer in the database.

To participate in the pilot, the PBRA property owner's management company must designate a single VAWA contact person to facilitate emergency transfers. Participating PBRA management companies first try to transfer a survivor to a safe unit in their management portfolio. If there is no available unit, the VAWA contact person uses the database to find an available unit outside of their portfolio. Participating PBRA owners must agree to prioritize survivors for available units. Once a safe available unit is identified, the current management company shares the survivor's information (with their permission) with the new property's management to streamline the application process and confirm eligibility. Participating PBRA owners also agreed to include these policies in their tenant selection plans using agreed-upon language. To incentivize PBRA providers to participate in the pilot, HUD approved a management add-on fee incentive to offset the cost of emergency transfers.

PBRA stakeholders in Massachusetts told us they were working on a similar strategy to help facilitate emergency transfers among PBRA properties statewide. These stakeholders include the state housing finance agency and PBRA management companies. As of January 2024, a participating company said the group was finalizing a proposal that it intended to share with HUD's Boston field office. Similar to the Illinois pilot, this proposal will include a database of vacant PBRA units and a streamlined application process for transfers across properties, according to these stakeholders.

³⁵Add-on fees are designed to offset the cost of managing special conditions specific to the property or market (or both) and are not a function of project rents or incomes. To receive this incentive in the pilot, participating properties must approve an emergency transfer in a 12-month period. Participating properties can receive \$4 per unit transfer, up to \$7,200 per year per property in management fees.

PHAs Providing Vouchers

Moving to Work

Representatives from three PHAs told us that participating in the Moving to Work program helped them make successful emergency transfers under the Violence Against Women Act. The program was created to allow participating PHAs to test alternative policies for the Housing Choice Voucher and Public Housing programs (it provides waivers of some rules and regulations for these programs). According to HUD officials, Moving to Work status allows PHAs the flexibility to use their funds to transfer survivors across programs. HUD officials also noted that such status enables PHAs to fund support for survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault, such as the employment of social workers.

Source: GAO analysis of information from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and interviews with public housing agencies (PHA). | GAO-24-106481

Some PHA representatives told us that they provided vouchers to survivors to help expedite the emergency transfer process.³⁶ For example, one PHA representative said vouchers were particularly useful for survivors with large families that needed units with three or more bedrooms. Representatives from five large PHAs, two of which participate in HUD's Moving to Work Program, said vouchers help survivors move quickly when they had no public housing units that would meet survivors' needs. For example:

- San Francisco Housing Authority representatives told us they keep 20 vouchers in reserve for extreme situations in which someone needs to move immediately for their safety. These vouchers are available for tenants of any of the housing authority's programs, including public housing and the Rental Administration Development program.³⁷
- Cambridge Housing Authority representatives said they issue vouchers to a service provider to assist survivors in need of an emergency transfer. With these vouchers, which the housing authority refers to as "sponsor-based vouchers," the service provider can enter into a lease on behalf of a survivor. After a year or two, the survivor can take over the lease. Representatives said sponsor-based vouchers were useful in emergency transfers, because they did not require survivors to meet selected eligibility requirements (such as credit checks). Staff from Cambridge Housing Authority told us this effort was a result of their participation in HUD's Moving to Work program.

³⁶A voucher is a portable subsidy administered by PHAs in which an assisted household pays a percentage of its monthly adjusted income in rent. The remainder of rent is paid through a HUD-subsidized "voucher," which generally is equal to the difference between (1) the lesser of the unit's gross rent or a local "payment standard" and (2) the household's payment.

³⁷HUD's Rental Administration Development program allows PHAs to convert public housing to long-term project-based Section 8 assistance to preserve and improve public housing properties and address the backlog of deferred maintenance. See GAO, *Rental Assistance Demonstration: HUD Needs to Take Action to Improve Metrics and Ongoing Oversight*, GAO-18-123 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 20, 2018).

Prioritizing Survivors

- Oakland Housing Authority representatives said staff used HUD’s emergency housing vouchers to transfer survivors.³⁸ They allocated some of these vouchers to local nonprofit organizations that provide services to survivors. In turn, the organizations distributed these vouchers to individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness because of domestic violence. Oakland Housing Authority representatives said they had a memorandum of understanding with nearby PHAs, through which they could use emergency housing vouchers to streamline transfers.

Two PHAs we interviewed said prioritizing survivors who request emergency transfers has helped them make the transfers more quickly.

- Oakland Housing Authority representatives said they prioritize VAWA-related emergency transfers over other transfer requests by putting those requests at the top of waitlists for a new program. For example, a public housing tenant can be placed at the top of the waitlist for a project-based voucher.
- The Boston Housing Authority considers VAWA-related emergency transfers to be a “super-priority,” meaning survivors are given additional priority on waitlists to ensure they are offered a new unit as quickly as possible.

Training Staff

Staff from two PHAs we interviewed said staff training has helped reduce misconceptions about survivors.

- Boston Housing Authority representatives said they provide continual training on domestic violence and emergency transfers, which they said has helped staff understand survivor trauma and recognize the signs of abuse.
- Chicago Housing Authority representatives said they provided staff training on the documents survivors must provide when requesting an emergency transfer, as well as training on domestic violence and sexual assault. The representatives told us this training helped ensure staff were only requesting documents required by HUD, and it reduced misconceptions about survivors.

³⁸Emergency housing vouchers were made available through the American Rescue Plan Act to assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness; at risk of homelessness; fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking; or who recently experienced homelessness or have a high risk of housing instability. Emergency housing vouchers sunset in September 2023, meaning they cannot be reissued, which limits the number of vouchers for PHAs to use. According to HUD officials, emergency housing vouchers are limited to around 2,500.

Hiring a VAWA Coordinator

Some housing providers we interviewed identified benefits from having a VAWA coordinator, or a single staff person, serve as a point-of-contact in the emergency transfer process. For example:

- Chicago Housing Authority representatives said their Victim Assistance Program serves as a single point-of-contact to streamline the emergency transfer process and support survivors living in public housing. This program allows survivors to request an emergency transfer through a VAWA coordinator and reduces the need for survivors to discuss their personal information with property managers.
- Representatives from a PBRA property management company said they hired a VAWA coordinator to be the point of contact for all emergency transfer requests. The coordinators' duties include conducting intake calls, determining whether survivors meet eligibility criteria for other properties, and finding available units.

Establishing Formal Relationships with Service Providers

Some housing providers said formal relationships with service providers can support survivors during and after an emergency transfer by mitigating the cycle of abuse and reducing the need for future transfers. For example, San Francisco Housing Authority representatives said they partner with a supportive services provider located in their office building to help survivors access shelters or hotels while waiting for an emergency transfer. They said providing assistance to survivors after they move to a new unit also is important for reducing the need for emergency transfers in the future.

HUD Has Provided Limited Support to Housing Providers on Emergency Transfers and Has Not Formalized PBRA Monitoring

HUD recently began efforts to increase training and technical assistance to housing providers on implementing emergency transfer plans, but some of its written instructions do not have implementation information. HUD has VAWA-specific monitoring procedures for PHAs, but not for PBRA providers. HUD also has not yet finalized reporting requirements and does not have a plan for collecting data on emergency transfers from PHAs or PBRA providers.

HUD Has Given Providers Limited Instructions and Training on Implementing Emergency Transfers

Revised Model Plan Not Yet Finalized

In November 2022, HUD published a revised draft model emergency transfer plan in the Federal Register for public comment but has not finalized it. HUD decided to revise the model plan after hearing feedback from stakeholders during listening sessions on emergency transfers in 2020, according to HUD officials. HUD first developed a model plan in 2016 as part of its VAWA regulation, which states housing providers should base their emergency transfer plans on HUD's model plan.

The 2016 model plan remains in effect until the new one is finalized, but it does not address some VAWA regulatory requirements. For example, it does not mention prioritizing survivors or describe policies to assist survivors in making an internal transfer when a safe unit is not available. Most PHAs and PBRA providers in our nongeneralizable sample (42 of 60) did not include policies in their plans for assisting survivors in these transfers. In addition, most of the interest groups we interviewed (seven of nine) said that a weakness of the model plan was that housing providers copied it without customization.

HUD's draft plan improves on some of the limitations of the current model plan by addressing all the regulatory requirements. The draft plan includes less-general language and directs housing providers to include their own policies on each topic. For example, it directs housing providers to incorporate their policies for internal transfers when a safe unit is not immediately available, including time frames, possible internal transfer locations, and priority status given to survivors relative to other tenants seeking transfers.

HUD pushed back its timeline for publishing the revised draft model plan in the Federal Register for final comment, which is the next step to finalizing the new model plan.³⁹ The Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity initially said the goal was to publish the revised draft model plan in early January 2024. But according to the Director, delays resulted because the draft has to go through multiple HUD offices

³⁹Under the Paperwork Reduction Act, the agency publishes the revised version to the Federal Register after considering the public comments received in response to the initial notice.

for review. As of June 2024, HUD had not finalized the plan. HUD officials said they plan to publish the revised version in the Federal Register by fall 2024.

Until a revised plan is finalized, HUD's model plan will not address all regulatory requirements and will continue to be limited as a key tool for housing providers to mitigate the challenges they (and thus survivors) face in the emergency transfer process. If a PHA or PBRA provider uses HUD's model plan without modifying its own plan to include the missing elements of the VAWA regulation, its plan would not provide staff with the information they need to effectively make emergency transfers. This missing information contributes to challenges PHAs and PBRA providers face in making emergency transfers and could put survivors at risk.

Limited Written Instructions on Implementing Emergency Transfers

HUD has provided limited written instructions to PHAs and PBRA providers on how to implement emergency transfers, in part because the agency did not have a director to focus on VAWA-related issues until 2021. In 2017, PIH and Multifamily issued notices on the 2013 VAWA reauthorization and HUD's final rule. The notices provided information to PHAs and PBRA providers on creating emergency transfer plans. For example, they provided some specifics on regulatory requirements (such as defining "immediately available" unit), items to consider when developing emergency transfer policies, and broad emergency transfer examples.

For external transfers, the notices encouraged housing providers to create formal arrangements (such as memorandums of understanding) with other housing providers but did not provide direction or instructions on how to set up these arrangements. PIH's notice included one example of an external transfer in which a hypothetical PHA partnered with a list of housing providers in the community to assist survivors. However, the scenario did not explain what these partnerships entailed, how they were established, or how they worked in practice. The Multifamily notice included one example in which the survivor was offered both an internal and external transfer and opted to take the internal transfer. The notice did not include an example that resulted in an external transfer.

In February 2023, HUD debuted its VAWA website, which included frequently asked questions, including about VAWA's housing protections and who is covered. However, the questions do not cover items related to implementing emergency transfers for housing providers.

In March 2023, PIH and Multifamily issued letters to housing providers on the 2022 VAWA reauthorization that detailed key changes to the law and identified provisions that went into effect immediately and those that were not yet implemented. For example, the letters updated HUD's definition of domestic violence based on the new law. The letters did not provide information related to making emergency transfers.

PIH's Guidance Principles state that information must meet customer's needs.⁴⁰ If it does not do so, it is ineffective as an information product, according to these principles. Many of those with whom we spoke during site visits noted a need for clearer, more specific written information on emergency transfer implementation. For example, a representative for a large property management firm noted that the information HUD issued did not take into account the barriers housing providers face when transferring people across programs and did not provide any specific instruction on how to implement emergency transfers. In addition, as discussed earlier, some housing providers said they needed more direction on how programs could coordinate.

Most interest groups we interviewed (six of nine) said housing providers needed more written direction on emergency transfers from HUD. Some interest groups noted more information on implementation was needed because the model emergency transfer plan did not include this information, did not explain how to conduct external transfers, or did not address differences in programs or local conditions. HUD's revised draft model plan provides additional information on what policies to include in an emergency transfer plan, but it does not include direction for housing providers on how to implement emergency transfers.

The Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity stated HUD has been updating its VAWA forms, such as the self-certification form. HUD plans to review the 2017 notices on VAWA requirements after the new forms are finalized and consider expanding on best practices in the notices, as needed, according to HUD officials. Officials added that HUD also plans to cover implementation of emergency transfers in training and technical assistance in 2024.

Without additional written instructions from HUD (particularly on steps to take when implementing emergency transfers), PHAs and PBRA

⁴⁰Department of Housing and Urban Development, *PIH Guidance Principles*, accessed April 18, 2024, https://www.hud.gov/open/innovation_ideas_in_action/pihguidanceprinciples.

Planned Training for Housing Providers

providers will continue to face challenges during the transfer process and thus may not effectively inform and serve survivors.

HUD developed a multiyear plan to provide training to PHAs and PBRA providers that aims to address the training needs housing providers and interest groups identified in interviews. The 2022 VAWA reauthorization authorized funding for VAWA training and technical assistance to fund such activities in fiscal years 2023–2027. According to the Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity, \$10 million will be used for this training and technical assistance. HUD executed contracts with three technical assistance providers in late 2023, according to the Director. As of January 2024, HUD established a multiyear draft workplan for these training dollars and began conducting VAWA-related training.

Previously, HUD had not conducted comprehensive VAWA training coordinated across programs, according to the Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity. In July 2017, PIH and Multifamily conducted program-specific training on the VAWA regulation. These training sessions were conducted virtually and are still available to watch online.

In 2022 and 2023, HUD conducted webinars related to VAWA and emergency transfers. For example, a three-part webinar series provided information about the updated definitions and provisions of the 2022 VAWA reauthorization. While this training was not targeted to PHAs or PBRA providers, HUD posted the webinars on its VAWA website for anyone to access.

As discussed earlier, PHAs, PBRA providers, and housing advocacy groups we interviewed said that additional training was needed on emergency transfers and the basics of domestic violence and sexual assault. HUD's 2023–2026 draft workplan contains courses to address these needs. For example, it includes foundational courses on trauma and domestic violence, housing protections for survivors, and updates on VAWA forms. The workplan also includes provision of general and individual technical assistance to housing providers on implementing emergency transfer plans. HUD officials told us they planned to hold training sessions on trauma-informed practices related to sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking along with housing protection requirements for survivors in 2024.

HUD Recently Began Monitoring PHAs' Emergency Transfer Efforts, but Has Not Developed Similar Procedures for PBRA

Monitoring of PHAs

Prior to 2023, HUD did not perform VAWA-specific monitoring of PHAs' implementation of VAWA-related emergency transfers, according to PIH officials. In 2023, PIH added a VAWA compliance checklist to its comprehensive compliance monitoring efforts and reviewed about 190 PHAs.⁴¹ According to PIH officials, 2023 was the first time the agency completed reviews in person since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

The VAWA compliance checklist contains about 30 questions, including 12 on PHA's emergency transfer plans (see fig. 3). These questions cover the elements of the VAWA regulation, such as confidentiality measures, reasonable efforts to assist an external transfer, and documentation requirements. According to PIH officials, the checklist was added in response to the 2022 VAWA reauthorization. PIH officials said their office plans to update the checklist annually to align with HUD's overall monitoring and data collection efforts.

⁴¹PIH's comprehensive compliance monitoring includes reviewing PHA operations, management, financial condition, physical condition, and governance. PHAs are selected for monitoring using a risk-based approach. The number of PHAs reviewed each year is dependent on the Secretary's priorities, according to PIH officials, who added that the goal was to review all PHAs over time. According to HUD's Comprehensive Compliance Monitoring Review Plan, the number of PHAs reviewed each year will increase in the future. There are about 3,300 PHAs.

Figure 3: HUD's Violence Against Women Act Compliance Checklist for Public Housing Agencies

OFO Compliance Monitoring Checklist
WAWA-1 | 1/22 v. 1.1 *FOR INTERNAL USE

Reviewers	Question No.	Question	Cited Regulation	Response	Flag for Report	Collected by reviewer	Assigned to	Reviewer comments	Supporting document & page in working folder
	142	Does the PHA prohibit the denial of assistance, tenancy, or occupancy based on domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking?	34 U.S.C. 12491(b)(1) and (b)(3)(A); 24 CFR 5.2005(b)(1), (b)(2), and (d)(4)	Yes No Other					
	143	Does the PHA prohibit the denial of assistance, tenancy, or occupancy rights solely because of an occurrence of criminal activity directly related to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking by a member of the household of the tenant, or any guest or other person under the control of the tenant, if the tenant or affiliated individual of the tenant is the victim or threatened victim?	34 U.S.C. 12491(b)(1) and (b)(3)(A); 24 CFR 5.2005(b)(1), (b)(2), and (d)(4)	Yes No Other					
	144	If the PHA evicts, removes, or terminates assistance to an individual under 34 U.S.C. 12491(b)(3)(B)(i), and they were the sole tenant eligible for assistance, does the PHA provide the remaining tenant or residents an opportunity to establish eligibility and/or a reasonable time to find new housing or eligibility for housing under a different covered housing program?	34 U.S.C. 12491(b)(3)(B)(i)	Yes No Other					
	145	Does the PHA allow for lease termination to evict, remove, or terminate assistance to any individual who is a tenant or lawful occupant of the housing and who engages in criminal activity directly related to domestic violence?	34 U.S.C. 12491(b)(3)(B)(ii); 24	Yes No					

Sample questions

Determine Remotely?	Question No.	Priority = very high	Question	Cited Regulation	Response	Flag for Report
	142	1	Does the PHA prohibit the denial of assistance, tenancy, or occupancy based on domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking?	34 U.S.C. 12491(b)(1) and (b)(3)(A); 24 CFR 5.2005(b)(1), (b)(2), and (d)(4)	Yes No Other	
	143	1	Does the PHA prohibit the denial of assistance, tenancy, or occupancy rights solely because of an occurrence of criminal activity directly related to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking by a member of the household of the tenant, or any guest or other person under the control of the tenant, if the tenant or affiliated individual of the tenant is the victim or threatened victim?	34 U.S.C. 12491(b)(1) and (b)(3)(A); 24 CFR 5.2005(b)(1), (b)(2), and (d)(4)	Yes No Other	
	144	1	If the PHA evicts, removes, or terminates assistance to an individual under 34 U.S.C. 12491(b)(3)(B)(i), and they were the sole tenant eligible for assistance, does the PHA provide the remaining tenant or residents an opportunity to establish eligibility and/or a reasonable time to find new housing or eligibility for housing under a different covered housing program?	34 U.S.C. 12491(b)(3)(B)(i)	Yes No Other	

Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). | GAO-24-106481

A lack of VAWA-specific monitoring prior to 2023 may have contributed to some PHAs in our document review sample not having emergency transfer plans or having plans that did not address all regulatory requirements. HUD found issues related to VAWA compliance in about half of the PHA reviews it analyzed in 2023.⁴² Common issues HUD identified included lack of emergency transfer plan information, use of expired forms, and VAWA rights not disclosed to tenants.

Monitoring of PBRA Providers

HUD's oversight of PBRA providers' compliance with VAWA-related emergency transfer requirements has been uneven. PBRA properties are primarily monitored through remaining tenant and occupancy reviews that

⁴²HUD analyzed a subset of PHA reviews (63 of 194) to identify common findings, according to HUD officials.

occur annually or less frequently, depending on the property's risk level. As a part of the review process, HUD or contractor staff are to assess PBRA properties' compliance with VAWA emergency transfer provisions.

In 2017, HUD issued a notice for PBRA property owners and managers on the VAWA regulation.⁴³ The notice states compliance with VAWA provisions (including adoption of an emergency transfer plan) will be assessed during management and occupancy reviews. The notice lists the questions on the review form that can be used to assess VAWA compliance.⁴⁴

However, questions on the form do not specifically describe VAWA requirements (see fig. 4). For example, question 14 has 16 sub-questions related to application processes and tenant selection. The form asks about the presence of a tenant selection plan. However, it does not ask about an emergency transfer plan or if the tenant selection plan ensures that requests for VAWA-related internal emergency transfers receive at least the same priority as other types of emergency transfer requests. The management and occupancy review form was published in June 2016, before the 2016 VAWA final rule was issued, and it has not been updated since.

⁴³Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization Act of 2013 – Additional Guidance for Multifamily Owners and Management Agents*, H-2017-05 (Washington, D.C.: June 30, 2017).

⁴⁴According to the notice, the regulatory requirements related to VAWA should be reviewed under questions 14, 16, 21, 22, and 25 of the management and occupancy review form (HUD Form 9834). The Multifamily Asset Management and Project Servicing handbook lists 24 C.F.R. part 5 as one of the regulatory requirements to be assessed under those questions, and VAWA provisions are located in Subpart L of 24 C.F.R. part 5.

Figure 4: HUD's Management and Occupancy Review Form for the Project-Based Rental Assistance Program

Management Review for Multifamily Housing Projects

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Housing – Federal Housing Commissioner

OMB Approval No. 2502-0178
Exp. 04/30/2018

PURPOSE: To assess management and oversight of multifamily housing projects.

INSTRUCTIONS: This form is to be completed by HUD staff, Performance Based Contract Administrators (PBCA), Traditional Contract Administrators (CAs) and Mortgagees of Consigned Projects (Mortgagees). The Management Review form consists of three parts: Desk Review, On-site Review with Addenda, and Summary Report. All reviewers of subsidized projects must complete Addenda A, B, C, & D. Reviewers of unsubsidized projects must complete Addenda B & C only. If any questions on any given form are not relevant to the program under review or if the information is not available, denote with "N/A". FHEO staff provide HUD staff a list of requests for documents and special observations each year. Additional guidance regarding the management process can be found in HUD Handbooks 4350.1, REV-1 and 4566.2.

A. Prior to On-Site Review

Complete Part I – Desk Review

- To complete the Desk Review worksheet prior to the on-site visit, review the project files, system reports, and other documents, and contact the HUD representative for any unavailable information needed to complete the desk review. Fair Housing/Civil Rights review requirements are all in Addendum B. This portion of the review will assist the reviewer in identifying potential problem areas. Owner must complete Addendum B, Part A, and send it to Multifamily Housing. HUD staff must complete the entire Desk Review for subsidized projects. For unsubsidized projects, HUD staff/mortgagees must complete all applicable sections. CAs must complete the entire Desk Review except where noted. This question applies only to HUD Staff/Mortgagees.
- Schedule a date for the on-site review with the owner/agent and confirm the review date in writing. The owner/agent should be given at least a two-week notice in writing and notified of the documents that need to be available the day of the review, as specified in Addendum C. Addendum C provides a list of documents noted by the reviewer that the owner/agent must have available during the on-site review. Addendum C and Part A of Addendum B must be forwarded to the owner/agent with the letter confirming the scheduled on-site review. The reviewer may request additional items as necessary.

B. Conducting the On-Site Review

Complete Part II – On-Site Review

- On-Site Reviews will be completed as follows:
 - HUD staff and Mortgagees must complete all applicable questions in Part II.
 - CAs must complete all questions in Part II except where noted. This question applies only to HUD staff/Mortgagees.
 - HUD staff completing a review of a project which is also reviewed by CAs. In accordance with Part D, bring back all information requested by FHEO.
- Use additional sheets as necessary to complete applicable.
- Upon completion of the on-site review, the reviewer will:

C. After On-Site Review

- The reviewer will record deficiencies, findings and action. The condition describes the problem or deficiency. The cause explains why the condition occurred, owner/agent must do to eliminate the deficiency. The discovered errors and omissions, but also describe to assure that the errors and omissions do not reoccur.
- The reviewer completes Addendum B and forwards it Marketing Plans in accordance with "General Operating Multifamily Housing Projects", which may be found.
- Complete Summary Report as follows:
 - Based on the Report of Findings, the reviewer will as or C (Corrective action required) and include target c the TCD column.
- For each of the seven major categories (A, B, C, D, E, enter a score of zero (0)). After rating the individual categories A through G, CAs will rate all categories c can be found in HUD Handbook 4350.1, REV-1.
- Distribute the Summary Report and cover letter as fol
 - Project Owner (original)
 - Management Agent (copy)
 - HUD office for PBCA reviews rated
 - HUD office for all traditional CA es
- *A copy of the completed Management Review Repo
- If a below average or unsatisfactory rating is determin provided in HUD Handbook 4350.1, REV-1.
- All Secure Systems users must document all required

D. Management Review Deficiency Follow up.

- Reviewer must conduct follow-up activity until all co dates in REMS.
- Housing reviewers will Forward all completed FHEO within 5 business days of receipt of the checklists fro

NOTE: The Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) check compliance with applicable Fair Housing laws and regulations is HUD staff must maintain the original checklist in the project file.

CATEGORY E. LEASING AND OCCUPANCY (This Category does not apply to Mortgagees)

14. Application Processing and Tenant Selection

a. Does the application form contain sufficient information to determine applicant eligibility? Yes No

Comments:

b. Does the application ask whether the applicant or any member of the applicant's household is subject to a lifetime state sex offender registration program in any state? Yes No

Comments:

c. Does the application ask for a listing of states where the applicant and members of the applicant's household have resided? Yes No

d. Is form HUD-92006 "Supplement to Application for Federally Assisted Housing", an attachment to the application or part of the application package? Yes No

form HUD-9834 (06/2016)
Ref: HUD Handbook 4350.1, REV-1
and HUD Handbook 4566.2

• 47 pages
• No questions specific to the Violence Against Women Act

Sample question

Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). | GAO-24-106481

In our interviews with PBRA providers, some noted that their management and occupancy review included a review of their emergency transfer plans, while others said it did not. According to Multifamily officials in Chicago's regional office, those conducting the reviews do not consistently check PBRA properties' compliance with VAWA provisions. HUD Multifamily officials also noted that a likely contributing factor to this inconsistency is the absence of explicit VAWA-related language on the review form.

Similar to PHAs, a lack of VAWA-specific monitoring may have contributed to some PBRA providers in our document review sample not having emergency transfer plans or having plans that did not follow HUD's requirements. For example, two of 30 selected PBRA providers

did not have emergency transfer plans or policies. In addition, documentation for 25 selected PBRA providers did not describe policies for making internal transfers when a safe unit was not immediately available. The VAWA regulation requires PBRA providers to include these policies in their emergency transfer plans.

Without VAWA-specific language on the management and occupancy review form to help ensure consistent compliance with VAWA-related emergency transfer provisions, HUD will be limited in its ability to monitor and address these issues at PBRA properties. In turn, noncompliance by PBRA providers can affect survivor's ability to move to new, safe housing.

Compliance Enforcement by FHEO

The 2022 VAWA reauthorization requires HUD to implement and enforce VAWA's housing rights and ensure compliance with those requirements. In January 2023, FHEO published a notice implementing VAWA's enforcement requirements by providing for the filing and investigation of VAWA complaints using HUD's existing Fair Housing complaint process.⁴⁵ These reviews investigate housing providers based on complaints, according to HUD officials.

As of November 2023, FHEO had received 110 inquiries related to emergency transfers, of which 40 resulted in investigations. Four of these investigations were closed, and none resulted in a charge of discrimination. According to FHEO officials, some emergency transfer cases have been procedural, such as housing providers not informing individuals of their VAWA rights or not providing information on the emergency transfer process. Other cases have been substantive, such as housing providers not offering a requested emergency transfer.

Formalizing Compliance Reviews in Regulation

The 2022 VAWA reauthorization requires HUD to establish a process to review compliance with VAWA's housing rights and issue a regulation

⁴⁵Section 602 provides the Secretary of HUD and the Attorney General with the authority to "implement and enforce this chapter consistent with, and in a manner that provides, the rights and remedies provided for in title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. § 3601 et seq.)," commonly referred to as the Fair Housing Act.

detailing this process by March 15, 2024.⁴⁶ More specifically, it requires HUD to conduct these reviews on a regular basis, using existing review processes as appropriate. The reviews must assess six areas, including compliance with survivor confidentiality provisions, notification requirements, and emergency transfer requirements. In addition, the regulations must define compliance standards for housing providers and include standards for corrective action plans when standards have not been met.

However, as of April 2024, HUD had not yet issued this regulation and did not have a specific timeline for issuing it. The Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity stated that a working group had been developing a draft regulation, but the specifics of the rule were under discussion. HUD held two listening sessions to discuss VAWA implementation with stakeholders in June 2023. However, HUD was not able to provide additional specifics about the progress made towards issuing the regulation.

Without formalizing the review process in regulation as required by law, compliance reviews may be inconsistent or incomplete. For example, FHEO officials noted that several issues related to VAWA complaints (such as whether advocacy groups could file complaints or not) were undecided because, in part, HUD had not yet issued regulations for compliance reviews. Currently, FHEO officials said they must make decisions on a case-by-case basis due to the lack of precedent in this area. In addition, FHEO officials said they would have more clarity on these issues once HUD promulgates the regulation.

⁴⁶Section 602 of VAWA 2022 adds a new section 41412 to VAWA (34 U.S.C. § 12492), which requires appropriate federal agencies to establish a process to review compliance with applicable requirements in title IV of VAWA (34 U.S.C. chapter 121, subchapter III, Part L). Agencies are to regularly conduct such reviews and assess the following six items: (1) compliance with requirements prohibiting the denial of assistance, tenancy, or occupancy rights on the basis of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking; (2) compliance with confidentiality provisions set forth in section 41411(c)(4) of VAWA (34 U.S.C. § 12491(c)(4)); (3) compliance with the notification requirements set forth in section 41411(d)(2) of VAWA (34 U.S.C. § 12491(d)(2)); (4) compliance with the provisions for accepting documentation set forth in section 41411(c) of VAWA (34 U.S.C. § 12491(c)); (5) compliance with emergency transfer requirements set forth in section 41411(e) of VAWA (34 U.S.C. § 12491(e)); and (6) compliance with the prohibition on retaliation set forth in section 41414 of VAWA (34 U.S.C. § 12494). The new section 41412 of VAWA also requires each appropriate agency to develop regulations to implement these changes related to compliance review.

HUD Has Not Collected Data on Emergency Transfers

Although HUD's 2016 VAWA regulation calls for data collection, HUD has not yet finalized reporting requirements and does not have a plan or timeline for collecting data on emergency transfers from PHAs or PBRA providers. The VAWA regulation includes a requirement for housing providers to track the number and outcomes of emergency transfer requests and report this information annually to HUD. In addition, the 2022 VAWA reauthorization requires HUD to issue a regulation by March 15, 2024, detailing the reporting requirements, including the number of emergency transfers requested and granted and the length of time taken to process emergency transfers.

In response to public comment, HUD stated in the summary of its 2016 VAWA final rule that it would solicit comments on the data collection provision through a separate notice before housing providers would be required to comply, due to the potential cost to providers. In November 2022, HUD published proposed data collection elements for public comment in the Federal Register.⁴⁷ The proposed data collection would ask housing providers for the number and outcome of emergency transfer requests, such as

- the number of requests that were denied;
- the outcome of approved emergency transfers, including the number that resulted in internal and external transfers, that were pending placement, and that did not result in a transfer; and
- the length of time it took to process emergency transfers.

As of April 2024, HUD had developed a draft data collection form based on these elements but had not yet drafted a plan with procedures or timelines for collecting the data. The Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity said HUD was working on finalizing the form and planned to publish the final version in the Federal Register by fall 2024. HUD officials did not have a final timeline on when data collection for PHAs and PBRA providers would begin but estimated it would be in 2024. The Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity said HUD had not established a timeline for data collection, because the program offices needed to address issues, such as confidentiality, before data could be collected.

⁴⁷60-Day Notice of Proposed Information Collection: Implementation of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, 87 Fed. Reg. 66723 (Nov. 4, 2022).

Each program office also will need to create a process for collecting the data from housing providers, according to HUD officials. PIH officials said they plan to collect these data annually through existing systems, while Multifamily officials said they plan to collect the data through their existing monthly reporting process. Both offices are waiting for the data form to be finalized before starting to use it for their respective programs, according to HUD officials. In addition, program offices are required to perform a privacy impact assessment for each data system, which could take up to 45 days per system, according to the Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity.⁴⁸

In addition, PIH and Multifamily officials stated they have not developed a plan to prepare PHAs or PBRA providers for collecting these data but may provide updated notices and training. Most PHAs and PBRA providers we interviewed told us they did not collect data on emergency transfers other than the documentation related to the request. Most added that collecting data on the number and outcome of emergency transfers would not be challenging. Specifically, seven of 10 PHAs and seven of 10 PBRA providers we interviewed said collecting these data would be “not at all challenging.” In contrast, during our site visits, representatives from three PHAs expressed concerns about the resources required to collect these data or the need to keep survivors’ information confidential.

Developing a plan and timeline to collect these data would help ensure HUD will obtain the required data. The continued lack of data limits HUD’s ability to answer congressional questions on this program and effectively direct its own policies, according to the Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity. For example, if the data indicated that providers in certain areas were struggling to make emergency transfers, the agency would need to address that, according to the Director.

Conclusions

HUD has made improvements supporting and monitoring PHAs and PBRA providers on emergency transfers since hiring a director in 2021 to coordinate policy matters involving gender-based violence. For example, the agency recognized and began to correct weaknesses in its model emergency transfer plan and developed a training and technical assistance workplan to address needs expressed by PHAs and PBRA

⁴⁸A privacy impact assessment is an analysis of how information is collected, stored, protected, shared, and managed. The purpose of the assessment is to demonstrate that privacy protections have been incorporated throughout the life cycle of a system.

providers. It also began monitoring PHAs' VAWA compliance and investigating VAWA complaints.

However, PHAs and PBRA providers we interviewed detailed several challenges they face in making emergency transfers. HUD has been delayed in some of its efforts to address these challenges. We identified areas in which HUD could improve support to these providers, such as by finalizing a revised model emergency transfer plan and providing additional written instructions on making transfers. By doing so, HUD could improve the transfer process for providers and survivors.

We also identified areas in which HUD could improve its VAWA monitoring of PBRA providers and formalize its compliance review process in required rulemaking. By doing so, HUD could ensure it consistently addresses VAWA compliance among housing providers. In turn, ensuring compliance may improve the process for needed transfers and survivor access to safe housing.

Finally, HUD does not have data on the frequency or outcome of emergency transfer requests made to PHAs or PBRA providers (which is required by HUD regulation). HUD developed a draft data collection form but does not have a plan and timeline for collecting the data once the form is finalized. By developing such a plan, HUD would help ensure it will obtain the required data on emergency transfers from providers. Having such data would enhance HUD's ability to target program activity (including communications and training) and oversight.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following seven recommendations to HUD:

The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity finalizes a revised model emergency transfer plan that meets all VAWA regulatory requirements. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Assistant Secretary for PIH provides written instructions to PHAs, such as through notices or frequently asked questions, on how to implement emergency transfers, including information related to external transfers and coordination. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Multifamily Housing provides written instructions to PBRA providers, such as through notices or frequently asked questions, on how to implement

emergency transfers, including information related to external transfers and coordination. (Recommendation 3)

The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Multifamily Housing revises the management and occupancy review form (HUD-9834) to incorporate specific questions on PBRA properties' compliance with VAWA emergency transfer requirements. (Recommendation 4)

The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity finalizes a regulation implementing the compliance review requirements of VAWA 2022, including defining standards of compliance and standards for corrective action plans. (Recommendation 5)

The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Assistant Secretary for PIH develops and implements a plan, including a timeline, for PIH to collect the required data on emergency transfers from PHAs. (Recommendation 6)

The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Multifamily Housing develops and implements a plan, including a timeline, for Multifamily to collect the required data on emergency transfers from PBRAs. (Recommendation 7)

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to HUD for review and comment. HUD provided written comments, which are reproduced in appendix II and summarized below. HUD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

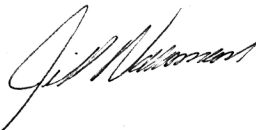
HUD agreed with our recommendations. The agency stated it plans to finalize an updated model emergency transfer plan, finalize a regulation implementing VAWA 2022 compliance review requirements, and implement data collection for PHAs and PBRA providers. It also stated Multifamily is updating the management and occupancy review form to accommodate VAWA emergency transfer requirements.

With regard to our recommendations on providing written instructions to PHAs and PBRA providers, HUD suggested we revise them to include other types of instruction, such as webinars and technical assistance. As our report notes, HUD has developed a multiyear training and technical assistance plan and begun conducting VAWA-related training. This plan includes technical assistance to housing providers on implementing

emergency transfers, which we agree is a good step. In contrast, the agency has provided limited written instruction on implementing emergency transfers. In addition, HUD stated the 2017 notices issued by PIH and Multifamily described the requirements specific to emergency transfers. As our report states, while these notices provided information on creating emergency transfer plans, they did not provide direction on how to implement them, especially external transfers. Many housing providers and interest groups we interviewed noted a need for more written information from HUD on implementing emergency transfers. Therefore, we did not revise these recommendations and maintain that written instruction is still needed.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Acting Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-8678 or NaamaneJ@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.



Jill Naamane
Director, Financial Markets and Community Investment

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

This report examines (1) the extent to which selected housing providers have adopted emergency transfer plans and policies, (2) any challenges selected housing providers identified that they experienced with emergency transfers and strategies for addressing these challenges, and (3) the extent to which the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) supports and monitors housing providers' efforts. We focused our review on HUD's Public Housing and Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) programs. We also considered how local administrators of these programs used Housing Choice Vouchers to facilitate emergency transfers. We focused on these programs because they are HUD's largest rental housing assistance programs.

Review of Selected Emergency Transfer Plans and Policies

For our first objective, we analyzed documentation of emergency transfer plans and policies from a nongeneralizable sample, comprising 30 public housing agencies (PHA) and 30 PBRA properties. To select our sample, we used HUD administrative data as of March 2023 to group housing providers by number of assisted units and rural and urban classification.¹ We then randomly selected housing providers for variation in size and type of location (small, medium, and large properties and urban and rural areas). Based on interviews with HUD officials with knowledge of the data and manual testing for missing data and obvious errors, we determined that the data were reliable for selecting this sample.

We created variables representing the size categories of PHAs and PBRA properties. For PHAs, we consolidated HUD's six predetermined size categories into three: small (1–100 units), medium (101–999 units), and large (1,000 or more units). For PBRA properties, HUD's dataset does not categorize the size of the properties based on the number of assisted units. Therefore, we used HUD's total assisted unit count to create a new variable representing the size of the PBRA property: small (1–50 units), medium (51–100 units), and large (101 or more units).

To ensure geographic representation, we limited the number of housing providers located in the same state to 10 percent of the sample.² In addition, for PHAs, we ensured the sample included at least five PHAs in each of the following HUD program categories: public housing only,

¹We used two datasets on PHA and PBRA property information from HUD's GIS Helpdesk website, as of March 2023. HUD's datasets include a variable to denote whether the housing provider is located in an urban or rural area, using the U.S. Census Bureau's method for urban and rural delineation. Data as of March 2023 were the most recently available at the time of our review.

²The sample had PHAs and PBRA properties located in 31 states and Puerto Rico.

Housing Choice Vouchers only, and both public housing and Housing Choice Vouchers.

We requested emergency transfer plans and related policies from the PHAs and PBRA properties in our sample. PHAs and PBRA properties provided documents that were current as of July 2023.³ We then analyzed these documents (using a data collection instrument) against relevant requirements of HUD's 2016 implementing regulation for the 2013 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). The requirements we reviewed included the following:

- presence of an emergency transfer plan,
- documentation that may be required to request an emergency transfer,
- policies to assist tenants in making an internal emergency transfer when a safe unit is not immediately available, and
- efforts to assist tenants in making an external emergency transfer when a safe unit is not immediately available.⁴

In addition, for policies or efforts to assist tenants in making external transfers, we determined if the descriptions in the documents were specific or not. We determined descriptions were specific if they described actions the housing provider would take or the process for assisting the tenant in making an emergency transfer. For example, documentation that described sharing tenant files with a new housing provider for an external transfer would be specific.

Finally, we determined if the documents discussed whether the provider would give priority to survivors in making internal or external transfers. One analyst made the initial determinations and then a second analyst reviewed and verified the accuracy of these determinations. The analyst and reviewer discussed any disagreements orally and in writing and then documented consensus on the final analysis results. The information collected from this sample of PHAs and PBRA providers documentation

³According to HUD field office officials, housing providers generally do not update their emergency transfer plans unless a change is required. There has not been a change required for emergency transfer plans since we collected these documents from housing providers in July 2023.

⁴As discussed earlier in the report, the HUD regulation implementing requirements in the 2013 VAWA reauthorization defines emergency transfers as internal (moving a survivor to a unit for which they would not be considered a new applicant) or external (moving a survivor to a unit for which they would be considered a new applicant).

cannot be generalized to the larger population of all PHAs and PBRA providers.

Review of Selected Housing Provider Challenges and Strategies for Addressing Them

For the second objective, we conducted structured interviews with representatives from a subset of 10 PHAs and 10 PBRA properties from the document review sample. Our interviews focused on how these entities implemented their emergency transfer plans or policies, including the number of emergency transfer requests received in the last 10 years, coordination with other housing providers, challenges in making emergency transfers, and effective strategies for making emergency transfers. We also asked for their observations on HUD's guidance, training, and assistance and their data collection efforts related to emergency transfer requests.

We judgmentally selected these PHAs and PBRA properties from our document review sample to represent a variety of characteristics in terms of size, urban or rural classification, and geography (states in which they were located). To ensure the interview group included housing providers able to share specific information about their emergency transfer processes, we selected housing providers with documented emergency transfer plans.

The structured interviews used a standardized questionnaire, and we recorded the responses in a data collection instrument at the time of the interview. The questionnaire included both closed-ended questions (those with pre-identified response categories) and open-ended questions (those without prerecorded response categories). We then coded the responses to the open-ended questions to identify common themes and determine their frequency. An analyst assigned a code that best summarized interviewer statements. A second analyst reviewed and verified the accuracy of the initial coding. The coder and reviewer discussed any disagreements about code assignments orally and in writing and then documented consensus on the final analysis results. The information collected from this sample of PHAs and PBRA providers cannot be generalized to the larger population of all PHAs and PBRA providers.

We also conducted site visits to three communities (San Francisco and Oakland, greater Boston, and Chicago) to learn about their strategies and challenges in implementing emergency transfers.⁵ We selected these

⁵We conducted virtual interviews with housing providers and advocacy groups in the greater Boston area.

communities because HUD staff, survivor advocacy groups, and housing interest groups identified them as areas with strategies for addressing emergency transfer challenges. During the site visits, we interviewed representatives from PHAs, PBRA property management companies, housing advocacy groups, and a Continuum of Care (which administer HUD homelessness assistance in local communities).⁶

We also interviewed HUD field office officials (from Public Indian Housing and Multifamily Housing Programs) in these communities to discuss the challenges for housing providers and survivors in the emergency transfer process and what strategies they use to address these challenges. We did not evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies.

To obtain perspectives on the challenges housing providers and survivors face during the emergency transfer process, we interviewed representatives of nine interest groups, including housing industry groups and survivor and housing advocacy groups.⁷ For housing industry groups, we selected national organizations with large memberships or those that provided VAWA training to housing providers. For survivor and housing advocacy groups, we selected national organizations with research or policy statements on housing issues related to domestic violence or sexual assault. The information collected from these interest groups cannot be generalized to the larger population of all interest groups.

Review of HUD's Support and Monitoring of Emergency Transfer Efforts

For the third objective, we reviewed the 2013 and 2022 reauthorizations of VAWA, HUD's 2016 VAWA regulation, and other notices published in the Federal Register. These included the November 2022 notice of proposed information collection and January 2023 request for public

⁶From the San Francisco and Oakland areas, we interviewed representatives from the Oakland Housing Authority, San Francisco Housing Authority, John Stewart Company, Alton Management Corporation, San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing and Urban Development, San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Services, and La Casa de Las Madras. From the greater Boston area, we interviewed representatives from the Boston Housing Authority, Cambridge Housing Authority, Cambridge Continuum of Care, Maloney Properties, Peabody Properties, MassHousing, Casa Myrna, and the WilmerHale Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School. From Chicago, we interviewed representatives from the Chicago Housing Authority, Mercy Housing, Related Management Group, Evergreen Real Estate, The Network, and All Chicago.

⁷We interviewed representatives from the Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, Nan McKay and Associates, Inc., National Affordable Housing Management Association, National Housing Law Project, National Leased Housing Association, National Network to End Domestic Violence, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, National Sexual Violence Resource Center, and Public Housing Authorities Directors Association.

comment on training and technical assistance needs.⁸ We compared HUD's current and draft model emergency transfer plans (published in the Federal Register) against HUD's VAWA regulation to assess if the plans included the required elements.⁹ These elements include detailing the priority given to survivors seeking emergency transfers, incorporating confidentiality measures, describing policies for assisting survivors making an internal transfer when a safe unit is not immediately available, and detailing required documentation for requesting an emergency transfer. One analyst made the initial determination and another reviewed and verified that decision, reconciling any disagreements.

We analyzed HUD's direction and instruction to PHAs and PBRA providers on developing and implementing emergency transfer plans against Office of Public and Indian Housing's (PIH) Guidance Principles.¹⁰ We reviewed HUD's notices and memorandums to these housing providers on the 2016 VAWA final rule and 2022 reauthorization.¹¹ We also reviewed HUD's VAWA website and relevant sections of HUD's occupancy handbooks for PHAs and PBRA providers, such as chapters on waiting lists and tenant selection.¹²

⁸24 C.F.R. §§ 5.2001-5.2011; 87 Fed. Reg. 66723 (Nov. 4, 2022); 88 Fed. Reg. 321 (Jan. 4, 2023).

⁹81 Fed. Reg. 80724 (Nov. 16, 2016); 87 Fed. Reg. 66723 (Nov. 3, 2022); 24 C.F.R. § 5.2005(e).

¹⁰Department of Housing and Urban Development, *PIH Guidance Principles*, accessed April 18, 2024, https://www.hud.gov/open/innovation_ideas_in_action/pihguidanceprinciples.

¹¹For example, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Public and Indian Housing, *Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 Guidance*, Notice PIH-2017-08 (Washington, D.C.: May 19, 2017); Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Housing, *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization Act of 2013 – Additional Guidance for Multifamily Owners and Management Agents*, H 2017-05 (Washington, D.C.: June 30, 2017); Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Public and Indian Housing, *Housing Provisions of the Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act of 2022* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2023); and Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Housing, *Housing Provisions of the Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act of 2022* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 10, 2023).

¹²Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Occupancy Requirements of Subsidized Multifamily Housing Programs*, Handbook 4350.3 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 27, 2013); and Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Public and Indian Housing, *Public Housing Occupancy Guidebook* (Washington, D.C.).

We reviewed HUD's current and planned training and technical assistance materials on emergency transfers, which included requesting the topic, target audience, and whether the training was mandatory or optional from HUD. We also reviewed the contents of HUD's online training sessions for housing providers on implementing the VAWA regulation. We reviewed HUD's 2023–2026 draft training work plan.

For HUD's monitoring of housing providers' efforts on emergency transfers, we reviewed HUD's policies and procedures for monitoring PHAs and PBRA providers and enforcing VAWA's housing rights under the 2022 reauthorization. We reviewed PIH's 2023 plan for its comprehensive compliance reviews of a sample of PHAs.¹³ We reviewed PIH's VAWA compliance checklist that was part of these reviews and compared it against relevant VAWA provisions and HUD's VAWA regulation. We also reviewed HUD's findings from these reviews as they related to VAWA and emergency transfers.

In addition, we reviewed Office of Multifamily Housing Programs' (Multifamily) policies and procedures for its management and occupancy reviews of PBRA properties as they related to VAWA and emergency transfers.¹⁴ We reviewed the form used to conduct the management and occupancy reviews for mentions of VAWA and emergency transfers and compared the form against Multifamily's policies and procedures.¹⁵

We compared HUD's planned data collection efforts against VAWA provisions and HUD's VAWA regulation. We reviewed HUD's proposed data collection elements published in the Federal Register.¹⁶ We also asked housing providers that we interviewed (detailed above) about their

¹³PIH's comprehensive compliance monitoring includes reviewing PHA operations, management, financial condition, physical condition, and governance. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Public and Indian Housing, *Comprehensive Compliance Monitoring Review Plan* (Washington, D.C.: January 2023).

¹⁴HUD uses management and occupancy reviews to ensure that HUD's multifamily housing programs are administered as intended by identifying deficiencies to eliminate fraud, waste, and mismanagement. See *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization Act of 2013 – Additional Guidance for Multifamily Owners and Management Agents*. Also see Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Multifamily Asset Management and Project Servicing*, Handbook 4350.1 (Washington, D.C.: August 2010).

¹⁵Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Housing, *Management Review for Multifamily Housing Projects*, Form HUD-9834 (Washington, D.C.: June 2016).

¹⁶87 Fed. Reg. 66723 (Nov. 4, 2022).

current emergency transfer data collection efforts and their views on HUD's proposed data collection elements.

We also interviewed HUD's Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity and officials from HUD's PIH, Multifamily, and Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity about the agency's current and planned guidance, training, technical assistance, monitoring, and policies and procedures for emergency transfers. In addition, we asked these officials about HUD's plans to issue regulations to implement VAWA provisions.

We conducted this performance audit from December 2022 to July 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Housing and Urban Development



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, DC 20410

June 20, 2024

Jill Naamane
Director, Financial Markets and Community Investment
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Subject: Opportunities to Improve Oversight of Emergency Transfers for Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault within the Department of Housing and Urban Development

Dear Ms. Naamane:

On behalf of the Acting Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”), thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report of the Government Accountability Report GAO-24-106481 (“GAO”) titled, “Rental Housing: Opportunities Exist to Improve Oversight of Assistance to Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault” (“Draft report”), which examines housing providers’ implementation of emergency transfer plans and opportunities for improvement. GAO’s audit was triggered by a directive in the Joint Explanatory Statement for the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, to “identify and study PHAs with effective transfer plans and report on their process for creating and implementing their plans, weaknesses and strengths of the emergency transfer plans, and any best practices that could be adopted by other PHAs.”

GAO’s Draft Report concluded that HUD has taken several positive steps since 2021 and could improve serving survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking by finalizing a revised model emergency transfer plan, improving its VAWA monitoring of PBRAs, formalizing its compliance review process, and collecting data on the outcome of emergency transfer requests made to PHAs and PBRAs.

The Draft Report identified the aforementioned areas of possible improvement and offered seven recommendations fully implementing VAWA’s requirements in the housing title. The Department shares the following formal responses to GAO’s draft recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity finalizes a revised model emergency transfer plan that meets all VAWA regulatory requirements.

HUD agrees with this recommendation and will finalize an updated model emergency transfer plan in accordance with VAWA’s regulatory requirements.

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Recommendation 2: The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Assistant Secretary for PIH provides written instructions to PHAs, such as through notices or frequently asked questions, on how to implement emergency transfers, including information related to external transfers and coordination.

HUD recommends revising the recommendation to read: “The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Assistant Secretary for PIH provides instructions for PHAs, such as through written notices, frequently asked questions, webinars, or other technical assistance efforts, on how to implement emergency transfers, including information related to external transfers and coordination.”

Additionally, HUD notes that PIH Notice 2017-08 already describes the requirements specific to emergency transfers. PIH intends to provide additional information as it updates its guidance as part of the implementation of VAWA 2022. PIH is also working with a technical assistance provider to develop training and resources, which will elevate best practices for effectuating emergency transfers.

Recommendation 3: The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Assistant Secretary for Multifamily provides written instructions to PBRA providers, such as through notices or frequently asked questions, on how to implement emergency transfers, including information related to external transfers and coordination.

HUD recommends revising the recommendation to read: “The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Assistant Secretary for Multifamily provides instructions for PBRA providers, such as through written notices, frequently asked questions, webinars, or other technical assistance efforts, on how to implement emergency transfers, including information related to external transfers and coordination.”

Additionally, HUD notes that MFH Housing Notice 2017-05 already describes the requirements specific to Emergency Transfer Plans, Emergency Transfer Policies, and External Emergency Transfers. MFH intends to provide additional information as it updates its guidance as part of the implementation of VAWA 2022. MFH also intends to facilitate stakeholder learning sessions so that owners can share and learn from best practices in this area.

Recommendation 4: The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Assistant Secretary for Multifamily revises the management and occupancy review for (HUD-9834) to incorporate specific questions on PBRA properties' compliance with VAWA emergency transfers requirements.

MFH is currently updating form HUD-9834 to implement Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act (HOTMA) requirements and to accommodate VAWA emergency transfer requirements and regulations for the purposes of enforcement.

Recommendation 5: The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Director of Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity finalizes a regulation implementing the compliance review requirements for VAWA 2022 including defining standards of compliance and standards for corrective action plans.

**Appendix II: Comments from the Department
of Housing and Urban Development**

3

HUD agrees with this recommendation and will finalize a regulation implementing VAWA 2022's new provisions of the housing title, including the provisions on compliance reviews at 34 U.S.C. 12492.

Recommendation 6: The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Assistant Secretary for PIH develops and implements a plan, including a timeline, for PIH to collect the required data on emergency transfers from PHAs.

HUD accepts this recommendation. PIH will implement this data collection through an annual PHA submission upon OMB approval. PIH is in the process of developing the plan and timeline to do so.

Recommendation 7: The Secretary of HUD should ensure the Assistant Secretary for Multifamily develops and implements a plan, including a timeline, for Multifamily to collect the required data on emergency transfers from PBRAs.

HUD accepts this recommendation. HUD's Office of Multifamily will implement this data collection through an annual (or more frequent) submission by owners covered by VAWA, so that data can be collected regularly and can be pulled from HUD systems for annual and other reporting purposes.

In sum, HUD concurs with comments on the Draft Report, including the seven recommendations set forth, and will work to implement them in the manner outlined above.

Sincerely,

KARLO NG

Digitally signed by: KARLO NG
DN: CN = KARLO NG C = US O = U.S.
Government OU = Department of
Housing and Urban Development, Office
of the Secretary
Date: 2024.06.20 16:50:04 -04'00'

Karlo Ng
Director on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Equity
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Jill Naamane, 202-512-8678 or NaamaneJ@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Lisa Moore (Assistant Director), Katherine Carter (Analyst in Charge), Hannah Dodd (Analyst in Charge), Monica Alvarez-Scott, Rachel Batkins, Rachel DeMarcus, Marc Molino, Patricia Powell, Barbara Roesmann, Jessica Sandler, Sara Shore, and Cassandra Vaught made key contributions to this report.

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