The low down on Request for Rent Increases

Raising rent on a Section 8 tenant works differently than a standard lease renewal. You can't just send a notice and expect the increase to go through—the request has to go through an approval process first.

Here's everything you need to know about Section 8 rent increases.

How Section 8 Rent Works

First, let's clarify the basics. In a Section 8 / Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) lease:

- **Total rent** = what you receive as the landlord
- **HAP (Housing Assistance Payment)** = portion paid by the WCHA
- **Tenant portion** = portion paid by the tenant (based on their income)

The tenant's portion is typically 30-40% of their adjusted income. When you raise total rent, the **HAP usually increases** while the tenant portion stays the same—until their next income recertification.

This is actually good news for landlords: you can often raise rent without increasing the tenant's out-of-pocket cost.

The Rent Increase Process

Here's the typical flow for raising rent on a Section 8 unit:

Step 1: Check Your Lease Terms

Most Section 8 leases allow rent increases once per year, often at the annual recertification. Check your Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) contract for specifics.

Step 2: Submit a Request to the WCHA

You'll need to:

1. Fill out the WCHA's rent increase request form
2. Provide the proposed new rent amount
3. Submit **60-90 days before** the effective date (varies by Authority)
4. **Submission prior to 90-days or any submission after the anniversary date will not be accepted, per authority policy and Administrative Plan.**

Don't skip this step

You cannot unilaterally raise rent on a Section 8 tenant. The Authority must approve it first. Charging more than the approved amount violates the HAP contract.

Step 3: Rent Reasonableness Review

The WCHA will compare your proposed rent to:

- Similar unassisted units in the area
- Your unit's condition and amenities
- Recent comparable rentals

WCHA will assess your unit against comparable rentals in the area

If your request is "reasonable," they'll approve it. If it's too high, they may:

- Approve a lower amount
- Deny the increase entirely
- Ask for justification

Step 4: Wait for Written Approval

Don't change anything until you receive **written approval** from the Authority. This typically comes within 10-45 days after your request.

Step 5: Update the Lease

Once approved, send the tenant a formal rent increase notice and update your records. The authority will also send out notice of the increase to the tenant.

How Much Can You Raise Rent?

There's no fixed cap on Section 8 rent increases however WCHA caps the increase at $75 due to funding allotment from HUD and WCHA uses **rent reasonableness** as the standard.

In practice, this means:

Situation	Likely Outcome
Rent is below market	Increase usually approved
Rent is at market	Small increase (2-4%) often approved
Rent is above market	Increase may be denied

Typical annual Section 8 rent increase (when approved) **3-5%**

PHAs want to keep good landlords in the program. If your request is reasonable and your unit is in good condition, you'll usually get approved.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. Missing the Deadline

WCHA requires advance notice- 60-90 days prior to the tenant's anniversary date. Miss this window and you may have to wait another year.

2. Asking for Too Much

A 15% increase on a unit already at market rent will likely get denied. Be realistic.

3. Neglecting the Unit

If your unit fails NSPIRE-V inspection, your rent increase is going nowhere. Fix issues first.

4. Charging Before Approval

This is a serious violation. Always wait for written authority approval before changing the rent.

What About the Tenant?

Here's the good news: in most cases, a rent increase **doesn't directly raise the tenant's portion**.

The tenant's payment is based on their income, not your rent. So, if you raise total rent from $1,500 to $1,575:

- HAP might go from $1,200 to $1,275
- Tenant portion stays at $300 (until their next income review)

This makes rent increases easier on Section 8 tenants than market-rate tenants.

Good to know

The tenant portion can change at income recertification (usually annual). But your rent increase alone doesn't trigger this—their income change does.

NSPIRE-V Inspections and Rent Increases

WCHA requires a unit to pass inspection before approving rent increases. Make sure:

- Smoke/CO detectors work
- No health or safety hazards
- All appliances function
- No deferred maintenance issues

A failed inspection delays (or denies) your rent increase request.

Tips for Section 8 Landlords

1. **Request increases annually.** Don't let years go by.
2. **Track market rents.** Know what comparable units rent for.
3. **Maintain your unit.** Pass inspections easily.
4. **Build PHA relationships.** Know your WCHA department.
5. **Document everything.** Keep records of all communications.

The Bottom Line

Section 8 rent increases require more process than standard leases, but they're absolutely worth pursuing. Most PHAs approve reasonable increases, and your tenant's out-of-pocket cost often stays the same.

The key is to:

- Submit requests on time
- Stay within market rates
- Keep your unit in good condition
- Get written approval before changing anything

Do this consistently, and you'll maximize income while keeping good tenants.