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By JOURNAL STAFF

To deal with a budget shortfall, the King County Housing Authority Board of Commissioners made cuts in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance program.

Families in the program will pay more in rent each month, and assistance to new households will be halted.

The Housing Authority is responding to a \$3.5 million reduction in 2005 funding by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program is a critical support for low-income families at a time when housing costs are outstripping income," said Doreen Cato, chair of KCHA's Board of Commissioners. "Less money from HUD, however, means less money to pay for vouchers."

This year's funding shortfall is the equivalent to the cost of 375 vouchers - or 5.5 percent of the current program, according to the Housing Authority. The program serves more than 8,100 low-income households, and more than 5,100 families are on the waiting list.

About half the households on the program - which allows low-income families to seek private market housing - are disabled and/or elderly. Typically, participants pay 30 percent of their income for rent on a modest rental unit, with the voucher picking up the remainder.

The commissioners voted to:

- Stop issuing new Section 8 Housing Choice vouchers. Vouchers turned in by families who leave the program will not be used to assist new families.
- Deny landlord requests for rent increases. The impact could be that landlords may elect to no longer participate in the program as their costs go up, according to Housing Authority.
- Decrease the payment standard - the maximum amount of subsidy the authority will pay for each size of rental unit within a given housing market. Many households will be required to increase their rent contributions and likely will pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing.