



Better Business Bureau®

# Scam Alert!

Breaking News from Better Business Bureaus



## Scammers Prey on Affordable Housing Seekers

June 12, 2015

In a particularly malicious scam, con artists have created fake websites that prey on those looking for affordable housing (sometimes called "Section 8"). The sites appear to offer a way to sign up for a voucher wait list, but they really collect fees and personal information from victims.

### How the Scam Works:

You are looking for affordable housing and search online for the housing choice voucher waiting list. You click one of the top search results, and it takes you to a website. The site looks real and even has an Equal Housing Opportunity logo.

You start to sign up for the wait list, but the site asks for a registration fee and personal information, such as your Social Security number. Don't enter it! The fee goes straight to scammers' bank accounts, and con artists can use your personal information to commit identity theft.

In another version of this scam, the fake websites list Section 8 properties that supposedly are available. You can rent one... if you pay the first month's rent via wire transfer or a prepaid card. The ads are fakes, and, if you pay, you just lost your money.

### Tips to Avoid an Affordable Housing Scam:

- ? **Contact your local housing authority.** To register for a housing choice voucher program, you need to go through your local housing authority. You'll find their email and phone number [on the Housing and Urban Development website](#).
- ? **Housing authorities do not charge fees.** They also won't reach out to you by phone or email to suggest that you join a waiting list.
- ? **Don't wire money or use a prepaid debit card:** Scammers often pressure people into wiring money or putting cash on a prepaid debit card. Why? It's like sending cash: once it's gone, you can't trace it or get it back. Government agencies do not typically ask for money using these forms of payment, so consider that a "red flag."
- ? **Be a skeptical search engine user:** Just because something appears high in search engine results does not necessarily mean it's legitimate. Be sure to double check the URL or type it in directly if making a purchase or sharing personal information online.
- ? **Have you seen this kind of scam?** [File a complaint with the FTC](#) and [HUD](#).

**NOTE:** Although this scam focuses on affordable housing in the U.S., residents of Canada and other countries should be on the lookout for similar scams that take advantage of people looking for help through government housing programs.

### For More Information

To learn more, read the [Federal Trade Commission's alert](#) on Section 8 housing scams. To find out more about other scams, check out BBB Scam Stopper ([bbb.org/scam](http://bbb.org/scam)).