

Beware of online Section 8 scammers

Here are steps to protect yourself

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If you are looking for Section 8 housing assistance, take precautions: scammers have made websites that look like registration sites for Section 8 waiting list lotteries.

If you pay a fee or give your personal information, the scammers will take it. And you won't be on a real Section 8 waiting list. In fact, there is no fee to register for a Section 8 waiting list.

If you search online for the Section 8 voucher waiting list, the top search results often are bogus sites. The sites look very real: their names may say "Section 8," and they might show an Equal Housing Opportunity logo. They ask for fees and your personal information, like your Social Security number, but they won't do anything for you. The scammers will keep your money and disappear. They also may give your personal information to identity thieves.



Here's the real way things work: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s Section 8 program provides funding to local government housing authorities. The local authorities issue housing choice vouchers to help people find housing in privately-owned rental units. To get on the waiting list for a voucher, find your local housing authority and call or email them. Ask how to sign up for the Section 8 waiting list lottery in your area. Again, there is no fee to register.

In another twist, some fake sites list Section 8 properties that supposedly are available. They promise you can rent one, if you pay the first month's rent via wire transfer or a prepaid card. The properties might exist, but the ads are fakes placed by scammers. If you pay, you just lose your money.

People have lost money and personal information to scammers – but they've also lost the chance to be in the actual lottery. Most people don't realize they've been scammed until after the waiting list is closed.

Keep these tips in mind to avoid a Section 8 lottery scam:

* Contact your local housing authority to find out how to register for the Section 8 waiting list lottery. A link to HUD's local office contact list for Oregon can be found at [211info.org/housing](https://www.211info.org/housing).

* Do NOT send money. Housing authorities do not charge fees and will never ask you to wire money or pay with a prepaid card.

* Treat your Social Security number and other personal information (such as credit card numbers), like cash. Don't give them out on a website you find through a search.

* Don't use Craigslist to find Section 8 housing. Fake apartment listings on the site are becoming more prevalent. **HousingConnections.org** can provide an alternate way to search online housing listings. But all sites pose potential risks. Just remember to never provide anyone personal information until you view the rental and meet the property manager in person.

