



## “Protect PII” Message to PHA Staff

This is a friendly reminder about our responsibility to safeguard “personally identifiable information” (PII) about applicants, residents and participants in our PHA housing assistance programs. With many of us working from home or away from our regular office most of the time, it can be more difficult to remember and follow the practices we use to keep private data secure in our offices.

Both federal and state law, as well as PHA policies, require us to protect private information about our clients, regardless of where we are working.

Whether we call it “private data” or “PII” (HUD’s term), we mean information that either:

- Directly identifies an individual PHA client (such as name, Social Security Number, specific address, etc.); or
- Can be used to trace an individual’s identity or access their private information, when combined with other personal or identifying information which is linked to that person (such as place of birth, mother’s maiden name, etc.).

Please observe these three guidelines:

1. **USE THE VPN.** For employees who are working from home, it is critically important to use the PHA’s virtual private network (VPN) while working with PII from a home computer. The VPN allows an employee to work remotely using the PHA’s computers. PHA messages, documents and other data that you access through the VPN are not being stored on your private computer (PC) or other personal device.
2. **DO NOT “SAVE” or store any file containing PII on your own PC or other device.** As much as possible, continue to save all files and messages on your PHA computer using the VPN. However, if you must save a copy of the data to your device, you must also take steps to prevent PII from being accessed by unauthorized persons. At minimum, the files must be protected by passwords and/or other encryption methods.
3. **DO NOT SEND OR RECEIVE EMAIL MESSAGES WITH PII or attach files containing PII using your personal email account (Gmail, etc.).** Even when you are using your PHA email (Outlook), do not send “sensitive” PII without protecting it. One way is to attach a file containing the PII and protect the file with a password. Then call the recipient or send a separate text message or email with the password.

Please contact your supervisor if you have any questions about what PII is, how to use the VPN, or how to safely store or transmit data.

Thanks for your diligence in protecting the privacy of PHA clients!

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