NYC Human Resources Administration
Department of Homeless Services
Department of Social Services

Special One Time Assistance (SOTA) Program Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is the Special One Time Assistance ("SOTA") program?**
   The SOTA program will pay one year of rent for eligible Department of Homeless Services (DHS) clients to move within New York City, to other New York State counties, or to another state, Puerto Rico, or Washington, D.C. SOTA can be accessed by households with recurring income from employment, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability (SSD) benefits and a rent that does not exceed 40% of the household's current or projected income.

2. **Who is eligible?**
   Eligibility criteria include the following:
   - <u>Families with children</u>: The household must have been in shelter for at least 90 days.
   - <u>Single adults and adult families</u>: The household must have been in shelter for 90 days out of the last 365 days.
   - SOTA is only provided to households whom DSS has determined will likely have the future ability to pay the rent once they no longer have the SOTA grant to cover their rent. Households must have recurring income from employment, SSI or SSD benefits and a rent that does not exceed 40% of that current or projected income. If the household is moving within New York City (only), it must not be eligible for any federal, State or City rental subsidy.

3. **How is the ability to pay rent determined?**
   In order to use SOTA, clients will be required to provide proof of income, and the rent must not be more than 40% of household income.

4. **How does a household in shelter apply for SOTA?**
   Case managers and housing specialists identify clients who may be eligible for SOTA. In addition, clients may reach out to their case manager or housing specialist if they believe they may be eligible. Housing specialists assist clients with their housing search and clients may also identify units on their own.

5. **Can SOTA be used for room rentals?**
   Yes. SOTA can be used for room rentals. Room rentals are only allowed in apartments or single-family dwellings in New York City and the utilities must be included in the rent. Rooms will only be approved for households that have one or two adults with no children and will not be approved if the room is in a rent-stabilized or rent-controlled unit.

6. **Is an apartment review required when using SOTA?**
   Yes. DHS or provider staff conduct walkthroughs utilizing a comprehensive apartment review checklist for all units within New York City, in the New York State counties of Nassau, Rockland, Suffolk, and Westchester, or in the New Jersey counties of Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Passaic, and Union.

7. **What if the apartment fails the review?**
   If the apartment fails review, but corrections are made in a timely manner and the apartment passes a second review or obtains a Certificate of Correction for the conditions from the local authority, the apartment may still be approved for SOTA.

8. **What aftercare resources are available to clients moving out with SOTA?**
   SOTA participants can call the SOTA Hotline at 718-557-1399 if they:
   - are having problems related to housing that the landlord is not fixing.
   - are being evicted or threatened with eviction.
   - are facing a loss or reduction of income and need a referral for services to help increase their income (for example, job training or career services).
   - are having issues that could affect their ability to remain permanently housed.
   - need guidance on other services available in their community (for example, information on how to register a child for school).

9. **When will the landlord receive SOTA payments?**
   Beginning in February 2020 for new SOTA participants, rental payments under the SOTA program will be made to landlords on a monthly basis.

10. **What happens if a client leaves the apartment during the lease?**
    Per the terms of the SOTA landlord agreement, the landlord will be obligated to notify HRA within 5 business days of learning that the tenant left the unit and return any funds in excess of the client's residency. If funds are not returned, the City will pursue legal means of recoupment. Tenants should also promptly notify DSS if they leave the unit before the end of the SOTA period.

11. **If a landlord tries to evict the tenant during the first year, how can the tenant get help?**
    Tenants can call the SOTA Hotline and ask about eviction prevention services available in their community. Tenants in New York City can be referred by HRA to a lawyer who can represent them in housing court. As per the terms of the landlord agreement, if an eviction occurs, the landlord will be obligated to return any funds in excess of the client's residency. If funds are not returned, the City will pursue legal means of recoupment.

12. **What if a DSS client returns to New York City shelter within the 12-month time frame?**
    DHS and HRA will work closely with the client to understand why they may be returning, assess and address their unique needs as appropriate, and help them avoid re-entering shelter whenever possible, including by assisting them in returning to their apartment.

13. **What if an individual or family is unable to pay their portion after the 12-month time frame?**
    SOTA is only provided to households whom DSS has determined will likely have the future ability to pay the rent once they no longer have the SOTA grant to cover their rent. Households must have recurring income from employment, SSI or SSD benefits and a rent that does not exceed 40% of that current income. Tenants can call the SOTA Hotline if they are facing a loss or reduction of income and need a referral for services. If the tenant is in NYC, they can go to the local Homebase program or HRA Benefits Access Center for assistance. As a last resort, if there is no other viable housing, an individual or family may reapply for shelter after the end of their 12-month participation in the SOTA program. To date, only a very small number of individuals or families have done so.

14. **Can a client receive SOTA more than once?**
    No. DHS clients are only eligible for this rental assistance one time.