

When applying for homeless assistance, programs funded by the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#) follow a strict, standardized hierarchy to document an applicant's prior residence or lack thereof.  HUD Excha... +1

Under federal guidelines (such as the [Emergency Solutions Grants Program](#) or Continuum of Care programs), agencies must prioritize **third-party verification first, intake worker observation second, and applicant self-certification third**. Critically, a complete lack of third-party documentation **cannot be used to deny someone immediate emergency shelter** or street outreach services.  Georgia Department of ... +2

The Documentation Hierarchy

Agencies must attempt to collect evidence in this specific order of priority: 

1. Third-Party Documentation (Preferred)

This is independent, written verification of where the applicant has been staying. Examples include:  HUD Exchange

- **HMIS Records:** Automated reports pulled directly from a regional [Homeless Management Information System \(HMIS\)](#) showing shelter stays.  HUD Exchange
- **Service Provider Letters:** Written certifications or letters from an emergency shelter manager, street outreach worker, or soup kitchen staff verifying the person's unsheltered status.  NC... +1
- **Institutional Documents:** Discharge paperwork, official letters, or oral referrals from social workers at hospitals, jails, or treatment facilities confirming a stay of 90 days or less (provided the applicant was unsheltered or in a shelter immediately before entry).  HUD Excha... +1
- **Imminent Risk Evidence:** Formal eviction notices, past-due utility statements, or court orders showing the applicant will lose their primary residence within 14 days.  HUD Excha... +1

2. Intake Worker Observation

If written third-party documentation is unavailable, an agency staff member can verify the living situation through direct observation.  HUD Excha... +1

- **Physical Assessment:** The intake worker visits the location where the person is living (e.g., a tent encampment, a car, an abandoned building) and documents the conditions in writing.  Georgia Department of Co...
- **Case Notes:** Detailed, dated log entries by a outreach worker detailing their face-to-face interactions with the individual in public spaces.  NC... +1

3. Self-Certification (Last Resort)

When no third-party or observational evidence can be obtained, HUD permits applicants to self-certify their lack of a fixed residence.  HUD Excha... +1

- **Signed Statements:** The applicant completes a written, signed, and dated [Self-Declaration of Eligibility](#) or housing instability form outlining their recent living history and lack of financial resources.  CivicPI... +1
- **Intake Due Diligence:** The intake worker must formally document the specific, exhaustive steps they took to look for third-party evidence and explain why it was unavailable.  HUD Excha... +1

Documentation Rules by Assistance Type

Type of Assistance	Strictness of Rules	Key Documentation Standard
Emergency Shelter / Street Outreach	Flexible	A self-certified sign-in sheet or verbal statement is legally sufficient. No one can be turned away from immediate shelter due to a lack of paperwork.
Rapid Re-Housing (RRH)	Moderate	Requires verification of "Literally Homeless" status (Category 1), ideally through third-party shelter letters or outreach logs.
Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)	Strict	Requires a comprehensive Chronic Homeless Certification demonstrating long-term homelessness (12 consecutive months or 4 separate occasions totaling 12 months over 3 years).

Homelessness Prevention	Strict	Requires third-party source documents proving imminent risk, such as legal eviction orders or utility shut-off notices.
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Special Circumstances

- **Fleeing Domestic Violence:** For safety reasons, if an individual is fleeing domestic violence, human trafficking, or dangerous living conditions, a **written self-certification** by the individual is accepted as primary evidence. No third-party verification from the abuser or previous landlord is ever required.  River Edge Behavioral ... +1
- **Lack of a Physical Address:** For benefits that normally require a permanent address (like state IDs or SNAP), individuals experiencing homelessness are legally permitted to use the address of a local shelter, a designated community day center, or a local post office offering [USPS General Delivery services](#). 