

**Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development**  
City and County of San Francisco



**London N. Breed**  
Mayor

**Kate Hartley**  
Director

**Hold Harmless Policy for MOHCD's Income Limits & Maximum Rents**  
*Effective: 5/3/2019 (update to the initial policy that was effective 2/19/2016)*

**Background**

Every year, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") publishes area median income ("AMI") data for jurisdictions across the United States. The City and County of San Francisco, acting through its Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development ("MOHCD"), is a part of the San Francisco HUD Metropolitan Fair Market Rent Area ("SF HMFA"), which contains San Francisco, San Mateo and Marin County. MOHCD uses HUD's unadjusted AMI for SF HMFA as opposed to adjusted AMI, which is inflated to reflect high cost factors, to establish the income limits, maximum rents and sales prices that apply to affordable housing projects and programs regulated by MOHCD.

In 2016, MOHCD established a Hold Harmless Policy which stated that in any year when AMI decreased, MOHCD would maintain the income limits, maximum rents and sales prices at the previous year's levels in order to protect the operational integrity of affordable and inclusionary housing developments.

**Purpose**

This update to the Hold Harmless Policy (this "Policy") adds a limit to annual increases to income limits, maximum rents and sales prices published by MOHCD in order to mitigate the significant financial burden on low- and moderate-income tenants and homebuyers during periods of high escalation of AMI in San Francisco.

This Policy establishes the following:

- Limit annual increases to income limits, maximum rents, and sale prices to a maximum of 4%<sup>i</sup>
- Uphold the current policy of maintaining income limits, maximum rents and sales prices at the previous year's levels in years when AMI, as published by HUD, has decreased.

This Policy is intended to limit harm by:

1. Protecting tenants from displacement due to annual rent increases that would cause a significant financial burden; and
2. Protecting the operational integrity of housing developments so that owners are able to cover operating costs that typically increase annually, even when AMI decreases; and

- Ensuring that San Francisco’s low-, moderate- and middle-income workforce retain access to homeownership opportunities.

**Hold Harmless Limits**

For the purpose of this Policy:

“**HUD SF AMI**” means the maximum income by household size, maximum rent by unit type, and maximum sales prices as published annually by MOHCD, derived from the median income determined by HUD for the San Francisco area, adjusted solely for household size, but not high housing cost area, also referred to as “Unadjusted Median Income”.

“**MOHCD AMI**” means the maximum income by household size, maximum rent by unit type, and maximum sales prices as published annually by MOHCD under this Policy.

“**Housing Provider**” means any person or entity that owns a multi-family property that is restricted for the purpose of affordable housing and/or subject to MOHCD administration, regulations, or policies.

Limited Increases: Annual increases to MOHCD AMI shall be limited to the lesser of: (1) the percentage amount necessary to adjust MOHCD AMI to match the then-current year’s HUD SF AMI, or (2) four percent (4%)<sup>i</sup>. This Policy limits year-over-year increases to MOHCD AMI to 4% in periods of high HUD SF AMI escalation, while allowing MOHCD AMI to “catch up” to HUD SF AMI during periods when HUD SF AMI grows slowly, is static, or decreases.

Limited Decreases: This update to the Policy does not eliminate the Hold Harmless Policy adopted in 2016. In years when the MOHCD AMI matches the HUD SF AMI, and the subsequent year’s HUD SF AMI decreases, MOHCD will maintain the MOHCD AMI from the previous year. If, in subsequent years, HUD SF AMI decreases again, stays flat, or increases to a level that is still lower than before the initial decrease, MOHCD will maintain its published AMI until such time as the HUD SF AMI increases to a level that is greater than the MOHCD AMI.

The application of this Policy may result in the creation of a calculation of MOHCD AMI that is different than the HUD SF AMI. The below chart demonstrates how this Policy would be applied over a hypothetical 6-year period:

	Base Year	Year 2		Year 3		Year 4		Year 5		Year 6	
	AMI	AMI	% Change	AMI	% Change	AMI	% Change	AMI	% Change	AMI	% Change
<b>HUD SF AMI</b>	100.0	108.0	8.0%	107	-0.9%	111	3.9%	109.0	-2.0%	112.5	3.2%
<b>MOHCD AMI</b>	100.0	104.0	4.0%	107	2.9%	111	3.9%	111	0.0%	112.5	1.2%

Utility Allowances

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this Policy, it is important to note that a Housing Provider will be required to lower net rents (i.e. tenant-paid rent) as the result of increases in utility allowances in years when the MOHCD AMI matches the HUD SF AMI, and HUD SF AMI has decreased or remained flat. MOHCD AMI establishes the limits for maximum gross rent (aka “Tier 2 rent” under the City’s Inclusionary Housing Manual),” which consists of tenant rent plus utility allowance. If HUD SF AMI decreases or remains flat, and therefore MOHCD AMI remain the same as the previous year, an increase in the utility allowance means that the tenant rent would have to be lowered.

Limited Hardship Waiver

MOHCD will consider, in its sole discretion, a waiver of this Policy from a Housing Provider with rental units restricted under contracts (i.e., loan agreement, grant agreement, or other agreement for funding from the City) with MOHCD upon demonstration that: (1) the MOHCD AMI imposes a financial hardship that puts at risk the Housing Provider's ability to cover reasonable operating costs and debt service, (2) existing tenants will not be unreasonably financially burdened by the Housing Provider's proposed rent increases, and (3) the Housing Provider is not in default under any contract with MOHCD. Any waiver from this Policy approved by MOHCD, in its sole discretion, shall apply for only one year. Housing Providers are solely responsible for providing MOHCD with any documentation requested by MOHCD to support a hardship waiver of this Policy.

---

<sup>i</sup> The application of the 4% increase is made on the amount for the 100% AMI level for a 4-person family. MOHCD continues to using rounding to the nearest \$50 on the calculations for all of the other income levels and household sizes. The use of rounding may create nominal differences in the percentage increases for all of the other max income levels and household sizes, as well as for all of the maximum rents.