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**HRA Policy Bulletin #2024-018**

*(This HRA PB Replaces HRA-PB-2024-013)*

**Date: July 11, 2024**

**DISTRIBUTION: ALL STAFF**

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**RESPONDING TO POTENTIALLY DISRUPTIVE OCCURRENCES AT  
HRA LOCATIONS AND TELEPHONE INTERACTIONS**

■ **OVERVIEW**

The purpose of this policy bulletin is to outline the actions to be taken by Program Staff, Directors, Deputy Directors, Site Supervisors and Designees, HRA Police, and Contracted Security Guard staff in responding to potentially disruptive occurrences, while ensuring all clients are treated with courtesy, compassion, and respect. This policy applies to courtesy guidelines related to “Potentially Disruptive Occurrences at HRA Locations and Telephone Interactions”.

■ **POLICY**

Many clients who seek benefits and services from the Agency are facing difficult life situations, and tensions may be heightened as a result of such challenges. The Agency is committed to serving all clients and ensuring staff interact with each client with courtesy, compassion, and respect.

Consistent with the Agency’s mission of serving those who seek benefits and services, it is the policy of the Agency that staff will make every attempt to defuse potentially disruptive occurrences, to effectively serve the client, ensure the smooth operation of services, and ensure the safety of applicants, participants and visitors.

■ **PUBLIC SAFETY**

Aligned with the HRA Workplace Violence Prevention Program, the Agency is committed to the safety and security of its employees and to preventing and/or minimizing the hazard of workplace violence for employees. In addition to employee safety, the Agency is committed to ensuring the safety of all members of the public at HRA locations.

**If there is an immediate safety threat, including all instances of physical violence, attempted assaults, threats reasonably perceived to result in physical violence, or other conduct that would be reasonably expected to lead to bodily harm (e.g. showing a fist, displaying a weapon, etc.) staff should contact HRA Police, Contracted Security Guard staff, and/or NYPD.**

## ■ POTENTIALLY DISRUPTIVE OCCURANCES AT HRA LOCATIONS

Potentially disruptive occurrences may occur while a client is interacting with Program staff or when there is no Program staff involvement.

### I. Program Staff Response

If Program staff is involved in a potentially disruptive occurrence that does not involve an Immediate Safety Threat, Program staff must contact their Program Supervisor. Once the supervisor arrives, staff must remove themselves from the situation.

- The Program Supervisor must:
  - Assess the situation.
  - Attempt to defuse the situation. These actions may include:
    - Attempting to relocate the client to further discuss the matter, in order to avoid staff and client disruption.
    - Assessing the client's needs.
    - Whenever possible, offering an alternative for service, e.g., using a self-service scanner, PC bank, ACCESS HRA, or visiting a participating community-based organization,
    - Offering to reschedule a return appointment for the client.
    - Working with the client to address any issues.

If the Program Supervisor is unable to defuse the situation, they must contact the Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or Designee who will determine next steps, including whether to contact HRA Police/Contracted Security Guard staff. If the Program Supervisor is the Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or designee, they will determine next steps.

## II. Director/Deputy Director/Site Supervisor/Designee Response

The Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or Designee must respond to the area and attempt to defuse the situation. These actions may include:

- Attempting to relocate the client to further discuss the matter, to avoid creating additional staff and client disruptions in the general public setting.
  - Assessing the client's needs.
  - Offering to schedule a return appointment for the client.
  - Working with the client to address any issues.
  - Working with Regional staff as needed to resolve the situation.
  - Providing the client with information on making a formal complaint.
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- If a client refuses to comply with a request but is **not disrupting Program Operations** and does not pose a danger to themselves or others (e.g., eating in a waiting area, charging a cell phone in a restroom, etc.), the Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or Designee should not involve HRA Police, Contracted Security Guard staff, or NYPD. In such situations, the Director/Deputy Director/Site Supervisor or Designee should periodically reassess the situation to ensure the client's behavior has not become so disruptive that HRA Police/Contracted Security involvement is warranted.
  - If the Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or Designee is unable to defuse the situation, and the client is disrupting Program Operations, the Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or Designee must communicate with HRA Police/Contracted Security Guard staff regarding next steps.

## III. HRA Police/Contracted Security Guard Staff Response

- If Contracted Security Guard staff observes or responds to a situation, they must:
  - Assess the situation.
    - Attempt to defuse the situation.
      - i. If they are unable to defuse the situation, they must notify HRA Police on site, or
    - If no HRA Police is on site, contact the Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or Designee, if they have not been involved already. See section II, Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or Designee Response, above. If the Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or Designee has already been involved, see section IV, HRA Police/Contracted Security Guard Staff Follow-up, below.

- If HRA Police observes or responds to a situation, they must:
  - Assess the situation.
  - Attempt to defuse the situation.
  - If attempts to defuse are unsuccessful, they must contact the relevant Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or Designee, if they have not been involved already. See section II, Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor, or Designee Response, above. If the Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor, or Designee has already been involved, see section IV,
  - HRA Police/Contracted Security Guard Staff Follow-up, below.

#### IV. HRA Police/Contracted Security Guard Staff Follow-up

- If a client refuses to comply with a request or an order but is **not disrupting Program Operations** and does not pose a danger to themselves or others (e.g., eating in a waiting area, charging a cell phone in a restroom, etc.), HRA Police/Contracted Security Guard staff should not issue a Criminal Summons or call NYPD. In such situations, HRA Police/Contracted Security Guard staff should periodically reassess the situation to ensure the client's behavior has not become so disruptive that issuing a Criminal Summons or calling NYPD is warranted.
- If the Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or Designee is unable to defuse the situation, and the client is disrupting Program Operations:
  - If HRA Police are on site:
    - i. HRA Police must warn the client that if they refuse to stop their disruptive conduct, they will be escorted out of the location or possibly arrested if they refuse to leave.
    - ii. If the client does not respond to the warning, the HRA Police must escort the individual out of the building, advising them that they will receive no further services at that location for the rest of the day but can return on a subsequent day.
    - iii. If multiple attempts to escort the client out of the building are unsuccessful, HRA Police may issue a Criminal Summons for violation.
    - iv. If the situation persists or escalates, and HRA Police require assistance, HRA Police may contact NYPD.

- If HRA Police are not on site:
  - i. Contracted Security Guard staff will attempt to escort the client out of the building, advising them that they will receive no further services at that location for the rest of the day but can return on a subsequent day.
  - ii. If multiple attempts to escort the client out of the building are unsuccessful, Contracted Security Guard staff may contact NYPD, and must notify the HRA Police Operations Desk if NYPD was called.

**As described and bolded in the [Public Safety](#) section, if any interaction with a client, whether there is program involvement or not, escalates to an immediate safety threat, HRA Police, Contracted Security, and/or NYPD may be called, and the Director, Deputy Director, Site Supervisor or their designee should be notified.**

**Note:** While no client will be denied services, they may be required to access services on an appointment only basis for a period of time.

## ■ POTENTIALLY DISRUPTIVE OCCURANCES DURING TELEPHONE INTERACTIONS

Potentially disruptive occurrences may occur during telephone interactions between a client and Program staff.

Verbal judo can be used to minimize conflict and potentially disruptive occurrences during telephone interactions with clients.

### I. The 5 Steps of Verbal Judo When Engaging with a Client

#### 1. **Ask**

*“How may I assist you?”*

#### 2. **Set context**

Reasons that a client is upset can be that an application decision hasn't been made yet, client missed a deadline, items lost in mail, wrong mailing address on file, etc. Inquire and confirm.

#### 3. **Present options**

*“I can assist you in getting you an answer”.*

**4. Confirm**

*“Let’s get your issue resolved”.*

**5. Act**

Follow up with the client. This reinforces a sense of trust and respect.

**II. Telephone De-escalating Process**

The following guidelines inform staff on how to appropriately handle hostile, angry, and/or disruptive verbal behavior they may encounter from a client during telephone interactions.

Staff members are required to conduct themselves in a professional manner that will not further provoke anger or hostility during telephone interactions.

Pay close attention to what the client is saying. Facial expression and body language are not possible to see during a telephone call.

Verbal expressions of anger or hostility should not be ignored. Do not take it personally and try to put yourself in the client’s situation. Knowing the source of the anger can help to defuse it.

The following suggestions can be useful:

- Introduce yourself and the Agency you represent, and ask in a calm, pleasant tone, “How can I help you today?”
- Maintaining a calm voice can help defuse the client’s anger/frustration.
- Establish credibility. If you don’t know the answer to a question, say so and say that you will inquire about it; misinformation breeds further frustration and distrust.
- If you have to put the client on hold, let them know and get back to them ASAP.
- Listen, without offering advice or passing judgement or interrupting the client.
- Ask follow-up questions and paraphrase (repeat) what you have just heard. This puts the client at ease and eliminates misunderstanding. It also indicates that you are listening to their concerns.
- Explore alternatives and other choices available for handling the client’s concerns. Choices reduce the feeling of being trapped and helpless.

- Keep your word. This reinforces to the client that you can be trusted, and they feel a greater sense of support. This type of support will prevent escalation of anger.
- Be aware of and respect cultural diversity to prevent you from making incorrect assumptions.

### III. **Contact Supervisor**

Sometimes, despite our best and most professional efforts, it becomes necessary to handle a hostile situation. Staff need to be prepared to respond to any indicators of rising tension or hostility. If a client is losing self-control, it is vital that staff always maintain self-control.

Staff must get the client's telephone number. Staff must give a brief summary of the call to the de-escalation supervisor and transfer the telephone call with the client to the designated de-escalation supervisor. If the de-escalation supervisor is unavailable, staff must inform the client so they can decide if they want to leave a voicemail message for the de-escalation supervisor or have the staff member take a message and the de-escalation supervisor will return their call. Be sure to inform the client of these steps.

If the call drops for any reason, staff will let the client know that a supervisor will be contacting them by telephone. Refer to the script below.

#### **Staff Script**

*I'm sorry for the frustration you're experiencing. I am going to put you on hold and transfer your call to a supervisor, so I can get you further assistance. Can you please verify the telephone number in case we get disconnected? Thank you for verifying your telephone number. Please stay on the line while I put you on hold and connect you with a supervisor.*

*In case the call gets disconnected, my supervisor will be contacting you at the telephone number you provided. Thank you for your patience.*

*Effective Immediately*

**Related Items:**

Workplace Violence Prevention Program

HRA-PB-2019-002 Civility Guidelines