



August 24, 2023

Sarah Edelman
Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Single Family Housing
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20410

Re: Mortgage Letter 2023-03: CORRECTED AND REPUBLISHED: Expansion of the COVID-19 Recovery Loss Mitigation Options

Dear Ms. Edelman,

On behalf of the clients, communities, and companies we represent, we welcome the opportunity to offer comments on the Federal Housing Administration's (FHA) Mortgage Letter 2023-03, which extended the new loss mitigation programs and processes that were established during the pandemic. Both the servicing industry and consumer advocates who monitor this sector appreciate the FHA's engagement with stakeholders to make these updates. Like FHA, we want clear, operationally feasible loss mitigation options that will maximize the number of FHA borrowers eligible for assistance to remain in their homes.

In that spirit, we want to address a challenging policy development that has been introduced through the publication of ML 2023-03.¹ Specifically, we are concerned that, for borrowers who are not on a COVID-19 Forbearance, "the Borrower must be 90 or more Days Delinquent at the time the permanent loss mitigation documents are executed." This language seems to unintentionally eliminate all loss mitigation options, other than repayment plans, for borrowers who have missed one or two payments, but are less than 90 days delinquent. Our understanding is that the specific text at issue may have been included in the mortgagee letter to accommodate Ginnie Mae MBS Guidance that dictates the terms under which a loan can be removed from pool for a loan modification. However, the broad language in the FHA mortgagee letter also eliminates the standalone partial claim for borrowers who are less than 90 days delinquent on their loans, even though loans with partial claims do not have to be bought out of Ginnie Mae pools, and thus the Ginnie Mae 90-day delinquency rule does not apply.

We are concerned that this overly broad policy prevents the 382,375² delinquent borrowers who are between 30-90 days delinquent from qualifying for a standalone partial claim, even if their hardship has resolved, and they are able to resume their previous monthly payments. For these borrowers, the only

¹ Also, please note that the requirement referenced in ML 2023-03 is also found in FHA guidance governing the traditional loss mitigation waterfall that is currently suspended (page 1044 of Handbook 4000.1 published on 8/9/23).

² Recursion data on FHA delinquencies in Ginnie Mae Securities for July 2023.

program available is a repayment plan that will increase their monthly payment, which could derail their ability to consistently make their monthly mortgage payments.

The current FHA policy prohibiting standalone partial claims for certain delinquent borrowers, is also misaligned with the GSE Deferral Program. Recent GSE guidance makes their Payment Deferral Program available for any borrower who is 60 days delinquent.³ Although our preference is for FHA to make partial claims available to any delinquent borrower, because of the operation costs of executing partial claims, we understand that aligning with the GSE 60-day delinquency requirement may be seen as more efficient.

Our second issue with the policy identified above, is that it adds a new operational standard that is not practical for servicers to execute effectively. The mortgagee letter establishes a new timeframe for the level of delinquency tied to the borrower's execution of the modification documents rather than the servicer's offering of the loss mitigation option. This requirement introduces operational difficulty and risk; even if the borrower is 90-days delinquent when the modification documents are sent, a borrower could make a payment before execution, resulting in a potential violation of the rule. Put differently, the policy articulates a 90-day delinquency standard that is out of the servicer's control. Even if FHA believes that it must maintain a 90-day delinquency standard to comply with Ginnie Mae MBS Guidance, that Guidance does not measure delinquency status using the date when "documents are executed." Thus, we strongly recommend dropping the phrase "documents are executed" from any future delinquency standard. If an operational standard is needed, we recommend using "at the time of the evaluation" or "at the time of offer" as those are bright-line, point-in-time standards, that servicers can effectively and consistently operationalize.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the changes to the Mortgagee Letter and the Handbook, and to provide the above recommendations on an important servicing issue. We look forward to working with HUD on these issues and others as part of our broader body of work intended to bring greater certainty and clarity to the FHA single family program, to expand lender participation and consumer access, and to protect communities from blight. Should you have questions or wish to discuss this issue further, please contact Matt Douglas at matt.douglas@housingpolicycouncil.org, or Steve Sharpe at [ssharp@nclc.org](mailto:ssharpe@nclc.org) to discuss next steps.

Yours truly,

Housing Policy Council

National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients)

³ See Payment Deferral and Freddie Mac Bulletin 2023-8