



Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) and Prisoner Re-Entry



A growing number of people are released each year from state prison and local jails; this phenomenon, prisoner re-entry, has a significant impact on housing programs administered by PHAs, including public housing, the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8), and other programs.

- Each year, more than 650,000 people are released from state prisons in the United States, typically to a handful of neighborhoods in major cities.¹ An estimated nine million individuals are released annually from US jails.²
- The majority of people released from prison (71 percent, in a Maryland study) expect to live with their families, many of whom receive Section 8 housing subsidies, live in public housing, or live in other housing supported by PHAs.³
- 41 percent of families in one Chicago public housing project expected to receive a family member from prison within two years.⁴

Ensuring that people released from prison and jail find appropriate places to live is critical to public safety and healthy families and communities.

- People who do not find stable housing in the community are more likely to recidivate than those who do: the Georgia Department of Corrections determined that, with each move after release from prison, a person's likelihood of re-arrest increased by 25 percent.⁵
- Re-arrest and re-incarceration disrupts income and the ability of both the person arrested and his or her family to comply with a lease agreement.

- In New York, it costs more than \$32,000 per year to serve a single person who stays in homeless shelters and returns to prison. Hospitalizations and child welfare involvement drive this price tag even higher.⁶

PHAs can play a role in stopping this destructive cycle by considering potential tenants individually and partnering with public safety and service agencies to ensure that tenants get the help they need to stay in housing.

- The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) charges PHAs with maintaining safe housing communities, but permits significant discretion in determining admission policies: only individuals who are subject to lifetime registration under a state sex offender registration program and those who have been convicted of the manufacture or production of methamphetamine in federally assisted housing are barred for life.⁷
- State departments of corrections, parole, and probation consider housing a paramount issue in ensuring successful re-entry and preventing recidivism. By providing supervision, services, and (in some cases) financial supports, that encourage housing stability, corrections agencies can be valuable partners.
- PHAs and their partners can benefit from national efforts and resources around re-entry—the President's Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative, the Re-Entry Policy Council and its report, and the work of the Interagency Council on Homelessness and local coalitions focused on ending homelessness.

A few PHAs have developed innovative strategies and partnerships to promote safe and successful re-entry and positive housing outcomes for people released from prison and jail in their jurisdictions.

- **Identify properties and mediate with landlords.** The Salt Lake County (Utah) Housing Authority has partnered with the county government to place people released from the county jail, and other special populations, directly into housing through the Homeless Assistance Rental Program (HARP). The county government and contracted agencies will refer participants to HARP and provide case management to them in their housing, once they are placed. The Housing Authority will locate appropriate units and serve as a liaison with landlords, as well as assisting HARP participants with applications for federal housing assistance.
- **Provide housing subsidies for supportive housing, and consider applicants with criminal records individually.** The Housing Authority of Portland (Oregon) provides 89 Shelter Plus Care housing subsidies to approved participants in the Community Engagement Program (CEP-IV), a partnership with the homeless service organization Central City Concern and the nonprofit career placement and training organization Worksystems, Inc. One of the groups that CEP-IV targets are jail inmates who will return to homelessness upon release. A jointly-funded Housing Specialist helps program participants locate private market or community units in which to use these subsidies. In addition, the Housing Authority considers individually applications to public housing by people with criminal records, based on guidelines that rate the seriousness of particular crimes. Applicants may appeal denials, and are invited to bring evidence of rehabilitation and an advocate, such as a parole officer, to testify on their behalf at the hearing.

- **Convene local housing and corrections agencies to plan for successful re-entry outcomes.** The Burlington (Vermont) Housing Authority (BHA) convened a Regional Advisory Group, which developed a strategic and targeted response to address the housing needs of people returning to Chittenden County from jail and prison. Six municipalities in Chittenden County have endorsed the plan. In addition, the BHA has a set-aside of Section 8 vouchers for people released from jail. BHA staff also work with inmates in the county jail's transitional work program to plan their finances and housing placement upon completion of the program.

PHAs interested in addressing prisoner re-entry issues in their communities may consider taking the following steps:

- Contact local “Continuum of Care” or other homeless services coalitions to discuss current efforts to support the successful re-entry of people released from prison or jail.
- Contact local jail administrators and the state department of corrections to identify discharge planning strategies and resources that could help support people transitioning from jails and prison into public housing or housing supported by Section 8 vouchers.
- Determine whether the local community is one of the more than 200 communities that has developed a “10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness” as advocated by the federal Interagency Council on Homelessness and determine how these plans address issues of prisoner re-entry.

1. The number of people released from state prisons each year been steadily increasing—from slightly more than 600,000 in 2000 to more than 670,000 in 2004. See Paige M. Harrison and Allen J. Beck, “Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2005,” US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 2006), NCJ 213133.

2. The jail numbers (2004) were provided by Allen J. Beck, “The Importance of Successful Reentry to Jail Population Growth” (presentation at The Jail Reentry Roundtable of the Urban Institute, Washington, DC, June 27, 2006).

3. Nancy G. LaVigne et al., *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Maryland* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2003).

4. Sudhir Venkatesh, *The Robert Taylor Homes Relocation Study* (New York, NY: Columbia University, Center for Urban Research and Policy, 2002).

5. Tammy Meredith, John Speir, Sharon Johnson, and Heather Hull. *Enhancing Parole Decision-Making Through the Automation of Risk Assessment*. (Atlanta, GA: Applied Research Services, Inc., 2003).

6. Corporation for Supportive Housing, “Re-entry housing promotes public safety while saving public dollars,” cost analysis based on data provided by the New York State Division of Parole, 2006.

7. 24 Code of Federal Regulations 982.553 and 882.518.