

Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

# Housing for Criminal Justice Involved Individuals in the District of Columbia

Research Brief



## Introduction

In 2017, approximately 626,000 individuals were released from federal and state prisons, and an estimated 6.9 million additional individuals were released from local jails.<sup>1</sup> During the same time period, approximately 6,500 individuals were released from jail and prison, and more than 18,000 concluded their community supervision in the District of Columbia (the District).<sup>2</sup>

Returning citizens face several obstacles that may impede their ability to successfully transition back into the community. Nationwide, 80% of those incarcerated have a history of drug use, 13% have a history of mental illness, 19% are illiterate, and 31% were unemployed before their arrest.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, 40% of the adult correctional population has not completed high school, compared to only 18% of the US population that lacks a high school diploma or equivalent.<sup>4</sup> Many incarcerated persons face several of these challenges concurrently.

For these individuals, returning from a period of incarceration and finding secure and stable housing can be difficult. Barriers include limited access to housing vouchers, limited affordable housing stock, rising housing costs, strict eligibility requirements, and landlords who are reluctant to rent to people who were justice-involved. The high cost of housing is particularly challenging in the District, which is one of the most expensive cities for housing in the United States. In 2019, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment in the District was \$1,665; in order to afford this level of rent and utilities without paying more than 30% of income on housing, a household must earn a minimum of \$66,600 annually.<sup>5</sup>

Research shows that access to decent, stable, and affordable housing substantially increases the likelihood that a person returning home from prison or jail will be able to find and retain employment, stay drug-free, and refrain from committing additional crimes.<sup>6</sup> In order to allow returning citizens to

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<sup>1</sup>Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2019). *Annual Survey of Jails, 2017*. United States Department of Justice. Office of Justice Programs. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2018-12-13.

<sup>2</sup> Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. (2018). *One-Day Estimate of Justice System-Involved Individuals within the District of Columbia (2017)*. Retrieved from <https://cjcc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cjcc/publication/attachments/One%20Day%20Count%20Justice%20Involved%20%202017%20Infographic.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Roman, C. G., & Travis, J. (2006). *Where will I sleep tomorrow? Housing, homelessness, and the returning prisoner*. *Housing Policy Debate*, 17(2), 389-418.

<sup>4</sup> Harlow, C. W. (2003). *Education and Correctional Populations*. NCJ 195670. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> National Low-Income Housing Coalition. *Out of Reach 2019- Facts About the District of Columbia*. <https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/files/reports/state/DC.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Nelson, M., Deess, P., & Allen, C.A. (1999). *The first month out: Post-incarceration experiences in New York City*. New York, NY: Vera Institute of Justice.

successfully re-integrate and reduce the chance of recidivating, it is important that stable and affordable housing options are available.

This brief outlines the unique situation of the District's returning citizens and the challenges they face securing stable and affordable housing. Next, it describes how housing can be a platform for successful reentry and provides a brief overview of several types of housing options for returning citizens. Finally, the brief discusses innovative approaches to housing from across the United States and current initiatives in the District.

## The Unique Situation of the District's Returning Citizens

The National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Improvement Act of 1997, also known as the Revitalization Act, transferred the responsibility and costs associated with certain state criminal justice functions, including housing, parole and supervised release of adult felons convicted under the D.C. Criminal Code, from the District of Columbia to various federal government agencies.<sup>7</sup> If an individual is convicted of a D.C. Code misdemeanor and is sentenced to one year or less of incarceration, or has been ordered to detention while awaiting trial, then they will be in the custody of D.C. Department of Corrections<sup>8</sup> (DOC) and housed at the D.C. Jail.<sup>9</sup> Persons convicted of a D.C. Code felony, however, who are sentenced to incarceration for more than one year will ultimately be housed in a facility operated or contracted by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). The complex nature of the District's criminal justice system can make reentry even more difficult, as many District offenders serve time at federal prisons around the country, far away from family and support systems.<sup>10</sup>

In recognition of the challenges posed by distant placement, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, pursuant to a 1998 Memorandum of Understanding executed with the District, seeks to house each inmate within 500 miles of their home. A variety of factors, including the availability of beds, security

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<sup>7</sup> Bouker, J. (2016). *The D.C. Revitalization Act: History, Provisions and Promises*. eBook. Washington D.C: The Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/appendix-1.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> The D.C department of Corrections operates two facilities. The Correctional Treatment Facility (CTF) and the Central Detention Facility (CDF). The CTF houses sentenced misdemeanants, all female offenders, the short-term BOP felon program and individuals participating in drug treatment and reentry programs. The CDF houses individuals awaiting adjudication of cases or are sentenced for misdemeanor offenses.

<sup>9</sup> DC Corrections Information Council. (2016). *CIC Pop -Up Think Thank: Reimagining CTF*. [https://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/release\\_content/attachments/Reimagining%20CTF%20Report%208%2023%202016%20with%20photos.pdf](https://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/release_content/attachments/Reimagining%20CTF%20Report%208%2023%202016%20with%20photos.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Grant, B (2018). *Reducing barriers for job-seekers*. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/reducing-barriers-for-job-seekers-in-d-c-and-the-metro-region/>

concerns, and individual prisoner medical needs may affect that placement.<sup>11</sup> While most inmates from the District are placed in facilities located in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and West Virginia, some are placed as far away as Florida, Texas, and California.<sup>12</sup>

In many state prisons, months prior to release, returning citizens are connected with social services organizations and potential employers, have opportunities to attend job fairs, and even receive assistance with building their resume. Because they are in facilities that are hundreds of miles from the District, many incarcerated District residents rarely have access to these opportunities. The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA), the District's community supervision agency, has made efforts to support successful reentry of the District's returning citizens. For example, CSOSA works with BOP case managers to place releasees into halfway houses upon release. CSOSA also prepares returning citizens for release through video conferences with service providers, during which they cover a range of topics, including housing options and job training.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the District's READY (Resources to Empower and Develop You) Center, a one-stop shop where formerly incarcerated District residents can access critical post-release services, was expanded in April 2019 to serve residents recently released from BOP facilities.<sup>14</sup> Previously, the READY center had only been available to persons released from the DOC. The READY Center connects participants with government agencies and community organizations assisting with housing, employment, educational and health services.

## Housing Instability Among Returning Citizens

Many returning citizens across the country face significant housing challenges. This is illustrated by research showing that people leaving prison or jail are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public.<sup>15</sup> Other studies report that approximately 13 to 50% of those who leave prison

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs. (2016). *Carper, Booker, Norton Seek Equitable Treatment for DC Residents Regarding Bureau of Prisons Policies*. Washington D.C. <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/media/minority-media/carper-booker-norton-seek-equitable-treatment-for-dc-residents-regarding-bureau-of-prisons-policies>.

<sup>12</sup> House Hearing, 111 Congress (2010). *Housing D.C. Felons Far Away from Home: Effects on Crime, Recidivism and Reentry*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and The District of Columbia of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-111hhrg58348/html/CHRG-111hhrg58348.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency. (2019). *Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2018 – 2022*. <https://www.csosa.gov/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/02/CSOSA-Strategic-Plan-FY2018-2022.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> DC Office of the Mayor Press Release (April 2019). *Mayor Bowser Expands READY Center Services to Returning Citizens from the Federal Bureau of Prisons*. <https://mayor.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-expands-ready-center-services-returning-citizens-federal-bureau-prisons>

<sup>15</sup> Couloute, Lucius. (2018). *Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among Formerly Incarcerated People*. Prison Policy Initiative. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html>.

are homeless for some period of time after release.<sup>16</sup> City- and state-level studies of homeless shelters found that many returning citizens rely on shelters, both immediately after their release and over the long term.

Unfortunately, being homeless makes formerly incarcerated people more likely to be re-arrested and incarcerated again, due to policies that often criminalize homelessness.<sup>17</sup> The Law Center surveyed 187 cities across the country to inform how many had codes that criminalized homeless persons' behaviors, and found that cities criminalized behaviors such as camping, sleeping, panhandling, sitting and/or lying down in public.<sup>18</sup> Other behaviors criminalized included sleeping in vehicles, sharing food, and loitering.<sup>19</sup> A summary of studies on the homeless population showed that, on average, 18% had been incarcerated, with some studies showing a prior incarceration rate of almost 50%.<sup>20</sup> In addition, research suggests that up to 15% of incarcerated people experienced homelessness in the year prior to their admission to prison. Individuals with a history of shelter use prior to incarceration were much more likely to use shelters post-incarceration.<sup>21</sup> The highest rate of homelessness occurs in urban cities where housing costs are continuously increasing.<sup>22</sup>

In the District, CSOSA reported that during fiscal year 2018, over 11%<sup>23</sup> of CSOSA's supervised population had unstable living arrangements. CSOSA identifies individuals as having unstable housing if they reside in homeless shelters, halfway houses, transitional housing, hotels or motels, or have no fixed address. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses a more comprehensive definition of homelessness and housing instability, to also include persons living with friends or family members on a temporary basis, and persons in imminent danger of losing their current housing. CSOSA

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<sup>16</sup> Roman, C. G., & Travis, J. (2006). *Where will I sleep tomorrow? Housing, homelessness, and the returning prisoner*. *Housing Policy Debate*, 17(2), 389-418.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> The District of Columbia criminalizes panhandling, but not the other activities listed. Panhandling is a criminal offense under DC Code 22-2302. <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/code/titles/22/chapters/23/>

<sup>19</sup> National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. (2019) *No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities*. [https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/No\\_Safe\\_Place.pdf](https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/No_Safe_Place.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Federal Interagency Reentry council (2011). *Reentry in Brief*. [https://nationalcia.org/wp-content/uploads/Reentry\\_Brief.pdf](https://nationalcia.org/wp-content/uploads/Reentry_Brief.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Metraux S, Roman CG, Cho R. (2007). *Incarceration and Homelessness*. National Symposium on Homelessness Research. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

<sup>22</sup> Geller, A., & Curtis, M. A. (2011). *A Sort of Homecoming: Incarceration and the housing security of urban men*. *Social Science Research*, 40(4), 1196–1213.

<sup>23</sup> This figure excludes those who are not under our supervision (e.g. direct releases or people whose supervision period has expired). Approximately 62% of CSOSA's supervised population is on probation and might have never been incarcerated.

does not routinely track the additional factors considered in HUD's definition.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, these statistics might underestimate the percentage of supervisees with unstable housing. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, housing in the District has become increasingly unaffordable for low-income residents, and renters with felony convictions are often ineligible for many subsidized housing options.<sup>25</sup>

## Housing, a Key Factor for Successful Reentry

Several studies have noted that housing stability and family support are instrumental in helping released individuals achieve positive outcomes, such as maintaining employment and avoiding future incarceration.<sup>26</sup> Stable housing and family support may contribute to lower rates of recidivism, homelessness, drug use, and parole and probation violations.<sup>27</sup> Housing stability is also a key to securing and retaining employment.<sup>28</sup> Returning citizens who are employed are less likely to be revoked for parole violations, less likely to commit new drug offenses, and are less likely to return to prison.<sup>29</sup>

Research shows that returning citizens attach a high value to housing and families as part of their post-incarceration success.<sup>30</sup> These studies point out that most released individuals plan to stay with or return to their family upon release and that access to affordable and stable housing would be an important factor in their ability to stay out of prison. Returning citizens with strong family connections also reported greater success with securing and retaining employment.<sup>31</sup> In sharp contrast, unstable

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<sup>24</sup> Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency. (2019). *FY 2020 Budget Request Summary Statement and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*. <https://www.csosa.gov/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/03/CSOSA-FY-2020-CBJ-Summary-Statement-FAQs-3-18-2019.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Couloute, Lucius. (2018). *Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among Formerly Incarcerated People*. Prison Policy Initiative. Accessed May 21, 2019. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Bradley, K. H., R. B. Oliver, N. C. Richardson, and E.M. Slayter. (2001). *No Place Like Home: Housing and the Ex-Prisoner*. Issue brief. Boston, MA: Community Resources for Justice.

Graffam, J., A. Shinkfield, and W. McPherson. (2004). *Variables Affecting Successful Reintegration as Perceived by Offenders and Professionals*. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 40: 147–71.

<sup>27</sup> Urban Institute. (2006). *Understanding the challenges of prisoner reentry: Research findings from the Urban Institute's Prisoner Reentry Portfolio*. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/42981/411289-Understanding-the-Challenges-of-Prisoner-Reentry.PDF>

<sup>28</sup> Roman, C. G., and J. Travis. (2004). *Taking Stock: Housing, Homelessness, and Prisoner Reentry*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/58121/411096-Taking-Stock.PDF>

<sup>29</sup> Visher, C. A., S. Debus, and J. Yahner. (2008). *Employment after Prison: A Longitudinal Study of Releasees in Three States*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/32106/411778-Employment-after-Prison-A-Longitudinal-Study-of-Releasees-in-Three-States.PDF>

<sup>30</sup> Nelson, M., P. Deess, and C. Allen. (1999). *The First Month Out: Post Incarceration Experiences in New York City*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice. [https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/the-first-month-out-post-incarceration-experiences-in-new-york-city/legacy\\_downloads/first\\_month\\_out.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/the-first-month-out-post-incarceration-experiences-in-new-york-city/legacy_downloads/first_month_out.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Urban Institute. (2006). *Understanding the challenges of prisoner reentry: Research findings from the Urban Institute's Prisoner Reentry Portfolio*. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/42981/411289-Understanding-the-Challenges-of-Prisoner-Reentry.PDF>

housing and episodes of homelessness were found to be important contributors to poor post-release outcomes, including recidivism, parole violations, and drug use.<sup>32</sup>

Returning citizens can require diverse forms of housing support over both the short and long term, and based on their circumstances, individuals may require distinctive degrees of support. The need for housing and housing assistance normally depends on the individual's employment history, education attainment, and physical and behavioral health treatment needs. A returning citizen with a complex history might require continuous assistance to meet their housing needs, while others may simply need help locating affordable housing alternatives where they expect to reside. Ideally, the provision of housing help is based on individual needs.<sup>33</sup>

## Housing Options for Returning Citizens in the District

Securing adequate permanent housing for returning citizens has been documented as a serious challenge that local and state governments have found difficult to overcome. The following section describes the different options available for people returning from incarceration, including the availability of these options in the District. For a detailed listing of housing options, please refer to the CJCC Directory of Housing Resources for Returning Citizens available at [www.cjcc.dc.gov](http://www.cjcc.dc.gov). The Public Defender Services will be issuing an updated version of the PDS Directory of Adult Services, which includes a section on housing, in mid-2020.

### *Halfway Houses*

Halfway housing units are intended to assist returning citizens in their transition to the community by providing a more structured environment than if the individual were to be released directly into the community. In the District, halfway houses—referred to as residential reentry centers (RRCs)—are intended to provide a “safe, structured, supervised environment, as well as employment counseling, job placement, and other services”.<sup>34</sup> These halfway houses help individuals gradually rebuild their ties to the community and facilitate their activities during the readjustment phase. Currently, the District has two private and independently operated halfway houses, compared to seven

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<sup>32</sup> Herbert, C. W. & Morenoff, J. D. & Harding, D. J. (2015). *Homelessness and Housing Insecurity Among Former Prisoners*. RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences 1(2), 44-79.

<sup>33</sup> Fontaine, Jocelyn and Jennifer Biess. (2012). *Housing as a Platform for Formerly Incarcerated Persons*. Washington, DC. The Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/25321/412552-Housing-as-a-Platform-for-Formerly-Incarcerated-Persons.PDF>

<sup>34</sup> Federal Bureau of Prisons. (2019). *Residential Reentry Management Center*. Washington, D.C. [https://www.bop.gov/about/facilities/residential\\_reentry\\_management\\_centers.jsp](https://www.bop.gov/about/facilities/residential_reentry_management_centers.jsp)

halfway houses in operation in 2004. The two halfway houses are: Fairview, a 60-bed all-female facility,<sup>35</sup> and Hope Village, a 48-bed all male facility.<sup>36</sup> Both facilities house residents under the supervision of BOP, DOC, or CSOSA.<sup>37</sup> Individuals with the following conditions may be placed in the RRCs: those nearing the end of their sentence of incarceration; selected individuals during the pretrial stage; or individuals participating in the work release program.<sup>38</sup> While not intended to serve as a housing solution, the lack of an RRC in the District can exacerbate homelessness and connection to services for many returning citizens. The average length of stay at RRCs is about 3.5 months, with a maximum of 6 months. The RRC contractor assists inmates in locating suitable housing, if necessary.<sup>39</sup> On November 1, 2018, BOP awarded a contract to CORE DC<sup>40</sup> to open a new all-male halfway house with a 300-bed capacity. However, a final determination regarding whether a facility will open is pending resolution of an appeal by Hope Village of the contract award decision.<sup>41</sup>

### *Transitional Housing*

Transitional housing refers to a type of housing accommodation that is time-limited (three months to one year) and is designed to provide a safe, stable environment for individuals while they work towards a permanent housing solution. Transitional housing is also considered a type of accommodation that is meant to bridge the gap from homelessness to permanent housing.<sup>42</sup> Transitional housing is a locally-funded part of the District's homeless services continuum for families and individuals,

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<sup>35</sup> Lahcari Consulting, LLC. (2018). Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Audit Report: Fairview.

[https://doc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/doc/publication/attachments/fairview\\_final\\_report\\_2018.pdf](https://doc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/doc/publication/attachments/fairview_final_report_2018.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Lahcari Consulting, LLC. (2018). Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Audit Report: Hope Village.

[https://doc.Distric.gov/sites/default/files/Distric/sites/doc/publication/attachments/hope\\_village\\_final\\_report\\_2018.pdf](https://doc.Distric.gov/sites/default/files/Distric/sites/doc/publication/attachments/hope_village_final_report_2018.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs. (2016). *D.C. Women in Prison: Continuing Problems and Recommendations for Change*. Washington, DC. [http://www.washlaw.org/pdf/dc\\_women\\_in\\_prison\\_report.pdf](http://www.washlaw.org/pdf/dc_women_in_prison_report.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> DOC places eligible individuals in a work release program upon referral by DOC or court order for sentenced misdemeanants, or court-ordered pretrial work release supervision. According to DOC, work release is conducted from a community correctional center (referred to as a Halfway House) or a DOC jail facility, as an alternative form of incarceration. District of Columbia Department of Corrections. (2019). Work Release Program Manual.

<https://doc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/doc/publication/attachments/PM%208010.1B%20Work%20Release%20Program%2001-18-2018.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Federal Bureau of Prisons. *Residential Reentry Centers*.

[https://www.bop.gov/about/facilities/residential\\_reentry\\_management\\_centers.jsp](https://www.bop.gov/about/facilities/residential_reentry_management_centers.jsp)

<sup>40</sup> Gathright, J. (2018). *Hope Village, D.C.'s Notorious Halfway House, Is Sticking Around. But for How Long?*

<https://wamu.org/story/19/03/01/hope-village-d-c-s-notorious-halfway-house-is-sticking-around-but-for-how-long/>

<sup>41</sup> On May 21, GAO denied requests for reconsideration from both Hope Village and BOP. The reconsideration summary is found here: <https://www.gao.gov/products/B-414342.5,B-414342.6>

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). *Permanent Supportive Housing: Building Your Program*.

<https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma10-4510-06-buildingyourprogram-psh.pdf>

overseen by the Department of Human Services.<sup>43</sup> To help with stabilization, some transitional housing programs may provide specialized services for individuals seeking support in a communal environment. Services include assistance in finding employment, navigating how to achieve stable permanent housing, and other needs associated with the reentry process. Many of the District's transitional programs have long waiting lists and specific eligibility requirements. Some of the common eligibility requirements are:<sup>44</sup> proof of homelessness, proof of sobriety, police clearance, referral from a social service agency, and/or being eligible and on the waitlist for public housing.<sup>45</sup> Another requirement that could be a potential barrier is that the applicant must be out of prison before being added to the waitlist.<sup>46</sup>

### *Public Housing*

Public housing is government-funded and operated rental housing that is made available to very low-income families, seniors, and disabled persons. The D.C. Housing Authority (DCHA) owns and manages approximately 56 public housing properties throughout the District with about 8,000 units.<sup>47</sup> The average rent paid by a public housing household is approximately \$250 per month. Eligibility for public housing is based on the family's gross annual household income and family size. Tenant selection is based on regulations set by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Each year, HUD sets income limits which are delineated into three categories: extremely low income, very low income and low income. The actual income levels differ based on the area, because they are calculated as a percentage of the area's median income level. Extremely low income are those households that make 30% or less than the District's median income level. Very low income are households making 50% or less than the District's median income level. Low income households are those at 80% or less of the District's median income level.<sup>48</sup> Income limits are created for families comprised of one individual to eight individuals. Family size adjustments will provide higher income limits for larger families and lower

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<sup>43</sup> The Housing Inventory Count (HIC) is the official record of the number of beds and units dedicated to the District's continuum of care for homeless families and individuals. The HIC is compiled on an annual basis at the same time as the District's Point-in-Time Count.

<sup>44</sup> Some programs ask for different requirements, in some cases there are specific programs for individuals with substance use issues.

<sup>45</sup> Georgetown Law. The Community Justice Program. (N.d). *A Housing Guide for Reentering Women in D.C.* <https://www.csosa.gov/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2018/03/housing-guide-reentering-dc-women.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> The Homeless Hub. (N.d). *Housing, Accommodation and Supports: Transitional Housing.* <https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/transitional-housing>.

<sup>47</sup> District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA). (2014) *Public Housing.* <https://www.dchousing.org/topic.aspx?topic=3>

<sup>48</sup> Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (2019). *Transmittal of Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Income Limits for the Public Housing and Section 8 Programs.* <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il19/HUD-sec8-FY19r.pdf>

income limits for smaller families. In 2019, qualifying household income for a family of four was set at no higher than \$77,600.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, applicants must be US citizens or non-citizens with eligible immigration status to qualify for public housing.<sup>50</sup> Once a family reaches the top of the waiting list, DCHA will collect additional information about the family to determine eligibility and payment amount. Some of the additional information collected includes: family income, past rental history, criminal activity, assets, and family composition. HUD grants priority to those who would be classified as extremely low-income level families. Next order of priority would be families with very low-income. Families ranked as low-income are typically last in line. Currently there are more than 32,000 individuals on the waiting list for public housing in the District, and the waiting list is closed for new applicants with no set date to re-open it.

For returning citizens, applying for public housing in the District comes with a set of additional challenges. Even though the DCHA works with returning citizens to ensure their pre-existing spot on the waiting list remains active, the chances of them securing a public housing unit are remote, given that there are likely thousands of individuals ahead of them on the waitlist and priority is given to veterans or people with disabilities. Having a criminal record is generally not a bar to public housing access; however, federal law prohibits admission of persons subject to Class A sex offender registration and persons who have been convicted of drug-related criminal activity for the manufacture and production of methamphetamine on the premises of federally assisted housing.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, persons who have been evicted from federally assisted housing for drug-related criminal activity are barred for three years following the date of eviction.

### *Housing Voucher Program*

The Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP), previously known as Section 8, is a federal program funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that provides financial assistance to low-income families, veterans, and people with disabilities to help them access

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<sup>49</sup> Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (2019). *Fact Sheet*. [http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/about/fact\\_sheet.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/about/fact_sheet.cfm)

<sup>50</sup> District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA). (2014) *Am I Eligible?* <http://www.dchousing.org/doc.aspx?docid=96>

<sup>51</sup> US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). (2003). *Public Housing Occupancy Guidebook*. Washington, D.C. [https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/DOC\\_10760.PDF](https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/DOC_10760.PDF)

rental housing in the private market.<sup>52</sup> DCHA is the administrator of HCVP in the District. To be eligible, applicants must meet HUD's public housing requirements described in the previous section.

In 2018, the District issued between 300 and 400<sup>53</sup> vouchers for single adults and approximately 12,000<sup>54</sup> for families through the HCVP. Tens of thousands of individuals and families remain on the waiting list. According to the Urban Institute, more than 40,000 families in the District are on the HCVP waitlist, and no additional families have been added to the waitlist since 2013.<sup>55</sup> Every year, the DC Interagency Council on Homelessness establishes prioritization criteria based on the data they collect. The 2019 Moving to Work Plan<sup>56</sup> recommended that the Mayor and the Council find funding in the future to more aggressively address the DCHA voucher waitlist.

DCHA also administers the District's Local Rent Supplement Program (LRSP), which is very similar to the federal program, but is funded by the District government, available exclusively to District residents and aimed at extremely low-income households with incomes below 30% of the District's median income. The LRSP supplements housing costs at the tenant-, project- and sponsor-based levels. The tenant vouchers allow families and individuals to pay no more than 30% of their income for housing by making up the difference between that amount and market rent. In 2019, the extremely low-income limit for a family of four was \$36,400.<sup>57</sup> The tenant-based LRSP allows District residents to enter the open housing market to find the best housing option for them. Vouchers distributed at the project- and sponsor-based levels are attached to specific units and distributed to organizations that develop or lease those units, who must then make them available to tenants with low incomes. Since the inception of the program in 2007, the tenant-based LRSP has supported 3,300 families and individuals.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). (N.d). *Housing Choice Vouchers Fact Sheet*. Washington, D.C. [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/programs/hcv/about/fact\\_sheet](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/about/fact_sheet)

<sup>53</sup> Greenwalt, K. (2019, May 21). Executive director for the District of Columbia Interagency Council on Homelessness. Phone Interview.

<sup>54</sup> District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA). (2019). *Vouchers*. <https://www.dchousing.org/media.aspx>

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, M., & Leopold, J. (2019). *A New Flexible Rent Subsidy Program Aims to Help Working Families Afford Housing*. Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://greaterdc.urban.org/blog/new-flexible-rent-subsidy-program-aims-help-working-families-afford-housing>

<sup>56</sup> District of Columbia Housing Authority. (2018). *2019 Moving to Work Plan*. <http://www.dchousing.org/mtw2/docs/DCHA%20FY%202019%20MTW%20Plan--as%20submitted%20for%20HUD%20approval.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). *FY 2019 Income Limits Summary*. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il2019/2019summary.odn>

<sup>58</sup> DC Fiscal Policy Institute. 2016. *The Local Rent Supplement Program*. Washington D.C. <https://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/16-04-LRSP-Brief.pdf>

### *Permanent Supportive Housing*

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is a type of subsidized housing intended for people with high needs—including disabilities and behavioral and substance use needs—who have experienced or are at risk of homelessness. Many of these units are also federally subsidized. PSH combines an affordable place to live with coordinated social services, which are typically provided onsite. Services include physical and mental health services, substance use treatment, vocational and employment services, tenant advocacy, and life skills training. The District’s PSH program is divided in three phases. During the first phase, a vulnerability assessment for individuals and families living on the streets, shelters and other institutions is completed. Then, individuals and families are placed in long term housing. Lastly, individuals and families are connected to case management services to ensure they are stabilized and as self-sufficient as possible.<sup>59</sup>

According to the DC Department of Human Services, in order to be eligible for a PSH unit, individuals must have a disabling condition and have either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.<sup>60</sup> In order to apply for the District’s PSH program, individuals should complete a vulnerability assessment survey at any District sponsored shelter facility or by a homeless service provider. The District’s Interagency Council on Homelessness reported that the PSH program has very low turnover and some landlords have so many eligibility requirements that many individuals in need are unable to qualify. The Interagency Council on Homelessness suggests examining the PSH program requirements and identifying where there could be more flexibility to ensure vulnerable District residents have access to housing.<sup>61</sup>

The PSH model has been proven effective for those who have difficulty living independently and are likely to fall back into homelessness without extra support. A study revealed that the ability to retain housing for the PSH population with histories of homelessness and mental illness range between 75 to 85 percent after one year of being placed in the program.<sup>62</sup> In addition, supportive housing has also

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<sup>59</sup> Department of Human Services (2019). Solutions to ending Homelessness: Permanent Supportive Housing Program. <https://dhs.dc.gov/service/solutions-ending-homelessness>

<sup>60</sup> Department of Human Services (2019). Solutions to ending Homelessness: Permanent Supportive Housing Program. <https://dhs.dc.gov/service/solutions-ending-homelessness>

<sup>61</sup> District of Columbia Interagency Council on Homelessness. Homeward Bound Strategic Plan 2015-2020. [https://ich.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ich/page\\_content/attachments/ICH-StratPlan2.11%20web.pdf](https://ich.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ich/page_content/attachments/ICH-StratPlan2.11%20web.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Barrow, S., G. Soto, and P. Cordova. 2004. Final Report on the Evaluation of the Closer to Home Initiative. New York: Corporation for Supportive Housing.

helped reduce shelter use, incarceration, inpatient hospital stays, and emergency room visits and their associated costs among persons with histories of residential instability and mental illness.<sup>63</sup>

### *Single Room Occupancy*

Like PSH, Single Room Occupancies (SROs) are units usually located in a building with several individual bedrooms and a common area shared by all the residents, including kitchens, bathrooms, and lounge areas. SRO units are reserved for special needs populations. SRO tenants are required to sign a lease and pay rent at a fixed percentage of their gross monthly income (usually 30% percent), which is usually far less than rent would be in the private market. SRO units have different requirements such as abstaining from drugs or alcohol. Even though there is no formal treatment offered at SRO units, attendance in 12-step groups is highly encouraged. As with many other District programs, there are long waitlists to access these units.<sup>64</sup>

Overall, there are different federally and locally funded options that are available to lower income families. For many of the units and housing options previously described, tenants and families pay no more than 30% of their income in rent. Returning citizens are often low income and eligible for these programs. However, increasing costs, reduced inventory, low turnover and specific eligibility requirements make it difficult for returning citizens to secure a space. Given these challenges, it is important for the District to consider smart practices around the country that would further expand housing opportunities for returning citizens.

## *Innovative Approaches to Housing*

As with most complex issues, there is no single housing solution for returning citizens. The District and other jurisdictions have tried innovative approaches to increase access to stable and affordable housing. As previously mentioned, housing will heavily reduce the likelihood that a returning citizen will recidivate. Below are some examples of national and local approaches in providing housing for justice-involved individuals. The first section will describe innovative and effective practices from across the nation. The second section will describe current District efforts, from establishing a specialized office for returning citizens to implementing forward policies.

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<sup>63</sup> Culhane, D. P., S. Metraux and T. R. Hadley. 2002. "Public Service Reductions Associated with Placement of Homeless Persons with severe Mental Illness in Supportive Housing." *Housing Policy Debate* 13: 107–62.

<sup>64</sup> Us Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2001) *Housing Homeless Individuals Through HUD's Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Program*.

<https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HousingHomelessSection8.pdf>

### *National Innovative Approaches to Housing*

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)<sup>65</sup> highlights three approaches to expanding housing options for returning citizens. First, create greater access to existing housing units. Second, increase the number of housing units made available specifically for the reentry population. And third, implement revitalized neighborhoods initiatives. Most returning citizens go back to the neighborhoods where they came from, and those neighborhoods are often heavily impacted by poverty.<sup>66</sup> Revitalized neighborhoods can help improve the services and supports of the community, including affordable housing, to at-risk populations.

The following section will present different programs addressing housing for returning citizens. Each of these programs presents a different perspective and approach with the goal of stabilizing returning citizens as soon as possible.

#### **Housing First Model**

Housing First refers to programs that provide individuals with immediate access to independent permanent housing and supportive services without the requirements of sobriety or participation in mental health treatment. This approach is guided by the belief that people need housing before attending to less critical but important issues like getting a job, getting a high school diploma or getting treatment for substance use issues.<sup>67</sup> Having a place to live makes a significant impact on an individual's ability to feel safe and to comply with supervision conditions. Additionally, Housing First is based on the theory that individual choice is valuable in housing selection and supportive service participation, and that exerting that choice will likely make the individual more successful in remaining housed and improving their life. Individuals in Housing First programs can choose the frequency and type of supportive services they receive, and refusal of services will have no bearing on their access to housing and supportive services. One of the benefits of the Housing First model is that it can help anyone with

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<sup>65</sup> BJA put out a policymaker's guide citing useful examples of best practices for each of these approaches (i.e. Utah's Homeless Assistance Rental Project, Chicago's Increased Housing Stock Approach, Wichita's Revitalized Neighborhoods approach). While the guide is a bit on the older side (2010), the approaches cited are nevertheless examples of housing best practices. You can find the guide online at: [https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Reentry\\_Housing\\_Options-1.pdf](https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Reentry_Housing_Options-1.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> Roman, C. G., Kane, M., Giridharadas, R (2006). *The Housing Landscape for Returning Prisoners in the District of Columbia*. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/46396/411433-The-Housing-Landscape-for-Returning-Prisoners-in-the-District.PDF>

<sup>67</sup> Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). (2014.) *Housing First in Permanent Supportive Housing*. Retrieved from <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Housing-First-Permanent-Supportive-Housing-Brief.pdf>

any degree of service needs, allowing it to be individually tailored.<sup>68</sup> Studies have shown that between 75% and 91% of participants in the Housing First model remain housed after a year.<sup>69</sup>

#### Montgomery County Pre-Release Center

The Montgomery County Pre-Release Center (PRC) is a 143-bed facility that serves local, state, and federal offenders who are within 6 to 12 months of release and are primarily returning to Montgomery County, Maryland, or the Washington metropolitan area. The PRC, one of the few in the country, provides intense case management and designs a highly structured community transition plan to align participants with employment, treatment, and family support.<sup>70</sup> Individuals can stay up to a year, with the average length of stay being 105 days. Eligible participants must have one year or less remaining prior to release, be able to work legally in the United States, have no pending charges or detainers, and have no escape charges. Most participants leave with housing arrangements, and thanks to the cooperation of willing employers who are aware of their prior offence status, many of them also leave with stable jobs.<sup>71</sup>

#### Gwinnett Re-entry Intervention Program

The Gwinnett Re-Entry Intervention Program (GRIP) works to provide housing and services to help individuals exiting jail transition back into society after a period of incarceration. The Gwinnett County Sheriff's Department (Georgia) has partnered with the United Way of Greater Atlanta in this effort aimed at reducing recidivism. In partnership with the Sheriff's Department, United Way assesses and refers inmates to GRIP to receive housing and care management upon release, access to mental health services, primary health care and job assistance. Since 2012, more than 270 individuals have been permanently housed through the program, with more than a 60% decrease in recidivism for GRIP participants.<sup>72</sup>

#### Returning Home Ohio (RHO)

Returning Home Ohio (RHO) provides high-risk returning individuals with non-time limited, permanently affordable supportive housing. This program, rated as “promising” by the National Institute of Justice Office of Justice Programs,<sup>73</sup> uses a harm reduction approach: participants are not required to

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<sup>68</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2016). *Housing First*. Washington D.C. Retrieved from <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/housing-first/>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Montgomery County Department of Correction and Rehabilitation. 2018. PRRS Resident Guidebook. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COR/Resources/Files/PDF/GUIDEBOOK%20August%202018.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> Montgomery County Department of Correction and Rehabilitation. 2015. Intern, Contractor and Volunteer Orientation. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COR/Resources/Files/PDF/PRRS-VolunteerOrientation-Template.pdf>

<sup>72</sup> United Way Atlanta – GRIP Program Overview <https://www.unitedwayatlanta.org/program/grip/>

<sup>73</sup> Program profile: Returning Home Ohio (RHO) Pilot Program <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=557>

maintain sobriety or participate in services to stay housed. One study found RHO participants were 40% less likely to be arrested and 61% less likely to be reincarcerated than a comparison group of those who did not participate. However, RHO participants who were rearrested were rearrested much more frequently than those who did not participate. This may be due to increased levels of supervision for RHO participants.

#### Alameda County Homecoming Project

The Homecoming Project is a pioneering pilot program that leverages extra living spaces within Alameda County, California, by providing daily subsidies to homeowners in exchange for allowing returning citizens to live with them in their extra living spaces, much like the Airbnb model where people rent their extra spaces. The project promotes an additional transitional housing reentry option for people who have served lengthy prison terms, and who will benefit from an individually-tailored program with up to six months of housing.<sup>74</sup> The program closes a gap in affordable housing for returning citizens given that the average rental for a studio apartment in Alameda County requires an annual income of \$60,000. Resident participants must have served more than 10 years in prison, sustained rehabilitation efforts throughout the period of their incarceration, have been deemed low risk by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, be under parole, and in need of housing. Once returning citizens have been paired with a host, they are linked with support systems to find employment, permanent housing, education and general assistance.<sup>75</sup> There has not yet been an evaluation of the pilot, which launched in early 2019. In 2019, 25 participants were paired with hosts, with the goal to double participation in subsequent years.<sup>76</sup>

#### Camden RESET Program

Camden RESET (Re-Entering Society with Effective Tools) is a pilot program that aims to “discover and address the root causes of hospital use, arrests, and jail stays among Camden residents who have experienced extensive hospital and jail utilization”.<sup>77</sup> The program helps participants gain the skills and support they need to avoid arrests and prevent additional hospital admissions and improve their wellbeing. The care team is composed of nurses, social workers, and community health workers, and

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<sup>74</sup> Impact Justice (2019) The Homecoming Project: Leveraging available living spaces to support people re-entering communities. Washington D.C. Retrieved from <https://impactjustice.org/impact/homecoming-project/>

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Shelterforce (2019). *A Home After Prison: There's No Place Like Homecoming*. <https://shelterforce.org/2019/11/04/a-home-after-prison-theres-no-place-like-homecoming/>

<sup>77</sup> Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers. (2018). *Camden RESET Brings Our Core Intervention Inside Camden County Jail* Retrieved from <https://www.camdenhealth.org/camden-reset-jail/>

they engage individuals at the Camden County jail.<sup>78</sup> Eligible participants for this pilot program consist of Camden city residents who have been admitted to the county jail at least three times in one year and have either a minimum of four emergency visits or a minimum of two inpatient admissions during the same period.<sup>79</sup> Once participants are released, the care team meets participants where they physically are, which may include their home, transitional housing, shelter, day program, or parole office. The care team provides wrap-around care management, accompanying participants to appointments and connecting them to agencies and services like housing, mental health services, and substance use treatment. Although the program is a time-limited intervention, it is considered a linkage program<sup>80</sup> since it doesn't take the place of mental health treatment or substance use treatment; rather, it focuses on empowering participants to identify sources that can help them manage their issues without the program. While the program is in its early stages, anecdotally, it is already showing promising results by reducing the number of jail stays and emergency department admissions, while increasing access to housing compared to one year prior to enrollment in the program.<sup>81</sup> An evaluation for Camden RESET and its interventions is being planned, and will provide insight into outcomes and factors that influenced success or non-success.<sup>82</sup>

#### Kaiser Permanente Thriving Communities Fund

In 2018, integrated health system Kaiser Permanente announced a commitment of up to \$200 million through its Thriving Communities Fund to address housing stability and homelessness.<sup>83</sup> The focus of the initiative will be on preventing displacement or homelessness in rapidly changing communities, ensuring access to supportive housing, and making communities more environmentally sound. The funds will be spent across the eight states in which Kaiser operates, plus the District of Columbia. The funds will be part of the company's impact investment fund, meaning they will be expected to generate a return so that the fund can continue to make new investments in the future. This could be accomplished through residential developments that mix homeless services and market-rate

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<sup>78</sup> SAMSHA Center for Integrated Health Solutions. (2019) *Housing as a Critical Component of Reentry*. Video Webinar. March 18, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Linkage programs are those aimed to help to connect health care providers, community organizations, and public health agencies so they can improve patients' access to preventive and chronic care services.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> Camden RESET FAQ <https://www.camdenhealth.org/camden-reset-jail/>

<sup>83</sup> *Kaiser Permanente Announcing \$200M impact investment to address housing crisis* <https://about.kaiserpermanente.org/community-health/news/kaiser-permanente-announces-200-million-impact-investment-partner> (May 18, 2018).

housing.<sup>84</sup> Access to housing under the fund are available to anyone experiencing homelessness, not just returning citizens.

#### *Colorado Coalition for the Homeless: Fusion Studios*

The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, a non-profit organization based in Denver, has developed an innovative approach to help close the affordable housing gap and address homelessness. The organization purchased a 139-room hotel complex for \$8.4 million, financed through a mix of private, city, and state funds, and transformed the facility into a micro-apartment complex named “Fusion Studios.”<sup>85</sup> These apartments provide immediate housing relief for homeless citizens who are coming from shelters, or directly off the streets. This novel approach of purchasing and transforming an existing facility for affordable housing can be more cost-effective and timesaving than building an affordable housing facility from the ground up.<sup>86</sup>

The apartments are to be filled on a rolling basis, with residents gaining access to special vouchers allowing them to pay rent at no more than 30% of their monthly income. Each 300-square foot apartment has a bathroom and kitchenette and is furnished. To help provide residents better access to medical and behavioral health services, there are case managers working on-site, in addition to a full-time property manager and 24-hour security. Candidates are selected by the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless in partnership with the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative and the Denver Health Agency. The program is not exclusively available to returning citizens.

#### *District of Columbia Initiatives*

The District is one of the least affordable cities in the country, and there is a severe shortage of affordable housing for households at the lowest income levels.<sup>87</sup> As such, the Mayor has pledged to build 36,000 new housing units by 2025 to offset the rising housing prices in the District; 12,000 of those would be affordable units.<sup>88</sup> With respect to returning citizens, the District has instituted smart practices, in addition to the housing options described previously. As an example, in 2007, the Mayor established the Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizen Affairs (MORCA) to act as a central office for locating

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<sup>84</sup> *A Healthcare Giant Enters the Battle for Cheaper Housing* <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2018/05/a-healthcare-giant-enters-the-battle-for-cheaper-housing/560741/> (May 21, 2018).

<sup>85</sup> *Craft Denver Nonprofit Snags Old Hotel and Turns it into “Instant Housing” for Low-Income and Homeless* <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/denver-nonprofit-turns-hotel-into-housing-for-homeless/> (Feb 1, 2020)

<sup>86</sup> *Denver Non-Profit Transforms Hotel Into Affordable Housing for the Homeless* <https://mymodernmet.com/denver-fusion-studios-affordable-housing/> (Feb 7, 2020).

<sup>87</sup> Polakovic, G. (2019). *Lack of affordable rent plagues cities across the United States*. University of Southern California. <https://news.usc.edu/156366/affordable-rent-research-income-distribution/>

<sup>88</sup> According to HUD, to be considered “affordable,” rent must be 30 percent of household income or less. Households that are spending more than 30 percent are considered rent burdened

and monitoring the provision of services to returning citizens. Further, in 2016, the D.C. Council enacted “ban-the-box” legislation, which prohibits rental providers from checking applicants’ criminal backgrounds prior to making a conditional offer.

### DC Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizens Affairs

The Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizen Affairs<sup>89</sup> (MORCA) was created in 2007, to “coordinate and monitor service delivery to returning citizens ... and make recommendations to the Mayor to promote the general welfare, empowerment, and reintegration of returning citizens in the areas of employment and workforce development, health care, education, housing, and social services.”<sup>90</sup> MORCA is one of the few offices of its kind in the country. It is an “organization separate from the judicial system, housed within an executive branch, and focused on both convening organizations as well as providing services to clients.”<sup>91</sup> Only six other jurisdictions in the country have organizations of this kind.<sup>92</sup> MORCA has had some notable accomplishments. In 2015, as part of Mayor Bowser’s Safer, Stronger DC plan, MORCA launched a 14-week program with Events DC and the Congress Heights Community Training & Development Corporation (CHCTDC) for female returning citizens. The training program provided participants with workforce development and a customer service course that focused on key skills, including professional etiquette, conflict management and digital literacy. During FY 2018 and FY 2019 MORCA has engaged with 2,092 returning citizens and has created comprehensive needs assessments and case plans for 795 individuals. Furthermore, it has made a total of 305 referrals to housing programs.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, it has connected returning citizens to employment opportunities, provided referrals to the Department of Public Works (DPW) for commercial driver’s license training, and assisted halfway house residents with social reintegration services, among others.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> The Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizens Affairs was previously known as the Office on Returning Citizen Affairs

<sup>90</sup> Council of the District of Columbia. 2007. “24–1302. *Establishment of the Office on Returning Citizen Affairs*. Washington D.C.

<sup>91</sup> Cognato, B., Green, D., Raderstrong, J & Sager, J. (2015). *A Data Needs Assessment for The Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizens Affairs: Identifying, Collecting, Connecting Key Data for D.C.’S Returning Citizens*. Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University

<sup>92</sup> The other six jurisdictions are: The Memphis and Shelby County Office of Reentry, the Indianapolis Mayor’s Office of Ex-Offender Re-Entry, Santa Clara Re-Entry Services, the Bexar County Reentry Program, the Philadelphia Mayor’s Office of Reintegration Services (RISE), and, the City of Houston Community Re-Entry Network Program.

<sup>93</sup> Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizen Affairs (MORCA). 2019. "Responses to Fiscal Year 2018 Performance Oversight Questions.". Washington D.C.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid

### Addressing Housing Discrimination: Ban the Box Legislation

In 2016 Council members Kenyan McDuffie and Anita Bonds introduced the Fair Criminal Record Screening for Housing Act of 2016.<sup>95</sup> The law, enacted in February 2017, prohibits rental housing providers in the District from inquiring into a housing applicant's criminal background before extending a conditional offer of housing. The law does not guarantee housing for individuals but prohibits housing providers from checking applicants' criminal backgrounds before giving a conditional offer of housing. Once a housing provider makes a conditional housing offer, they may ask only about criminal accusations pending at the time of the criminal background check or specific convictions that have occurred within the past seven years. The convictions to be considered are: murder, robbery, rape, assault, arson, sex abuse and fraud. The seven-year timeframe is counted from the date of a verdict or plea of guilty or *nolo contendere*, and not from the release date from incarceration. The District of Columbia Office of Human Rights (OHR) is responsible for enforcing the law.<sup>96</sup>

### DHS Project Reconnect

In April 2019, the DC Department of Human Services (DHS) launched Project Reconnect, a shelter diversion and rapid exit program for unaccompanied adults experiencing homelessness, with priority given to returning citizens. The initiative is in line with the District's goal of making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.<sup>97</sup> Shelter diversion assists families and individuals in quickly securing solutions to homelessness outside of the shelter and homeless services system. The main difference between diversion services and other housing-focused interventions centers on the point at which intervention occurs. Ideally, diversion services target households that are requesting entry into shelter and have not yet accessed homeless services.

### Expanding Housing Options Moving Forward

As noted, due to an oversaturated public housing market and a lack of private housing options, there is a severe shortage of housing options for returning citizens both nationwide and in the District. While affordability is cited as one of the most significant barriers to housing within the private market,<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> The Council for the District of Columbia. (2017) Fair Criminal Record Screening for Housing Act of 2016.

<http://lims.dccouncil.us/Download/35646/B21-0706-SignedAct.pdf>

<sup>96</sup> DC Office of Human Rights. (2017). Criminal Background Screenings and Housing: Factsheet for Housing Applicants.

[https://ohr.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ohr/publication/attachments/FCRSHousing\\_Factsheet\\_Applicants\\_110217.pdf](https://ohr.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ohr/publication/attachments/FCRSHousing_Factsheet_Applicants_110217.pdf)

<sup>97</sup> DHS Project Reconnect Program Manual

[https://dhs.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhs/page\\_content/attachments/Project%20Reconnect%20Program%20Manual.pdf](https://dhs.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhs/page_content/attachments/Project%20Reconnect%20Program%20Manual.pdf)

<sup>98</sup> Metraux, S., and D. P. Culhane. (2004). *Homeless Shelter Use and Reincarceration Following Prison Release*. *Criminology and Public Policy* 3: 139–60.

subsidized housing is in scarce supply and priority is given to individuals with very high needs. Some individuals may find that the families to which they hope to return cannot or will not accept them into their former homes.<sup>99</sup> While only a small percentage of released individuals participate in pre-release programs, the availability of programs and services that assist or connect the District’s returning citizens to housing are scarce.<sup>100</sup> These challenges are exacerbated by a fragmented service delivery system for returning citizens in which no single agency handles the provision of long-term housing or additional services required by this population, such as illiteracy, mental illness, substance use, etc. This results in returning individuals falling through the social service “cracks” and an increase in returns to prison or use of crisis services, such as homeless shelters.<sup>101</sup>

While there is much great work underway in the District to address homelessness and the lack of affordable housing, there is work left to do to meet existing demand. Various District agencies, advocacy groups, and nonprofit organizations have called for additional efforts, including the expansion of the stock of permanent supportive housing,<sup>102</sup> additional investments in programs such as Project Reconnect, and the creation of pilot housing programs specifically designed for returning citizens, such as the innovative practices described in this report. Efforts to expand housing options in the District should be aligned with accurate assessments that quantify the amount of unmet need for housing among the returning citizen population in the District.

Given the importance of housing to ensuring successful reentry, local and federal criminal justice agencies should work collaboratively with the human services sector and community-based organizations to collect and share data that can shed light on the scope of the housing landscape for returning citizens. This information can then be used to help identify which innovative efforts tailored for the District would be most effective to expand housing availability for returning citizens in the District, as well as the appropriate scaling of these efforts.

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<sup>99</sup> Bradley, K. H., R. B. Oliver, N. C. Richardson, and E.M. Slayter. (2001). *No Place Like Home: Housing and the Ex-Prisoner*. Issue brief. Boston, MA: Community Resources for Justice.

<sup>100</sup> Roman, C. G., and J. Travis. (2004). *Taking Stock: Housing, Homelessness, and Prisoner Reentry*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

<sup>101</sup> Fontaine, Jocelyn and Jennifer Biess. 2012. *Housing as a Platform for Formerly Incarcerated Persons*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute

<sup>102</sup> The Fair Budget Coalition FY21 Budget Report calls for the creation of 300 LRSP vouchers for returning citizens <http://fairbudget.org/fy21.html>