

The Eight-Point Plan for Housing Justice in Cuyahoga



Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Reentry

Overview

Homelessness and incarceration are two sides of the same coin as those with criminal records are ten times more likely to experience homelessness, and those who are homeless are more likely to be arrested.¹ The Cuyahoga County's high rate of incarceration, particularly of Black men, requires a housing-focused response to break this harmful cycle.

Who We Are: At the prompting of the Cuyahoga Office of Reentry, a dedicated Steering Committee, made up of housing professionals and subject matter experts whose lives have been impacted by incarceration, convened over six months to develop an actionable plan to address the housing gaps in the County. The Steering Committee explored the housing needs and assets; examined promising and evidence-based housing interventions; conducted focus groups and interviews; and developed an actionable 8-point plan to address the housing needs of individuals who have been incarcerated.

WHAT PRINCIPLES GUIDE OUR WORK

- + Equality and equity
- + Housing as a human right; and
- + Housing as a foundation for opportunity and resiliency

We are determined to take actions that are innovative and impactful.

The Need:

The Impact of Race/Racism in Housing Formerly Incarcerated Persons

Black men are significantly overrepresented in the incarcerated population. Black men are six times as likely to be incarcerated as their white counterparts in the County. The connection between incarceration history and unemployment and homelessness is well known, and as this troubling trend has repeated for many years, the compounding impact on Black communities is devastating. ^{2 3 4}

Quantifying Need

Using a research-based tool from the Corporation for Supportive Housing, we determined that in total, 710 households need supportive housing each year but don't receive it, and 1,312 households need moderate housing interventions, such as rapid rehousing, eviction prevention, or other affordable options with some community support.

What People Impacted by Incarceration Say They Need:

- + Individualized advocacy and housing navigation support, particularly at shelters, and with caseload sizes small enough to be effective;
- + Employment and job training;
- + Additional units of housing available and affordable to people with justice backgrounds; and
- + Ongoing support, including legal and credit building, to ensure successful housing outcomes and potentially become homeowners and build assets.

Our Recommendations: Immediate Steps/Eight Point Plan for Housing Justice in Cuyahoga County

While the Steering Committee identified longer-term, larger-scale actions to address the unmet housing needs for individuals with criminal backgrounds, the following eight items could be quickly implemented with resources that are within reach.

- Establish an Accountable Entity to convene, raise funds, and communicate with the community on progress and impact as the plan is implemented.
- Evaluate new programs and initiatives, as well as the implementation process.
- Double existing successful pilots (Returning Home Cuyahoga, Returning Home Ohio, and the Community Transition Program) that target high need individuals exiting incarceration. Annually sustains 90 more households.
- Develop 105 new housing units in scattered site, or small-scale developments that are accessible to people with varying criminal backgrounds.
- Prevent evictions: Keep families in existing housing through one-time support and mediation, and by changing policies in federally assisted housing to allow those exiting incarceration to return to their families without violating lease agreements. Serves 150 households with eviction prevention assistance and 180 with mediation.
- Unlock existing units: Provide short-term funding and case management to house people coming out of jail and prison, who need only moderate levels of support. Serves 100 households for 12 months each and modifies policies that will impact a larger number of families.
- Pass Fair Chance Housing legislation: Prevent property owners and property managers from discriminating against individuals with criminal backgrounds by enacting legislation that expressly bars this common practice. 23,000 individuals and their families who exit incarceration in the County each year would potentially benefit.
- Initiate asset-building and home ownership pilots for people with criminal backgrounds. Provide down payment assistance, matched savings and lease-to own housing units; pilot flexible credit programs and dedicate housing counselors for those impacted by incarceration. At least 673 households would benefit from these pilots.

The total cost estimate for the eight action items is \$37,645,000 and would directly serve 1,288 household heads. Thousands more justice involved individuals, and their family members, will be impacted through policy changes.

Leveling the playing field by addressing the housing barriers for individuals who are exiting incarceration, their family members, and communities whose lives they touch must be prioritized to promote Cuyahoga County as a thriving place to live. The eight action items and long-term objectives detailed in the plan will significantly reduce the suffering of people with behavioral health challenges cycling through incarceration, homelessness, and hospitals, while making smarter investments of public dollars. The housing recommendations will also decrease the recidivism rate for returning citizens and support them in stabilizing their lives for future success.

¹ Couloute, Lucius "Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people." *Prison Policy Initiative*. 2018

² Pettus, et al. *Housing Stability After Incarceration*, Institute for Justice Research and Development, Florida State University, April 2022, retrieved from: [Housing Stability After Incarceration.pdf \(fsu.edu\)](#)

³ *Incarceration Trends in Ohio (vera.org)*; To et al, *The effect of incarceration on housing stability among homeless and vulnerably housed individuals in three Canadian cities on JSTOR*, Canadian Journal of Public Health, Vol. 107

⁴ Crutchfield, *The Effects of Mass Incarceration on Communities of Color (issues.org)*

