

Rental Housing Re-Entry Program

Illinois Housing Development Authority

Special Needs Housing: Combatting Homelessness

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Overview:

Over 27,000 individuals leave the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) system each year. Many of those individuals are unable to find stable, safe, and decent housing due to their criminal background. These individuals face an array of barriers to stable and affordable housing due to employment issues, difficulty accessing benefits, and a simple lack of affordable housing, leaving many persons, who have served their time in prison, as either vulnerably housed or at risk of homelessness.

Program Description:

To address this problem, IHDA created a Re-Entry Pilot round of the existing Rental Housing Support (RHS) Program, a rental assistance program created in 2005 to promote permanent housing through the funding of rent subsidies for these rent-burdened, extremely and severely low-income households.

The primary RHS Program has been an effective resource to assist priority populations – extremely and severely low-income households – by awarding program funds to organizations around the state that then become local administering agencies (LAA). The LAAs in turn provide subsidies to landlords, which allow extremely low-income households to afford their rents. The three primary goals of the program are to reduce the risk of homelessness for extremely low-income households, assist communities as they create and preserve long-term affordability, and provide rental assistance to areas in the state that are underserved by rental assistance and affordable housing programs.

The RHS Program is funded through a \$10 fee collected from real estate document recordings. Resources are allocated by the state legislature and then distributed by IHDA to four geographic areas: Chicago, suburban Chicago, small cities and rural communities. The program is publicized through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process and is open to local housing authorities, municipalities and nonprofit community groups with the organizational capacity and experience to operate housing programs.

Once selected as a local administering agency, the LAA helps to identify local property owners to participate in the program, help determine tenant eligibility and inspect all units included in the program. During the application period, IHDA conducts a series of trainings across the state for groups interested in applying to become administrative agencies. Another series of trainings covering program management requirements is held once the LAAs have been selected.

Under the RHS Re-Entry Pilot program, IHDA will request proposals from qualified housing providers to create a pool of housing that will serve individuals exiting the prison system, and provide them with the services needed to successfully reintegrate into society.

Although individuals exiting the prison system have a wide variety of needs, this Pilot will focus on two primary populations: “Elderly/Disabled” and “Ready to Work”. The Pilot will be a partnership between IHDA, IDOC and local service providers, each playing a critical role to the success of this program. IHDA will provide funds for rental assistance for up to 100 individuals exiting the prison system to LAA’s, who will in turn identify local property owners to provide housing. IDOC will deliver targeted individuals who have developed a pre-release plan the opportunity to participate in the program, in partnership with a local service agency. The service providers will follow the pre-release plan to provide the individuals with the services needed for a successful reintegration.

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Currently, the Winnebago County Housing Authority (WCHA) is receiving funds to house this population within an existing RHS grant. WCHA is working in partnership with the New York University Marron Institute and the IDOC on the Graduated Reintegration program (GR). It is anticipated that this model will be replicated within the Re-Entry Pilot.

GR participants participate in pre-release programming for approximately three months before release on GR. The pre-release program can include financial literacy training, life skills, communication and critical thinking; and substance use disorder services if warranted. Each participant leaves with a re-entry plan.

GR Participants are released approximately 3- 6 months prior to their parole eligibility into housing. The program rewards participants with greater freedom as they demonstrate their ability to follow GR program rules, and minimizes risk to public safety by carefully monitoring the movement of GR participants during the time they are under the custody of the IDOC.

Participants are assigned to a case manager from TASC (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities) who provides them with wrap-around supports and assists them in accessing community- based services to meet their individual needs. Upon successful completion of electronic detention, they may choose to live elsewhere or retain their living unit. Participants are required to pay an income-based tenant contribution for housing.

Conclusion:

IHDA's mission is to create and preserve affordable housing for Illinois residents. For tenants, this means having access to affordable and stable housing that can be used as a platform for stability, recovery, and independence. The subsidies provided under the Rental Housing Support Re-Entry Pilot program enable us to do just that for an underserved population with a critical need for housing. While the 100 units funded in this Pilot may seem like a small investment, the impact of the program has far reaching consequences: individuals release from the State prison system avoid becoming homeless, reduce their use of expensive public services like emergency rooms and shelters and achieve a better quality of life with improved housing stability. If success is seen from this pilot, IHDA will expand the program to house additional individuals leaving the State prison system.