

Open Doors to Public Housing: New Initiative and Report Aim to Ease Barriers to Housing for People in Tacoma, Washington with Conviction Histories

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Tacoma, Washington, September 29, 2017 — Today, the Vera Institute of Justice announced that **Tacoma, Washington** was selected for a new initiative, *Open Doors to Public Housing*, that will help the public housing authority safely increase access to stable housing for people with conviction histories. Chosen after a competitive selection process, **Tacoma Housing Authority** joins five other public housing authorities from across the country.

“The Tacoma Housing Authority looks forward, with this initiative, to make all its housing programs responsibly more accessible to persons with criminal histories, and their families. This initiative is particularly timely as we expand our program that houses homeless Tacoma Community College students and their families. This program will now serve homeless students who begin their studies while in prison. To do this we will learn from current research and best practices to make our city and its housing market safer and more accessible.”

Michael Mirra, Executive Director, Tacoma Housing Authority

“Access to stable housing is something that is foundational to a person’s ability to contribute productively to society,” said Fred Patrick, director of Vera’s Center on Sentencing and Corrections. “However, restrictive policies often leave some of the people most in need of affordable housing without a place to live and separated from their families. As described in the guide, housing authorities can successfully and safely open up their doors to people who have had past involvement with the criminal justice system.”

As part of a national movement toward easing the wide-ranging collateral consequences of a criminal conviction and improving reentry outcomes, a growing number of housing authorities have taken measures to change their policies toward people with criminal histories.

The initiative launched today seeks to help housing authorities who similarly want to plan and implement their own reentry-focused housing programs, or to change their admissions policies. The initiative has been met with positive feedback from both Departments of Corrections and Public Housing Authorities.

Other jurisdictions participating in the initiative include:

- State of Colorado
- Kearney, Nebraska
- Tacoma, Washington
- Springfield, Massachusetts
- Providence, Rhode Island
- Asheville, North Carolina

Vera also published a guide for all housing authorities seeking to make similar changes, which draws upon the best practices and lessons learned from 11 agencies across the country that have successfully implemented programs and policy changes to help reunite families and reduce recidivism. This initiative is funded with support from [Trinity Church Wall Street](#) and [The Tow Foundation](#).

Over the past five years, Vera and the Corporation for Supportive Housing worked with the New York City Housing Authority to launch and implement a program that reunites people recently released from prison with their families who live in public housing, and connects them to supportive services to improve reentry. Last year, an [evaluation](#) found that of the 85 people accepted into the program, only one had been convicted of a new charge over the three year evaluation period. Almost 50 percent of program participants interviewed for the evaluation said they would be homeless, living in a shelter, or in transitional housing, if not for the public housing reentry program. The evaluation concluded that the program could be expanded and replicated as a national model. Vera has also worked with the Housing Authority of New Orleans to address policy barriers to affordable housing and employment faced by people with criminal records.

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About the Vera Institute of Justice

The Vera Institute of Justice is a justice reform change agent. Vera produces ideas, analysis, and research that inspire change in the systems people rely upon for safety and justice, and works in close partnership with government and civic leaders to implement it. Vera is currently pursuing core priorities of ending the misuse of jails, transforming conditions of confinement, and ensuring that justice systems more effectively serve America's increasingly diverse communities.

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