

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/opening-doors-to-public-housing-for-people-with-criminal-convictions>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

On Monday, November 2, President Obama announced that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has released guidance for public housing and other federally-assisted housing providers on [excluding the use of arrest records in housing decisions](#). The guidance is an important step in helping housing authorities reexamine the ways they use arrests and convictions in admissions and evictions decisions and bringing their approach in line with HUDs goal of providing second chances to formerly incarcerated individuals where appropriate and to ensuring that individuals are not denied access to HUD-subsidized housing on the basis of inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise unreliable evidence of past criminal conduct.

In recent years, Vera has been working with housing authorities to improve access for people with criminal convictions. HUDs guidance, and the presidents support, is a testament to our government partners, including the [Housing Authority of New Orleans](#) and the [New York City Housing Authority](#), whose efforts were referenced among the best practices detailed in HUDs guidance. It is also a testament to the many community advocates for fairer treatment of persons with criminal convictions, whose efforts have been at the forefront of driving the change that is now underway.

To help shine a light on the HUD guidance, Vera is partnering with the [Sergeant Shriver National Center for Poverty Law](#) to organize a webinar in the coming weeks. In the meantime, take a look at a [recent fact sheet](#) produced by Veras Family Justice Program to learn about other ways housing authorities are increasing access to people with conviction histories.

The president signaled the importance of opening the doors of public housing to people with criminal convictions by including it in a package of policy changes that address the ways government over-punishes people arrested and convicted of crimes. He called for steps to make our criminal justice system fairer and more effective and to address the vicious cycle of poverty, criminality, and incarceration that traps too many Americans and weakens too many communities. Rather than continuing punishment, our public housing authorities can play a supportive role in helping people succeed, to the benefit of the entire community. HUDs guidance provides a helpful framework to the authorities, such as in New York City and New Orleans, who are finding ways to play that role.

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