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From Locked Up to Locked Out: Access to Affordable Rental Housing and Criminal Recidivism¹

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Abstract

Attaining rental housing is difficult for ex-offenders because most landlords are unwilling to rent to them and rents are often unaffordable. This is the first paper to estimate the relationship between affordable rental housing market conditions on the probability that released felons return to prison. I find that ex-offenders who return to areas with relatively higher vacancy rates for affordable rental housing are significantly less likely to recidivate. This finding is driven by Blacks and the availability of rental-units in single-family homes, whose landlords are more likely to rent to ex-offenders. I find no effect for changes in the share of affordable units in multi-family buildings, which is consistent with these units often being rented by property management companies who are less likely to rent to ex-offenders. I conclude that access – not just affordability – of rental housing is important for decreasing recidivism of ex-offenders.

JEL Codes: J15, H32, I39

Keywords: Affordable housing, recidivism, economics of crime

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