

Housing Mobility Demonstration Will Improve Families' Access to High-Opportunity Areas



The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program can enable low-income families with children to move to safe neighborhoods with high-quality schools. But many families participating in the program remain in high-poverty areas, for a variety of reasons. The recently enacted Housing Choice Voucher Mobility Demonstration, included in the fiscal year 2019 funding bill for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and other agencies, provides incentives to public housing agencies (PHAs) to help thousands of families realize their goal of moving to high-opportunity communities. The 2019 funding bill included \$28 million for the demonstration: \$20 million for housing mobility services, \$5 million for new vouchers for families with children, and \$3 million for research.

Why Do We Need a Housing Mobility Demonstration?

PHAs have limited resources and incentives to help low-income families gain access to neighborhoods that traditionally have been out of reach. The demonstration program will help PHAs plan and implement a housing mobility program to provide this assistance. It includes an evaluation component to help determine which interventions are most cost effective and beneficial to families.

A growing body of evidence shows that children who move to low-poverty areas do better in the long term. As the funding bill [report](#) issued by the House Appropriations Committee explains:

Low-income families, including voucher holders, tend to be concentrated in high-poverty neighborhoods where schools are under-resourced, transportation is limited, and well-paying jobs are scarce. This demonstration will harness the power of the housing choice voucher platform to help families with children seek housing and successfully move to privately-owned units in lower-poverty areas. A growing body of research finds that when families move to higher opportunity areas with less poverty, more jobs, and quality schools, their children experience significant earnings and educational attainment improvements that persist into adulthood. The persistence of the improved outcomes for children is remarkable and gives hope that family mobility could hold the key to arresting generational poverty in families served by HUD.

Given this important research, the housing mobility demonstration has enjoyed strong bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate.

Funding for Services

PHAs need additional resources to offer robust services to give more families access to high-opportunity communities. The demonstration includes \$20 million for services, which will allow selected PHAs and their partners to work together to develop and operate a housing mobility program. Those services might include:

- Informing families of the advantages of areas of opportunity.
- Working directly with individual families to address barriers they may need to overcome to successfully move to a high-opportunity area, such as by providing financial coaching.
- Providing outreach to landlords to recruit more of them to participate.
- Providing housing search assistance to help families find affordable units that meet their individual needs.
- Providing post-move services, such as regular check-ins, resource coordination, and landlord/tenant mediation, to help families living in areas of opportunity remain there.

Funding for Vouchers

The demonstration includes \$5 million for new vouchers for families with children that participate in the demonstration. This funds about 500 new vouchers, which will boost incentives for PHAs to undertake the substantial planning needed to meet the demonstration's goals.

The demonstration also allows participating agencies to use voucher funding for security deposits in designated opportunity areas. Lack of funds for security deposits is a significant barrier for poor families to move to higher-opportunity areas, where landlords often require large deposits.

How Would HUD Select Agencies to Participate?

HUD would select PHAs to participate in the demonstration through a competitive process. The proposal requires HUD to prioritize regional collaborations that have high concentrations of voucher holders in low-opportunity neighborhoods, or one or more small housing agencies, or a high-performing Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program and a commitment to allow families in the demonstration to maintain FSS participation, among other factors. PHAs selected for the demonstration would coordinate with partners and other service providers in the region to:

- Identify low-poverty areas and analyze access barriers for voucher holders.
- Determine what information, services, and resources families need to access high-opportunity areas.
- Develop a plan to recruit families and landlords to participate in the program.
- Create educational materials, including maps of the region, transportation options, and educational resources, to help families understand the regional housing market.
- Collaborate to make it easier for a family to move from one PHA's jurisdiction to another.
- Modify agency policies, such as payment standards and search time, as needed to facilitate moves to areas of opportunity.
- Enhance the quality of the Housing Choice Voucher program generally, to encourage more landlords to participate.

To implement the demonstration, HUD likely will issue two separate documents: a notice defining terms and specifying policies that will apply to the demonstration, and a Notice of Funding Availability to launch the competition to select the regions that will participate. These steps ideally will not take longer than six months. PHAs would then apply for the funding. HUD would likely make awards in late 2019 or early 2020.

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