

## **Overview of Articles**

### **March 10, 2015**

*Budget Cuts Put a Big Hole in Housing Authority Security* - HACCC is currently struggling with how it can continue to pay for needed security as a result of HUD funding changes last year. This article talks a little bit about the history of HUD funding for security and struggle other housing authorities are facing in continuing to pay for security.

*Feinstein Renews Push to Redefine Homelessness*

*Stretching the Homeless* - These articles discuss proposed legislation in Washington that would expand the federal definition of homelessness and the availability of housing services. However, it appears these changes will come with no additional funding.

*What Happens to Families on Housing Assistance When the Assistance Goes Away?* - This article discusses the results of a recent Urban Institute study of 5,000 families who left public housing for a variety of positive and negative reasons. The study looked at how their lives improved or not over the next 10-15 years.

## **BUDGET CUTS PUT A BIG HOLE IN HOUSING AUTHORITY SECURITY**

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette – 1/26/2015 -- by Rich Lord

McKeesport resident William Doyle was fatally shot last week in the Crawford Village public housing complex that once benefited from a federally funded police presence but now relies largely on security cameras to deter crime.

Doyle, 24, who faced drug charges, didn't live in Crawford Village, said McKeesport Housing Authority executive director Stephen L. Bucklew. Nor did the men suspected of shooting him. So why were they all there?

"The criminals prey on the poor people," Mr. Bucklew said.

Housing authorities are charged with sheltering low-income families, disabled people and seniors. Since 2001, Congress and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, which funds the authorities, have nearly shut the spigot of funding for security in public housing communities.

McKeesport's authority, for instance, got as much as \$600,000 in annual Public Housing Drug Elimination Program grants during the 1990s, and used them to pay that city's police force for extra patrols. Now those grants are gone, and the authority struggles to come up with \$10,000 every few years to pay for occasional impact patrols.

"There are reasons why public housing has more problems with crime than other places," said Susan J. Popkin, director of The Urban Institute's Program on Neighborhoods and Youth Development. The complexes are "not very secure. They're very public. Anyone can get in there. ... They have all of the ills that come with concentrated poverty. They tend to have a lot of kids."

The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh spends more than \$2 million a year for private security guards. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on Sunday detailed problems with the deployment of those guards.

As recently as 2001, the Allegheny County Housing Authority got \$859,000 in federal grants to fight drug dealing. Those grants were eliminated by President George W. Bush's administration. Now the county authority has to carve out \$901,000 for its own 10-man police force from an operating subsidy of \$10.8 million, which is meant to pay for management of 3,300 apartments.

HUD's only remaining contribution to public housing security comes in the form of Emergency Safety and Security Grants, which typically total around \$3 million a year nationally, and never exceed \$250,000 for a single authority. They can be spent primarily on equipment — usually surveillance cameras — and never on manpower.

The McKeesport authority recently got one of those grants, and a few months ago finished installing around 30 new cameras, plus expensive buried cables at Crawford Village. Doyle's shooting, though, occurred in an area not covered by the new, high-resolution cameras.

Complicating matters further, HUD in late 2013 barred authorities from spending capital dollars on security personnel. As a result, said Ms. Popkin, security costs come out of the operating subsidy, "and Congress has been cutting that steadily."

The Minneapolis Public Housing Authority, which once had a 12-officer police force, cut it down and then in 2011 eliminated it completely, said Mary Boler, the authority's managing director. The authority still spends around \$1.5 million a year with security firm Securitas, which mans front desks, patrols communities and monitors the security camera system.

Others have maintained large security budgets. The Chicago Housing Authority spends \$20.7 million a year on private security, plus \$2 million on its surveillance camera system, and pays \$6 million annually to the city's police department for guaranteed police patrols.

Why spend anything on security, when it's neither required nor federally funded?

"We're in various municipalities that are distressed," with limited police forces, said Frank Aggazio, executive director of the Allegheny County Housing Authority. The authority's internal police force is part of "a strategy of providing a safe, comfortable living environment."

If residents "feel uncomfortable, they leave," said Chief Mike Vogel of the county housing authority force. "We'd probably have a 30 percent vacancy rate if we didn't have police."

Housing authorities are paid by HUD according to the number of occupied units they manage, and that subsidy barely covers maintenance and administrative costs. If authorities lose residents due to a perceived safety problem, then even less money will flow from Washington.

The county authority police work closely with municipal and county officers and the district attorney, concentrating on high-impact patrols and investigations, said Chief Vogel. "We do a lot of drug roundups over the years where we put informants in, we'll come in six months later and round up 30 drug dealers," he said.

Congressionally mandated HUD budget cuts threaten to make things worse, said county authority chief financial officer Rich Stephenson.

"They're compounding the security problem," he said. "HUD needs to give us dedicated money for security."

## **FEINSTEIN RENEWS PUSH TO REDEFINE HOMELESSNESS**

The Examiner – 2/18/2015 – by Chris Roberts

Officially, there are an estimated 6,400 homeless people in San Francisco. But there are many more adults, children and families with no permanent housing in The City — and U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein wants them under the same classification.

Thousands of people considered homeless by The City are not included in the official biannual homeless count tally because of differing definitions of homelessness.

People doubled up with friends or family, couch-surfing, or living in single-room-occupancy hotels are not considered homeless by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

But that would change under legislation Feinstein, the San Francisco Democrat, introduced in Congress last month that would expand the federal definition of homelessness — and also expand the availability of housing services.

The disparity between people defined as homeless by the federal government and the true number of homeless people in The City is stark.

The 2013 San Francisco homeless count identified less than 900 homeless children. However, there were 2,352 homeless children in San Francisco public schools last year, according to school data.

And that disparity is playing out around the country. Nationwide, homeless counts tallied 222,197 homeless households with at least one child, but the Department of Education says there are 1.2 million homeless children in America.

Under Feinstein's Homeless Children and Youth Act, the government would recognize children and families living in SRO hotels, motels and doubled-up with friends or family as homeless.

This is Feinstein's second try at expanding the homeless definition, after similar legislation last year died in committee.

The law would not include single adults living in similar precarious situations as the homeless.

Advocates note that having more people defined as homeless would mean more money for services.

The City's total budget for homeless services is about \$163 million, with about \$30 million coming from the federal government for homeless outreach and services.

However, shelters meant for families are at capacity, with up to an eight-month wait for family shelter, according to Elizabeth Ancker, a program director with Compass Connecting Point, which manages emergency housing for families.

"That's a very problematic length of time," she said Wednesday. "Families can destabilize quite a bit [in six months or longer]."

There are currently 140 families on The City's wait list for emergency shelter. That's lower than the recent average, but that's after 100 chronically homeless families were moved into permanent supportive housing.

And The City's "permanent supportive housing options are full now," she added, with few new units in the pipeline.

It's not clear if Feinstein's bill will have better luck getting approved this year. If successful, The City's homeless problem would become statistically worse overnight.

However, HUD's "false definition" of homelessness needs changing for statistics to reflect reality, said Jennifer Friedenbach, the director of the Coalition on Homelessness.

"With a narrow definition, we create barriers to housing for people who need it," she said. "We're making the need appear smaller than it actually is."

## **STRETCHING THE HOMELESS**

Blade, The (Toledo, OH) – 2/16/2015 – EDITORIAL

A bill sponsored by Republican U.S. Sen. Rob Portman of Ohio would expand the federal definition of homelessness, enabling nearly 1 million more homeless children and young people nationwide to gain access to federal housing aid. By including children who live doubled up or in motels, the measure provides a more relevant definition of homelessness, and would serve children who are disconnected from social-service providers and vulnerable to pimps and traffickers.

However, the well-intended bill does not provide more money for the hundreds of thousands of people who would be newly eligible for homeless programs run by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Without a funding increase, the benefits of expanding eligibility are minimal — and potentially even risky if assistance is diverted from the neediest cases.

Even now, HUD-funded homeless programs — amounting to \$2.4 billion in President Obama's proposed 2016 budget — serve only a fraction of those who are eligible. By using the Department of Education's definition of homelessness instead of HUD's, Mr. Portman's bill could more than triple the number of people who become eligible for already underfunded programs.

In Ohio, 23,748 children were homeless at some time last year, but HUD counted only 4,714 households with children as homeless. Because of HUD's narrow definition, only an estimated one in five homeless children in Ohio is eligible for federal housing programs.

In Toledo, roughly 1,000 people are homeless at any time. But the number of people who are homeless in the city at some time during the year is probably three times higher.

Nationwide, an estimated 610,000 people — including more than 12,000 in Ohio — are homeless at any time. More than one-third of them are in families. Those families, under the current definition of homelessness, include people who live on the street, in shelters, in cars, and under bridges.

Mr. Portman's bill would offer HUD homeless aid to poorly housed families who live doubled up with other households or in motels. That's appropriate: Children and families who live in such dangerous and deplorable conditions need help. They can be even more disconnected from service providers and vulnerable to pimps, human traffickers, and gangs than are children in shelters.

With current funding, however, they would get little aid from HUD programs. Any help they receive would come at the expense of families who are literally homeless and on the street.

The Portman bill has the right idea. Even without more money, Congress should pass it. Expanding eligibility would give local communities more choices in setting priorities, as well as open doors for especially at-risk families who cannot now get help.

But Mr. Portman and other bill sponsors, including Democrat Dianne Feinstein of California, should not pat themselves on the back yet. Without a substantial increase in funding, the measure could be more of a false promise than a real help to some of the nation's most vulnerable people.

## **WHAT HAPPENS TO FAMILIES ON HOUSING ASSISTANCE WHEN THE ASSISTANCE GOES AWAY?**

Washington Post – 9/22/2014 -- by Emily Badger

Housing constitutes the largest expense that most of us bear every month, as well as the most essential. And yet of all of the forms of aid we offer the poor — food stamps, income support, school lunch, health care — housing assistance can be the most precarious.

Only about a quarter of all families who qualify for public housing or vouchers [ever receive the help](#), creating long backlogs and year-long waits. And families who do receive it may lose the aid for several reasons, both seemingly good (a marriage or raise made them ineligible) or bad (a rules violation got them evicted). Here is one woman, from a [new Urban Institute study of housing assistance recipients](#), describing her deep fear of losing housing assistance:

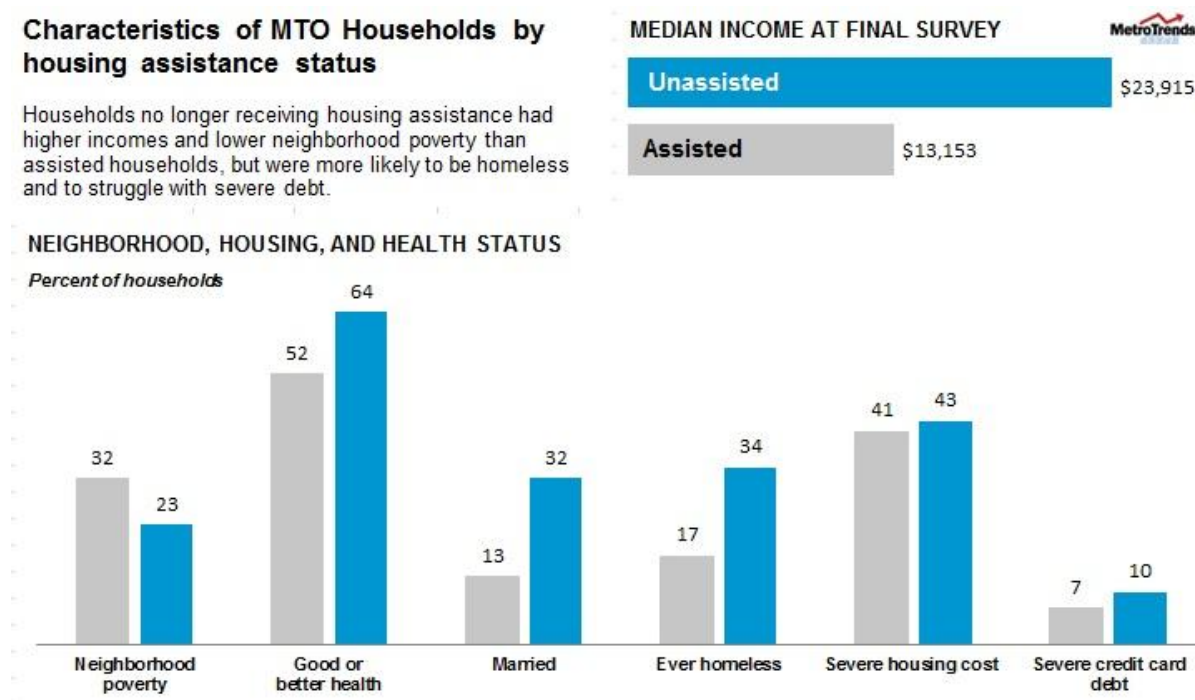
You have to go through hell and high water to get housing. And I thought, what if I can't afford full rent? Where will my kids be, in a shelter? So you get scared because it takes so long to get housing. You know what I mean? It's like a trap. It's hard to get in, and because of that, you're scared to get out.

Despite this shaky picture, we actually don't know a lot about what happens to families as they transition off (or get evicted from) housing assistance. But the answer is more important than ever as local housing agencies, facing shrinking budgets and rising demand, look for ways to stretch their resources further. If we were to set time limits on housing vouchers, what would happen to families when their time is up? Does housing aid offer a ["springboard to better](#)

[outcomes" or a safety net](#) without which families will fall into homelessness? In short, are people better off when they leave these programs?

The new Urban study, from Robin Smith, Susan Popkin, Taz George and Jennifer Comey, suggests some discouraging answers. They examined data from HUD's Moving To Opportunity demonstration, which followed a sample of about 5,000 families who started in public housing in five cities in 1994 over the next 10-15 years. At the time, the project was trying to track what happens to low-income families who are given the chance to move to low-poverty neighborhoods (Thomas Edsall at the New York Times recently wrote an exhaustive piece about [the conflicting and controversial answers to this question](#)).

The Urban researchers, though, have posed a different question about the data: Regardless of how families originally received the assistance, what happened to the households who were no longer getting any housing aid by the end of the survey? About 35 percent of all the MTO families met this description. And the below chart summarizes the mixed results in their lives:



The households who were no longer receiving assistance by the end of the survey were making significantly more money than those who still were, and they reported being in better health.

"But even among the households that left on a more positive trajectory, they're still struggling heavily with debt," says George. "They're still on other forms of public assistance. They're severely burdened in terms of finding affordable housing."

Many of these families earned too much that they no longer qualified for housing help, but that actually left them with *higher* housing cost burdens on the open market. And it left them more

prone to homelessness, even if they left assistance for positive reasons. Whatever additional money these families were seeing through better jobs or new marriages, the costs of finding housing on their own erased many of those benefits.

"This really spoke to us that there needed to be a two-pronged set of solutions," Popkin says. "One is a much bigger focus on eviction prevention for people lucky enough to get in. The other is some kind of graduated way of getting people off so they aren't just left hanging. Because it's a big cliff when they go."

The first solution could entail efforts to identify and work with tenants who might violate program rules. The second could involve slowly reducing the size of assistance until a family is on firmer ground. As with a lot of ideas about how to strengthen housing assistance, both would require more time from staff and more money for families. Which brings us back to the original problem that housing agencies are already tight on money.

"I don't see a free solution to the problem," George says.

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