

Recruiting Opportunity Landlords:

Lessons from Landlords in Maryland



June 2020

*Jennifer E. Cossyleon
Philip ME Garboden
Stefanie DeLuca*

PRRAC
*Poverty & Race
Research Action Council*

**Mobility
Works** 

About the Authors

Jennifer E. Cossyleon is Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow and Policy and Advocacy Advisor at Community Change, a national progressive organization that supports the grassroots community organizing of directly impacted people of color around economic and racial justice issues, including affordable housing. Her research explores the social and familial processes marginalized people experience as they contest social and economic oppression through collective action. Formerly, she was a post-doctoral researcher at the Poverty and Inequality Research Lab and the Sociology Department at Johns Hopkins University.

Philip Garboden is the HCRC Professor in Affordable Housing Economics, Policy, and Planning at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) and the UH Economic Research Organization (UHERO). His work examines how the decisions of supply side actors (landlords, tenants and developers) are shaped by domestic housing policies and how those decisions impact the lives of poor tenants.

Stefanie DeLuca is the James Coleman Professor of Social Policy and Sociology at Johns Hopkins University, where she directs the Social Policy Program and the Poverty and Inequality Research Lab. She informs education and housing policy by using interdisciplinary and mixed-methods tools to explore how families make decisions about neighborhoods and schools, how neighborhoods shape the outcomes of parents and children, and how instability affects all of these processes. Based on work with young adults in the Baltimore site of the Moving to Opportunity program, Stefanie wrote a book, *Coming of Age in the Other America* (with Susan Clampet-Lundquist and Kathryn Edin), which was named an Outstanding Academic Title from the American Library Association, and won the William F. Goode Award from the American Sociological Association.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the author(s) alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation.

The authors also thank the staff of the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership, who were very generous with their time and expertise, as well as the landlords and property managers who shared their stories with us.

Recruiting Opportunity Landlords: *Lessons from Landlords in Maryland*

INTRODUCTION

Mounting evidence suggests that helping children move to higher opportunity neighborhoods can have a direct impact on their overall well-being, physical and mental health, economic mobility, and academic achievement (Chetty, Hendren, Kline, and Saez 2014; Sard and Rice 2014; Rinzler, Tegeler, Cunningham, Pollack 2015). These effects are especially important given that school segregation falls primarily between, rather than within, jurisdictions, trapping children from lower-income families in under-resourced schools and making it difficult for housing programs to improve educational outcomes (Ellen, Horn, and Schwartz 2016). Numerous studies have shown that while the receipt of a traditional Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) has large financial benefits for families, it does not help households enter low-poverty

neighborhoods at higher rates than comparable low-income unsubsidized renters (McClure, Schwartz and Taghavi 2015; Sard, Rice, Bell and Mazzara 2018).

To this end, housing mobility programs, which help families relocate to areas of higher opportunity, represent one of the most effective public policies for affirmatively addressing issues of segregation and concentrated poverty (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum, 2000; Briggs, Popkin and Goering, 2010; DeLuca and Rosenblatt, 2017; Bergman, Chetty, DeLuca, Hendren, Katz, and Palmer 2019). However, the success of housing mobility programs is largely dependent on the willingness of private landlords to accept housing vouchers. This is particularly difficult in low-poverty communities where landlords have the least incentive to



Photo credit: BRHP

participate in the voucher program and can be unwilling to go through annual inspections of their units and other programmatic delays that might result in lost income (Garboden, Rosen, DeLuca, and Edin 2018; Garboden, Rosen, Greif, DeLuca and Edin, 2018; Cunningham et al, 2018). Understanding what motivates landlords' participation in voucher programs, as well as their hesitations to participate, is vital for attracting and retaining landlords within mobility programs across the country.

Our study describes landlords' challenges with housing voucher programs as well as their enthusiasm to participate in such programs. We present data from 40 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with landlords in the Baltimore Metropolitan Area who owned or managed properties in census tracts that qualify for the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program (BHMP), one of the nation's largest and most successful mobility programs (DeLuca and Rosenblatt 2017). Our data consist of a group of 30 landlords who participate in the mobility program and a group of 10 landlords who do not. We view this as an initial pilot study that can be expanded to other sites and with larger samples. Additional studies can address some of the same questions, as well as others that emerge as housing mobility efforts expand nationally.

The report is divided into two sections. First, we use our data to discuss landlords' perspectives on housing vouchers generally. We discuss the benefits of participation in the program articulated by many of our landlord respondents, noting that even the standard HCV program works well for some landlords by providing a reliable stream of revenue protected from the vicissitudes of the labor market. We affirm earlier findings related to the challenges faced by housing programs looking to expand opportunity for voucher families (Garboden et al. 2018).

In the second section, we describe the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program (BHMP), which is administered by the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP). We discuss the steps BRHP has taken to overcome landlord resistance to voucher acceptance and assist thousands of families to move to low-poverty neighborhoods. We conclude with several policy recommendations that can help mobility programs across the country achieve their mission of racial and economic desegregation by recruiting landlords in opportunity areas to rent to tenants with housing vouchers.

DATA AND METHODS

We conducted 40 in-depth interviews with two sets of randomly sampled landlords and property managers:¹ those participating in the BHMP and those who own properties in qualified areas but were not sampled from the BHMP's list.

We avoid making direct comparisons between the two sets of landlords as distinctions were far from sharp. Most, although not all, BHMP participating landlords also accepted standard vouchers. Some landlords in the comparison group did not accept any vouchers, while others had never accepted the BHMP voucher but did accept vouchers offered by other regional Public Housing Authorities (PHAs). Moreover, because the vouchers provided by HUD to BRHP are Housing Choice Vouchers, they share many administrative characteristics, albeit with BRHP providing significantly more programmatic supports. For these reasons, we discuss landlord experiences with standard HCVs regardless of how we sampled them.

Interviews covered landlords' general business models, perceptions of voucher programs (including the BHMP and the standard PHA programs), as well as their experiences and challenges with renting to voucher holding tenants

¹ For parsimony, "landlords" is used to cover both groups, but important differences are discussed in the findings section below.

in opportunity areas. Specifically, our study asks: What do opportunity area landlords believe are some of the benefits and barriers of participating in the HCV program? We seek to understand what is working and what is not working for landlords, as well as the reasons they chose to participate or avoid housing voucher programs altogether.

To answer these questions, we interviewed two groups of landlords who owned and or managed properties within opportunity areas as defined by the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP). We recruited the first group of landlords from an administrative list provided by the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP). We recruited the second group from a list of rental listings within BRHP's allowable areas, which we scraped from Craigslist.com. For the sake of clarity, we note that several landlords whom we recruited through Craigslist were also participating in the BRHP program.

We stratified the sample to ensure both smaller and larger landlords were included, given that the type of unit significantly predicts landlord behavior (Garboden, Rosen, DeLuca, and Edin 2018). We interviewed landlords who owned or managed large multi-family dwelling units as well as those who owned or managed single-family homes.

Our sample is not designed to be representative of rental property owners and managers but instead to reveal a range of practices and perspectives. Our oversample of participating landlords was designed to complement previous work which randomly selected landlords in and around Baltimore City. We reference this previous work when necessary to make comparisons.

We recruited all landlords via phone, email, and/or letter depending on what contact information was available to us. We scheduled interviews at a place and time most convenient for each respondent. Our in-depth interviews were semi-structured,

which allowed the conversation to flow freely, often revealing unanticipated insights (see DeLuca, Clampet-Lundquist and Edin, 2016). This approach helped to uncover rich descriptions of landlords' business strategies and experiences. Although interviews covered a wide range of topics from tenant recruitment processes, repairs, maintenance, inspections, interactions with tenants, and the respondent's personal history, our conversations focused on landlord's experiences with various voucher programs.

We gave respondents \$50 in cash for their participation. We audio recorded interviews and transcribed the audio verbatim. Respondents selected their own pseudonyms, which we preserved except in the case of duplication. When we felt a particular quote or story put the respondent at risk for identification, we changed substantively irrelevant details.

Of the landlords with valid contact information, 74 percent agreed to participate in the study, for a total sample size of 40 landlords. Study landlords included 23 women and 17 men, who were racially diverse (28 White, 9 Black, 3 Asian), and who leased anywhere from 1 to over 1,300 units in Baltimore City and the surrounding counties (See Tables 1 and 2). In three cases, we interviewed more than one respondent from a single property (a property manager and an assistant property manager, for example). The total of 40 interviews represents 37 focal properties.

To better understand the procedures implemented by BRHP to increase landlord participation, we hosted two meetings with program staff and counselors—one prior to data collection and one after data collection was complete. In these meetings, staff reflected on their work, including successes and challenges they have had with landlords and tenants. The meetings were audio recorded and fieldnotes were taken at both events.



PART I. The Opportunities and Challenges of Housing Vouchers

In this section we consider both the opportunities and challenges faced by opportunity landlords from the standard HCV program. First we describe how participating landlords talk about the benefits of the voucher program,² noting ways that, even in the absence of reform, voucher programs can market their strengths to rental property owners. We then move on to their critiques of the program. In most cases, landlords in our sample accepted vouchers but nevertheless expressed frustrations with the program. In other cases, landlords described the barriers that prevented them from participating at all.

It is necessary to recognize that we are reporting landlord's perceptions of the voucher program, not necessarily its reality. We understand that this can be frustrating for practitioners who believe our respondents are casting the HCV program in a poor light. Certainly, none of the landlords we spoke with understood the challenges faced by Public Housing Authorities who are tasked, year after year, to do more with less. Nonetheless, we believe it is essential for policymakers to understand how a program is perceived. These perceptions, however divorced from reality at times, are the basis on which landlords make decisions regarding their participation in the program.

OPPORTUNITIES AND BENEFITS

Before describing the barriers to participation, it is critical to understand the benefits of the program for opportunity landlords. Past research focused on

landlords renting in high poverty neighborhoods has noted that HCV tenants are highly desirable in some environments where landlords can receive guaranteed above market rent, which more than makes up for any negative aspects of the program (Rosen 2014).

Opportunity landlords, however, are less motivated by these factors; they are generally in areas where market tenants can afford higher rents and the "counterfactual tenant" is as, if not more, profitable to house than a voucher tenant (Garboden et al. 2018). Interestingly though, the difference appears to be one of degree rather than kind. We found that even in relatively affluent neighborhoods, landlords and property managers still valued the stability and predictability that a voucher tenant can provide.

Easier Recruitment: "We'd Rather Get a Tenant in There, Have Them Stay Forever"

As landlords considered whether to rent their units to both market and voucher tenants, they often estimated how long a potential tenant would rent from them. Long-term tenants were tenants who stayed beyond the term of a one-year lease. These tenants avoided many hassles for landlords including: vacancies, creating and posting rental property ads, property showings, tenant screening and background checks, as well as other move in and move out tasks—all of which cost time and

2 Because our sample consists exclusively of landlords with properties in opportunity areas, we note that opportunity landlords in the Baltimore suburban metropolitan area differ from their city counterparts in ways that extend beyond the location of the property. Generally, the counties surrounding Baltimore City tend to have high levels of homeownership in the single-family stock. The rental stock is thus more likely to be in multifamily buildings (generally low-rise) than the city, meaning that it is corporately owned and professionally managed. Of course, many mom-and-pop landlords operate in the metropolitan area, but we find they are more common in the city.

money. Steve, a White man in his early-30s is one example of a landlord in our study who mentioned long-term tenancy as a main benefit of renting to tenants with a housing voucher.

Steve worked at PLR Management, LLC, which owned and managed 215 properties mainly located in Baltimore County. Steve, the nephew of the owner, began overseeing property rentals back when the company did not accept tenants with housing vouchers. "We weren't working with low-income housing because [our staff] didn't understand it," Steve told us, admitting that the company also thought vouchers came with negative "connotations." But, call after call from people inquiring about whether they accepted vouchers, Steve soon asked himself "why are we saying no to all these people, [when] there is obviously a huge demand?" In response, the company started by renting one property to a tenant with a voucher through the standard HCV, which snowballed into now renting 80 percent of their properties to voucher holding tenants, many with vouchers through the BHMP.

Steve, who supervised a property manager, a leasing agent, and three property maintenance technicians, was also involved in property acquisition of mostly larger single-family homes (with 3-5 bedrooms). To meet the high demand, PLR Management, LLC began purchasing homes in opportunity areas, which "rent really, really fast," said Steve adding how opportunity areas, unlike some parts of Baltimore City, "aren't speculative, they are developed, they are—they have shopping, they have everything that tenants want and the [BHMP] wants. So, we know it's a good area to buy. So, we jump on those [properties] as quickly as possible." Buying, renovating, and renting these opportunity area properties often secured a long-term voucher tenant.

Built into the business model of PLR Management, LLC was ensuring that the homes they bought and

renovated were upgraded enough to receive the highest rent possible from tenants with housing vouchers. Families with housing vouchers are PLR Management's ideal tenants because, according to Steve, they typically stay for a longer period of time in comparison to market rate tenants. "We'd rather get a tenant in there, have them stay forever," Steve said as he explained how his company viewed a long-term tenant as more profitable than even \$50 to \$75 more in monthly rent from a market tenant. Another aspect that made tenants with vouchers even more "attractive" was when most of the rental amount was paid by the administering PHA, making the tenant's portion very small or zero.

Guaranteed Rent: "The Rent Comes Every Month"

Another major benefit that comes with renting to tenants with a housing voucher was guaranteed rent payments. Debbie, a White woman in her late 50s is a quintessential example of a landlord in our study who relied on consistent and guaranteed rent payments through a voucher program. Debbie owned and rented two single-family homes in Baltimore County, both to families with housing vouchers (one to a BRHP tenant, the other to a standard HCV tenant). Both tenants had lived in her property for more than twelve years and had small or no rent portions. In the following quote, Debbie expands on the convenience of participating in a housing voucher program:

The benefit to me is, the rent comes every month. The first day of the month, it's deposited in the bank. I don't have to go collect anything, I don't have to chase it down. That rent – that voucher amount is guaranteed every month... So, it's – for someone like myself who's single, who still has a full-time job, it's – I don't have to chase money, I don't have to.



Whereas larger landlords who had staff to send late rent notices, file for nonpayment, or who might be able to afford a vacant unit or two amidst a sizable portfolio, Debbie did not. She had acquired her property through a divorce settlement and had previously not been involved in its management. Thus, one of the main reasons her properties remained profitable, was because rent was consistent. It was guaranteed every month with minimal effort on her part, other than keeping up with property maintenance. She said the voucher program was mutually advantageous: "I think that it's beneficial to the tenant because they can live in, maybe a nicer neighborhood with better schools. So, it's just—it works for me and I think it works for them," Debbie said.

Tenant Quality: "I Think Some of Our Best Tenants Are Voucher Holders."

Like, people that say subsidized tenants are slobs and pigs, that's wrong. Man, I have subsidized tenants that have beautiful homes, you can eat off their floors, and I have market tenants that live in really upscale places that I can't stand to be in, because of the filth. So, there's no, there's no true category as to what the tenant is like.

—Elizabeth, White woman in her 50s, owner of a property management company

Similar to Elizabeth's sentiments above, many of the stories told by landlords in our study—who had actual experience with renting to voucher holding tenants—help to dispel some myths about families who receive a federal rent subsidy.

Faye, a White woman in her early 40s, offers a typical example of a landlord who described tenants with housing vouchers as high-quality. We met Faye at Malberg Property Management, Inc., where she held the role of property manager. After working for an auto insurance company for a

decade, Faye decided to try a real estate career. First, she began in mortgage lending and later enthusiastically joined her current company. Faye oversaw 430 properties in Harford and Cecil County, Maryland, and most of these properties were single-family homes owned by individual owners. Describing herself as "superwoman" Faye dealt with property owners, managed the collection of rent, and oversaw maintenance and repairs. Almost ten percent of the properties she managed were rented to someone with a housing voucher, although if it were up to her, this number would be much higher. In the following quote, Faye explains further:

The owners that don't accept them [vouchers] they're just, they're ignorant to [what] the whole reason is for these, you know, women to actually get these [vouchers]. They [have] heard bad things about Section-8. This technically really isn't Section-8, its housing assistance. That's what I call it, I don't call it Section-8.

Faye said the majority of tenants with a housing voucher were working women with children whose "income is just not sufficient enough to put a roof [over their head] ... Hence, the reason they get the housing assistance." Faye, like many other landlords in our study, described the negative connotations associated with "Section-8":

It's just these horror stories. And I think maybe back in the day it was because they, you know, the whole Section-8... but I think it was certain areas where that was—and people just, you know, destroyed units and stuff. But we don't have a problem.

Faye's experience with renting to tenants who received housing assistance taught her that most

tenants with vouchers did not destroy units, they were rarely on her list for nonpayment –only “once in a blue moon”— and overall were great, responsive tenants. “I think some of our best tenants are voucher holders,” she said with little hesitation. Faye similarly underscored long-term tenancy as a major benefit of renting to tenants with a housing voucher: “[Tenants with a voucher] get used to a place and they make it their home and what not, and especially if they have children, small ones they’ll stay in the same school zone to when they graduate.”

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Paperwork and Bureaucracy: “It Takes a Lot of Time for My Staff to Write That Big ‘Ol Packet”

Landlords in our study, especially those who rented a high volume of units (in our sample, up to 1,300 units), bemoaned the paperwork required by the three-party contracts for voucher programs. Sharon, a White woman in her mid-50s who’d been working in property management for 20 years, worked as an assistant property manager at a very large multi-building apartment community. She described how voucher program paperwork was a burdensome task; she had seen her fair share of paperwork, but she described to us how the amount of documentation always seemed to increase. “Oh my gosh! There’s so many more pages,” said Sharon recalling how she had sat down with her leasing agent to review the information requested by the program.

Located in Howard County, which has a source of income protection law for tenants who receive a housing voucher, the property where Sharon worked handled anywhere from 40 to 60 files for tenants who receive a housing subsidy. “We get our money on time all the time from [voucher programs, but some of them] require all of the paperwork in duplicates. It takes a lot of time for my staff to write that big ‘ol packet” said Sharon.

“No one comes in here and trains us,” she added describing the confusion she faced when packets were modified, and her company received little direction or instructions. Sharon said some voucher programs required two copies of paperwork mailed to them, which meant that if these were lost by the post office, they “have to start all over.” Another frustrating detail for Sharon was that correspondence from voucher programs was sent to their company headquarters, instead of their actual residential community, which further delayed communication. “I wish they would just send emails or something,” suggested Sharon.

In many ways, these findings corroborate previous research, which argues that landlord’s administrative capacity can influence their decision to participate in voucher programs (Garboden, Rosen, DeLuca, and Edin 2018), but it is amplified within opportunity areas for several reasons. First, the opportunity landlords in our sample often own and manage far more units than those in the urban core. This makes what a mom-and-pop landlord might view as a one-time hassle into a routine burden on their staff. Second, as Sharon’s comment about email suggests, professional managers are much more comfortable in a paperless world. Having to mail documents, in duplicate no less, not only represents a waste of time, but can lead to frustration when more streamlined tools are readily available.³

But smaller landlords can become frustrated as well. Sly, a Black man in his late 40s, offers another example of dealing with bureaucratic processes. Sly worked full time for the railroad, owned 11 units in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., and managed another 8 units for private owners. Although Sly did not rent to voucher tenants at the time of our interview, he did have prior experience with the standard HCV program. Sly said the he did not have any voucher tenants because the long approval process often meant he was able to find a market tenant before a voucher tenant was cleared



to move in. Also, Sly believed he could get more rent for his properties outside of voucher programs:

The [voucher approval] process is so long, especially like in Baltimore, it takes something like two or three months. So, by then, usually, thankfully, I've found good tenants where I didn't have to wait on Section 8. Also, Section 8 sometimes low-balls you. I may be asking \$600 but they already say, "Well, your neighborhood only pays \$450." Who am I going to go with? It doesn't always work out.

Sly's comments emphasize the need for voucher programs to make approval processes quicker and to pay the highest possible amounts for rent to remain a competitive option for opportunity landlords.

Technical Mismatches: "And Now You Trying to Play Let's Make a Deal"

Many of the professionally managed complexes in our sample have switched to dynamic pricing models for their housing. Instead of setting a rent for a unit in advance, these models determine rent in real time based on a property's vacancy rate and a dynamic market analysis. When fewer apartments are available in a complex, asking rents increase. While the actual fluctuations are rather small, these systems make it difficult for tenants to determine in advance whether a unit will qualify based on the local voucher payment standard.

Moreover, HUD's process of rent reasonableness determination is generally interpreted by property managers as simply a rent negotiation, which they are often unable or unwilling to participate in. A

typical example of this confusion comes from Charlotte, a White woman and professional property manager in her 40s, who describes how she views the process after submitting paperwork to rent out a unit through the standard HCV program:

You get passed around from different case workers, and by the time you get to the next one or the third one or something like that, all of the sudden they're wanting you to do a discount in rent for them. And you are like, "you told me over here that [the tenant was] approved for this, we wouldn't have processed the paperwork, and put this resident through it. And now, you are trying to play, let's make a deal?" ... I'm sure that that's them just trying to cut costs. They are trying to get as many people in as they can into the program and maintain the budget.

There are many portions of this quote that an HCV administrator would view as inaccurate. Rent reasonableness is designed to keep costs down, but it does so under the assumption that it can estimate fair rents for a unit. Because Charlotte already has software to estimate market rents, she views rent reasonableness instead as a negotiation. Property managers are rarely allowed to negotiate rent (or only within pre-specified limits). This is not only good business, but also allows them to avoid fair housing complaints if they are viewed as giving rent breaks to some tenants and not others.

Similarly, tenant screening is often fully automated by professional managers. By taking discretion out of the equation, corporate landlords are able to

3 Of course, many Public Housing Authorities allow for electronic document submission, but even one or two that do not can influence how managers like Sharon evaluate the costs of participation.

avoid fair housing issues, avoid nepotism by managers, and ensure a consistent tenant group. Although this does remove the potential that voucher tenants would be discriminated against directly because of their gender, race, or family size, it can make it hard for them to be accepted, depending on what the software screens for. If the complex screens primarily on income, the voucher tenant can often make the case that the voucher ensures their rent multiple is never above three. However, if the screening policy focuses on credit scores or previous evictions, many voucher tenants will have their application rejected with no room for appeal. In our sample, large landlords used one or both criteria at various times. We have no evidence that landlords use such screening as a way of circumventing source of income protection laws (nor was our study designed to detect such intent), but intentional or not, the reliance on an applicant's history through automated screening rather than their current situation increases voucher households' barriers to access.

Poor Customer Service: "Sometimes When You Call, They Don't Return Your Phone Call"

Landlords consistently described communication with program staff as a frustrating component of participating in voucher programs. Respondents wanted to be able to quickly reach someone on the phone or via email. We spoke to Maria, a White woman in her mid-30s and Gary, a Black man in his mid-20s, both who managed a community of nearly 300 units in Howard County. Nearly 20 percent of their properties were rented to people who received a housing voucher, and both cited communication issues with voucher programs. In the next quote, Maria describes her unanswered phone calls and explains why she believes this is the case:

I mean, you have to get in communication with them, especially when you're going through the move-in process. I usually... email's probably the best. Sometimes when you call, they don't return your phone calls... They have a lot of cases. They have a big caseload... So, I mean, they're usually pretty good, it's just a longer process.

Although empathetic to the large caseloads of voucher programs, Maria cites communication as a barrier to having quicker move-in processes.

Offering another example Tim, a White man in his mid-50s, mentions communication issues within housing inspections through the voucher program. He stated: "The voucher, the Section-8, definitely our inspections are a lot more nitpicky, so nitpicky, terrible communication, there's no way to know what's going on or talk to somebody, and the attitude." Tim went on to say that "not all Section-8" programs were the same.

Maria and Tim point to the need to be responsive to landlords particularly concerning issues that could delay move-ins, including inspections. Tim in particular, describes wanting to feel like a valued customer—instead of a burden—when he has questions for voucher program staff. Improved communication could help to avoid some of these frustrations and other we describe below.

Inspections and the Responsibility for Repairs: "Why Do I Have to Pay for It?"

When it came to routine inspections, landlords in our study believed they should not be responsible for damages caused by tenants. Prior research finds that landlords are often confused about which responsibilities belong to them rather than the Public Housing Authority (Greenlee 2014).



This speaks to a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of inspections in the standard HCV program. HUD must assure that all units they fund meet basic health and safety standards. If a unit fails to do so, the landlord is expected to make the repairs and then enforce their lease regarding who should pay for the repairs. Landlords participating in voucher programs, however, often expect the local PHAs to adjudicate blame and make the necessary collections. Because PHAs are both unwilling and unable to do this, conflict can emerge.

Marie's⁴ story offered one typical example of a landlord in our study who believed they should not be responsible for certain tenant provoked property maintenance issues. Marie, a White woman in her late 40s with over 14 years of experience as a landlord, took the lead in managing 300 single-family properties at her family owned business, QMA Real Estate, Inc. The company managed units mainly in Anne Arundel County and Baltimore County, and 25 percent were leased to voucher holding tenants.

Marie described a number of instances where she believed voucher programs did not hold tenants responsible for their actions. She told us about an HCV tenant whose child flushed a rubber chicken down the toilet, making the bathroom flood. The tenant refused to pay for the repair, stating she would go to court if needed. "We have a picture of the chicken in the toilet!" Marie exclaimed, describing how the HCV program did nothing to address this issue. In another case, involving a different HCV assisted tenant, a child kept removing and hiding a smoke detector in the home. When inspectors came, they ordered the management company to have one re-installed, which they did. However, come time for re-inspection, the child had again removed the smoke

detector and the PHA did not pay rent for that month leaving QMA Real Estate, Inc. responsible for paying the property owner. In another case, a tenant broke a closet door, and the program required the property owner to fix it. Describing a last example, Marie said: "[The program] wants us to be responsible for, you know, kids hanging on the shower rod. That's not my fault your kid hung up on the shower rod and broke it, why do I have to pay for it?" asked Marie rhetorically.

Marie articulated how property owners were held accountable by HCV programs for paying for repairs, while programs did little to hold tenants responsible for damages they caused. When tenants reported an issue, particularly concerning property maintenance, Marie said voucher programs were "ready to withhold funds" if her company did not react promptly. Once, she said a tenant called the PHA reporting that two of their windows did not open. Marie's maintenance staff quickly went to the property and replaced the window sashes, taking full responsibility for the cost. "But, like when we report a problem with them, it's still pending," she said describing a recent example where she told a counselor that a tenant was smoking marijuana in their unit—two months later, a report had been filed, but the issue had not been resolved.

Combined, these experiences have led Marie to question whether renting to tenants with a housing subsidy is worth it. "We're one of the only ones around here that will take a voucher... Because everybody—if they have a voucher and Section 8, they're scared of them," said Marie differentiating her family's business from other management companies in the area. Confirming these sentiments, a leasing agent at the same company, Lynn, added that other businesses seldom dealt with housing voucher programs because of credit

⁴ Marie works with both the standard HCV program and the BRHP. The adjudication of maintenance responsibility is the same for both programs and thus Marie's concerns apply to all HCV vouchers.

scores: "A lot of [voucher-holding tenants] have very low credit scores, and I know a lot of other, like, property managers, they won't accept that there." Nonetheless, QMA Real Estate, Inc. continued to rent to voucher assisted tenants and company representatives were actively involved in advocating for the passing of local source of income protection laws.

Fear of Voucher Assisted Tenants: "I Don't Know What I'm Dealing With With Those Vouchers"

Similar to previous research, we find that race and fear played a factor in landlords' voucher-participation decision-making processes (Nisar, Murdoch, Elgin, Vachon, Horseman and 2M Research 2018). Perceptions about the voucher program held by landlords like James, below, offer one example of how racist stereotypes tied to subsidized housing assistance shapes landlords' decisions to not rent to voucher tenants. James, a White man in his early 40s, owned two units in a wealthier neighborhood of Baltimore City, a single-family home and a condominium. He did not accept housing vouchers and ignored any calls and emails from tenants who mentioned having one. Besides generalizing that tenants with vouchers would, "trash the property [and] trash the street," James wanted to avoid not only the process of obtaining the rental license that is required for voucher participation but also being subject to varying rent portions every time a tenant's income changed. Despite the fact that he would receive the same total rent regardless of the tenant's estimated portion, James felt that increases in tenant responsibilities would lead to more late payments.

Because James' property was located in an "expensive place to live in Baltimore," near the harbor, he said he rarely encountered so-called "riffraff" tenants. However, James said he could easily screen tenants based on poorly written email inquiries and whether or not they had a housing

voucher. James highlights what Garboden et al. (2018) describe as the "counterfactual tenant," whom landlords could possibly rent to in the open market if they did not accept a voucher holder (36). In the following quote, James elaborates:

The voucher thing, right, I don't know that much about it, but I know it's for people that aren't making that much money... I'm not dealing with that, there's enough good tenants... I can rent to them... I don't know what I'm dealing [with] those vouchers, and I don't want to bring that level of tenants to my own property.

James repeated that tenants with vouchers would surely annoy other people on the block. When we asked him to explain further, James said voucher tenants were "generally" people who were not going to take care of the properties they lived in and did not care about their neighborhoods. James used recent uprisings among African American youth in Baltimore in response to the death of Freddy Gray while in police custody as proof for his reasoning:

They are just generally people that aren't going to take—don't care about the street they live on where they grow up, they're just—part of the disease that's involved, all right, they just don't care. So, trash the property, trash the street – it's like they are not even like—you see these riots on TV, they are trashing their own community, like this is where you live and now you're setting everything on fire, so it's just that type of stuff, you know what I mean?

It is clear that his perception of voucher programs was clouded by stereotypes of lower-income Black residents. We learned from our respondents that



these stereotypes were not solely constructed by landlords, but they were also reproduced by other tenants and neighbors, which arguably also affected landlord inclinations to participate or avoid voucher programs.

The Opinion of Existing Tenants: "White People Like to Blame Nonwhite People for Problems"

Conrad, a White man in his mid-30s who worked as a property manager for a 150-unit property in suburban Pikesville, Maryland offers a key example of how the feedback of neighbors may work against welcoming voucher tenants. In contrast to James' viewpoints, Conrad expresses thoughts on the other end of the ideological spectrum. As someone who had extensive experience with renting units to tenants with housing vouchers, Conrad described his frustration when his boss relayed the message that the owner of the rental community no longer wanted to rent to tenants with housing vouchers. Although Conrad described that the decision was made for no apparent reason, he mentioned how other tenants often blamed voucher recipients for problems at the property. For instance, when a computer in a shared community space was slammed to the ground and broken, renters accused voucher tenants. "We did eventually find out who it was, and it wasn't a housing [voucher tenant]," Said Conrad before adding: "But anytime anything goes wrong, non-housing residents want to blame people on housing."

Conrad explained to us that even before voucher tenants' leases ended, a resident exclaimed to him: "'This place has gotten better since you got rid of the housing!'" "Well, most of the housing is still here," said Conrad, visibly annoyed as he recalled his response. After warning us that what he was

about to say could be construed as not being nice, Conrad explained further:

White people like to blame non-White people for problems, and it pisses me off. And I'm a White person and I don't do it... People with money assume that people who have less money are awful and are the ones... making the problems and doing the crimes. Generally, the reason we have crime in this area, where I live, right up the block, is because parents aren't paying attention to their children. Has nothing to do with race.

Conrad detailed how the accusations placed on tenants who received housing vouchers were unfounded. Yet, a combination of racism and scapegoating the poor may have led "non-housing" residents to effectively push out voucher tenants from his property.

Having been homeless himself during parts of his childhood, Conrad described the process of telling fifteen voucher tenants he would not be renewing their lease as "heartbreaking." He said the worst part of his job this past year had been letting tenants know that they had to move out, particularly an elderly woman in a wheelchair who was brought to tears with the news. "I didn't tell her why," Conrad said, explaining how it would have been easier if he was not renewing their leases because tenants had been notoriously late on rent. However, in this case, he was telling families with housing vouchers they had to move when their lease ended because of "no fault of their own, simply because the ownership wants what they want," said Conrad grimly.

PART II. Overcoming Obstacles: How the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership Promotes Mobility

OVERCOME LANDLORD BARRIERS

In the section above, we outlined some of the barriers to landlord recruitment in opportunity areas. In this section, we describe the techniques used by the BRHP to overcome those barriers. Not all of the concerns expressed by our respondents can (or should) be addressed by mobility programs. As described in detail below, BRHP has developed a set of programmatic innovations, incentives, and operational streamlining that has proven highly effective at recruiting landlords throughout Central Maryland.

ABOUT THE BALTIMORE HOUSING MOBILITY PROGRAM

The Baltimore Housing Mobility Program (BHMP) is one of nearly 20 mobility programs across the US that assist families who participate in the HCV program to move to neighborhoods of higher opportunity (Juracek, Bell, Rolfe, Tegeler, Kurniawan, and Herskind 2018). BHMP was created in response to the 1995 housing desegregation class action lawsuit *Thompson v HUD* filed against the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC), the City of Baltimore, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The suit alleged that public housing in Baltimore had been intentionally segregated, placing the majority of public housing in African American neighborhoods even when alternatives were available. As a remedy, the courts required the issuance of 4,388 additional housing vouchers (1,788⁵ in 1996 and 2,600 in 2012) with which



Photo credit: BRHP

eligible families could move to higher opportunity communities.

The specific definition of what constitutes an “opportunity area” has changed over the nearly twenty years the program has been administered, but generally it has consisted of census tracts falling below a particular threshold of household poverty, percent African American (as a measure of racial segregation), and percent subsidized families. Eligibility has also shifted over time, but at present the program is open to Baltimore City residents and their children who have been impacted by the

5 The PCD actually authorized more than this number, although 1,788 was locked in at the time of the final settlement.



Photo credit: BRHP

segregation of public housing. Priority is given to former and current public housing residents, but most other very low-income families are eligible as well.

In order to facilitate mobility moves, the program is administered at the metropolitan level, originally by Metropolitan Baltimore Quadel (MBQ) and now by the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP).⁶ The BHMP operates as a voluntary program alongside several traditional HCV programs (including those in Baltimore City and Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, Howard, and Anne Arundel Counties). Families who elect to receive a BHMP voucher are required to move to an eligible

census tract for at least two years, after which time they can select housing anywhere within the metropolitan area.

BHMP has outperformed programs such as Moving to Opportunity (MTO) in its ability to assist families in making opportunity moves. To date, the program has successfully helped over 5,000 Baltimore households, nearly all of whom are African American, to move to low-poverty, racially integrated neighborhoods (DeLuca and Rosenblatt 2017). In large part because of BHMP, the Baltimore metropolitan area has among the highest rates of voucher families leasing up in high opportunity neighborhoods, in comparison to other

6 For most recent BRHP Opportunity Area Map see:

http://www.brhp.org/penn_station/folders/voucher_holders/voucher_holder_forms/Ready_Set_Search_BRHP_Opportunity_Area_Search_Tool_Packet.pdf

large metro areas (Mazzara and Knudsen 2019). While not designed as an experiment, econometric analysis has shown that families participating in BHMP achieve greater residential attainment and their children higher academic achievement than would have been likely had they not participated (DeLuca and Rosenblatt 2017; DeLuca, Rhodes, and Garboden 2016).

MAKING THE CASE: HOW BRHP STRIVES TO OVERCOME BARRIERS

Many of the landlords in our sample did not distinguish between voucher programs, a finding that BRHP staff did not find particularly surprising. For landlords who were already in a position to accept a voucher, BRHP did not need to distinguish itself. But for landlords who had a previous negative experience with the standard HCV program, BRHP outreach and counseling staff worked hard to highlight the benefits of *their* program. For this reason, when landlords in our study were aware of the differences, they generally stated that the BRHP was far more landlord-friendly than their county's HCV program on a number of dimensions.

Sarah, a White woman in her 30s, who owned one rental property in Columbia, MD described how BRHP did more for its tenants, which in turn benefited landlords: "They [BRHP] teach tenants about budgeting and how to manage their money and pay bills on time. They teach them how to build their credit. So, it is good things for the landlord." Sarah told us about a family with a BHMP voucher who sometimes paid rent late. She said she was more willing to accept late rent from them because: "They showed me their budget book. Rent comes first and [then] all the other bills." Having a budget, something BRHP helps tenants to create, indicated to Sarah the family's serious efforts to pay rent. "I guess they don't have very high income, so I understand" she added.

While BRHP is careful not to criticize the existing county HCV programs, our landlords had no such reservations. Small and inexperienced landlords in particular were grateful for BRHP's more streamlined processes and tenant workshops. Jean, a White woman in her early 70s, offers a typical example. Jean rented only one single-family home in Anne Arundel County. She never participated in a housing voucher program until she learned about BRHP from her brother. Jean gave glowing reviews of her current BRHP tenant: "She's very clean and I hope she lives there forever," she exclaimed. Jean was only open to trying BRHP because she saw it as distinct from the "Section-8" voucher. Jean said: "You know, [the PHA doesn't] check up on [tenants] and they don't make sure they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. That's what I've been told [by people I know]. So, there's a big difference there." Jane explained that she has "been lucky" since she knows other people have not had all positive experiences with voucher programs.

In this section, we discuss some of the programmatic innovations that may lead to this "big difference."

Addressing Doubts and Appealing to Landlord Altruism

BRHP staff said they recognized the stigmas attached to tenants with housing vouchers and they addressed these stigmas head-on with landlords. For instance, beyond explaining guaranteed rent payments each month and the security deposit assistance program they offer, staff stated facts about the rarity of property damage caused by voucher tenants. Tenants risked losing their voucher for breaking program rules, and as a result these instances were rare. In terms of security deposits, BRHP minimizes the burden for tenants by offering them a loan, which they can apply for through a counselor on staff.



At first, BRHP staff facilitated many landlord education workshops and meetings, which slowed down once the program had a steady number of participating landlords. Nonetheless, in individual conversations with landlords, staff described how BHMP participants were “good tenants” who have gone through six workshops and an orientation process before being eligible for the program. Mandatory BHMP workshops include topics on banking, home maintenance, credit repair, housing searches, and landlord-tenant relations. In addition, BHMP staff offers resources for tenants to find schools and access transportation. They also make tenant home visits when they move in and at 10 months, 16 months and 21 months.

Simultaneously, BRHP also appeals to the altruism of landlords. Staff explain to landlords how everyone deserves a safe and secure place to live and offer landlords the chance to be part of a partnership to make this housing right a reality. Admittedly, staff agreed that most of this information is shared when landlords were hesitant about participating in the program. Thus, landlords who were motivated to participate might not learn of all of the added services BRHP provides.

John, a Black man in his mid-40s, provides one example of how landlords can have altruistic motives to rent to tenants. We talked to John in a home he was renovating and would soon rent out. Sitting on top of boxes of uninstalled floor planks, John told us he was new to the BHMP and had just recently begun buying and renting properties in Baltimore. He said he bought properties he would consider moving into with his family and renovated them with the highest quality materials. John said he was not in the property renting business solely for the “financial aspect,” but rather because he wanted to improve the community he himself lived in. When a BHMP applicant asked him to lower the rent by \$100 so it would meet her voucher amount, he did so because he felt he would “be able to help her.” John explained the tenant had

three kids, including a small baby. At first, he thought: “I wasn’t going to go down on that rent just because I know how much I put into that house” but then he said he felt a little bit of sympathy and decided “Okay, maybe I want to help her... I am helping her with her kids.”

Streamlining Paperwork and Communication

BRHP staff described competition in an open market as a considerable barrier, particularly in places without source of income protection laws. With a limited number of landlords accepting vouchers, as well as being in competition with other PHAs, voucher-holding tenants had a smaller than ideal number of dwelling options. To remain competitive and encourage participation, BRHP has tried to streamline paperwork and communication. We see the outcome of these efforts with the example of Tim, who had been in the business of renting to voucher holding tenants for the past seven years. Of the more than 30 properties he owned, all of them were rented to tenants with vouchers. However, Tim was beginning to phase out of renting to HCV tenants, and instead wanted to only rent to BRHP tenants. He explained:

I try not to do vouchers up any more. I’ll just BRHP... They are so much easier to deal with and accountability and just everything. They are more responsive, and it seems like people are a little bit better and it seems like the rent is a little higher than the Section-8 vouchers. If I don’t have to, I don’t use the vouchers. It’s more drama.

Although Tim could not explain why tenants with a BHMP voucher were “a little bit better,” the supportive counseling and workshops provided by BRHP could help explain some of the differences in the ways tenants managed common hardships. Tim

also praised BRHP for being more responsive when he contacted the program, in comparison to other generic HCV programs.

BRHP has taken steps towards streamlining paperwork and communication. First, they have assigned one person to be the main contact for landlords, a Landlord Relations Specialist. This is intended to avoid having landlords bounced around from person to person and helps to establish a relationship between the program and individual landlords. Staff described establishing relationships with landlord as one of the most important components of having a successful mobility program. Tim for instance, emphasized how staff at BRHP “sound like they care,” enough where “it feels like [you are] calling your mom.” Whereas other programs continuously give him “attitude,” he does not hesitate to reach out to staff at BRHP.

Our data suggest that while these innovations have improved landlord experiences, several still said they still faced communication barriers with BRHP. For example, one landlord had questions regarding how to request a rent increase and another was confused about why he received a letter stating his tenant needed to vacate his property with little explanation. This speaks to BRHP’s goal of a single point of contact so that all participating landlords know whom to contact with questions. Finding the exact balance between a customized experience for each landlord and providing just enough to keep the vast majority of the landlords satisfied, will be an ongoing process for any mobility program.

Second, BRHP completes property inspections every two years, instead of annually, again to avoid scheduling conflicts and inconveniences for landlords. Most landlords said inspections were an easy process. Conrad described his experience with inspections: “It’s simple...She just walks around and makes sure that it’s in good condition.” Similarly, Charlotte, a White woman in her 40s who

managed a large complex in Nottingham, said her maintenance staff could quickly fix minor problems flagged by inspectors. In the next quote, Charlotte explains how inspections did not detract from the goal of housing a family:

The inspectors, as long as everything is good to go, 99.9 percent if there is something you need to fix, if you can fix it right there and then in front of them; they are even ...they want to get a person into a home. They want to take care of that individual. So, I really feel that everybody is working toward a common goal, getting them in.

Offering another example, Steve described the expedited process he experienced with one of his properties: “I remember we failed the inspection the first time for like a bad outlet. So, I got the outlet replaced the same day, and we got the tenant in the next day, which is great.” Because Charlotte and Steve both had maintenance staff on payroll they could quickly make repairs to avoid any delays—which might not always be the case for smaller landlords.

Third, BRHP created a landlord portal where they share information for each unit participating in the program by month, as well as changes and adjustments to rent payments. In the next quote, Elizabeth expands on the utility of BRHP’s website and landlord portal:

They developed a website, we have a portal on that website now. You can go in, and we can identify the case worker, we can actually email the case worker, discuss with the case worker what’s going on, and that really helps. We’re able to follow our inspections really well, so it, kind of





Biannual Property Partner Orientation at BRHP, 2019

Photo credit: BRHP

eliminated having to go down there every five minutes to straighten something out. You can now do everything online, which is a tremendous asset... it is terrific.

Landlords like Elizabeth—who had to keep track of nearly 200 units—especially appreciated having online access to instant information concerning their tenants, with contact information for the tenants’ caseworker. Likewise, smaller landlords like Raj, an Asian man in his late 30s who rented just one property in Columbia, also appreciated the landlord portal. Raj used the “user friendly” portal to download rent increase paperwork and was quickly able to email it for consideration. Based on this feedback, we can see how BRHP has made efforts to make the landlord portal helpful and accessible to landlords—and how landlords notice.

Fourth, BRHP attempts to keep landlords informed through their tenants. Viewing tenants as unofficial

spokespeople for the BRHP, they educate tenants on the terms of the program so tenants could answer landlords’ questions and relay information. Susan Smith, a White woman in her 50s who owned and rented a home in Nottingham, confirmed her experience with BRHP as largely through her tenant: “It was pretty much all through the tenant, I think. They might have emailed me and said, “I need that” or something like that “Can you sign this?” But, basically it was through the tenant,” she said. BRHP’s goal is to encourage tenants to speak on their own behalf, instead of having the program intervene at every avenue (see Bergman, Chetty, DeLuca, Hendren, Katz and Palmer, 2019 on the importance of mobility program staff empowering tenants to negotiate with landlords).

Last, if a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract is approved, BRHP will pay rent retroactively to the lease signing date, while the

unit is scheduled for inspection, accounting for landlords' potential loss in rent while the approval process is finalized. Faye noted this as something that differentiated BRHP from other housing programs: "One thing that they do is once they do the inspection if it passes then they'll prorate so we can get the tenant in prior to the first of the month," she said.

Through these stories, we can see how each of BRHP's efforts to streamline paperwork and communication helps to improve how landlords experience the program.

Mediating Disputes

Although rare, BRHP staff said they were available to mediate landlord-tenant conflicts. Acting as neutral participants, BRHP hosted three-way telephone calls with tenants and landlords to discuss the issues at hand. At times these phone calls relayed information about changes in rent

portions because of the loss of tenant's employment, other times the parties discussed maintenance concerns or other issues. BRHP staff said they reiterated program rules and landlord responsibilities and most issues were resolved amicably. However, when mutual agreement could not be reached, BRHP suggested tenants search for free legal aid and landlords uphold their lease and if necessary go through the court system. BRHP staff highlighted the binding lease between tenants and landlords, and although they at times could help mediate disputes, there was nothing BRHP could do to hold either party accountable, other than terminating a tenant's voucher or ending the relationship with landlords. Without designated funds to pay for property damages, BRHP could not compensate landlords. However, according to BRHP staff, many landlord-tenant issues were often the result of absentee landlords, especially among private owners who lived out of town.



PART III. Policy Recommendations and Conclusion

While our study is small in scale, it reveals several areas where we can inform and improve mobility programs. Because BHMP uses the HCV, there are parts of the program that are difficult to modify (i.e. HAP contract, inspection criteria, rent reasonableness). Thus, we recognize that regardless of BRHP's desire to innovate, they (along with other programs) are in many ways constrained by program requirements. Nonetheless, in this section, we divide our recommendations into two parts. First, we suggest best practices that could increase (and retain) opportunity landlords within the constrictions of the HCV. Second, we offer some cautionary advice regarding landlord recruitment processes.

Source of Income Protection Laws

A major step towards ensuring that families with housing vouchers are able to secure a unit in opportunity areas is to pass source of income protection laws and enforce their implementation (Finkel and Buron 2001; Freeman 2012). These laws should carry consequences for landlords who choose to ignore them and avoid loopholes that exclude smaller landlords as well as buildings that already participate in local housing assistance programs with higher income eligibility thresholds (i.e. the Moderate Income Housing Unit program in Howard County, MD). The Maryland General Assembly followed suit in 2020 with the Housing Opportunities Made Equal Act, and must now turn to enforcement.

Continuous Landlord Outreach and Advocacy

It is evident from our interviews that landlords were not always aware of the resources available to them and their tenants through voucher programs.

Routine sharing of information is necessary, not only to recruit new landlords, but also to keep current participating landlords informed and updated about new and ongoing services and forms of communication. Continuous outreach with landlords beyond the requirements of the program could help build and strengthen relationships.

Create a 24-Hour Hotline

Given that the inability of reaching staff at voucher programs was a consistent complaint among many landlords in our study, a 24-hour hotline where landlords can reach a live person could be one option to remedy this issue. Pilot programs with this type of services have been implemented across the country. For instance, the Marin Housing Authority in California has a 24-hour landlord liaison service hotline, which provides general information about the program, rapid responses for issues, and connects landlords to available resources (County of Marin 2016). Another option is a 24-hour chat service through a phone application, to offer some additional assistance to landlords. However, if this is not a suitable option, the single point of contact is key.

Damage Payment Incentives

One of the primary apprehensions held by landlords in our study was that voucher holding tenants would not take care of their property, and damages would exceed the amount of their security deposit. Although most landlords we talked with said the actual occurrence of these types of issues was the same, if not minimized when renting to tenants with vouchers, a damage coverage protection fund could give landlords peace of mind—particularly for landlords not familiar with the program. In Marin



County for instance, landlords can receive up to \$3,000 for losses caused by tenants beyond normal wear and tear (Evidence Matters 2019).

Referral Programs

Landlords in our study often learned about voucher programs through their networks or through tenants inquiring about available units. Yet, the information landlords shared with other landlords went unrewarded, as were the explanations tenants gave to landlords about the program (except possibly securing a unit to live in). A referral program with monetary incentives could increase the number of landlords who share information about voucher programs through word of mouth with a wide range of smaller and larger private landlords and property management companies. Hiring current and or former voucher holding tenants to help with landlord recruitment efforts should be implemented when possible, as tenants have personal experiences with the often-difficult process of searching for housing in opportunity areas (See Rosenblatt and Cossyleon 2018; Cunningham, Galvez, Aranda, Santos, Wissoker, Oneto, Pitingolo, and Crawford 2018).

Make Administrative Tasks Easier

Landlords in our study were busy people, many holding more than one job. As such, they did not want to incur additional administrative burdens as a result of participating in voucher programs. Several strategies can help reduce these burdens. First, given the attractiveness of having a long-term tenant for landlords, housing voucher programs may choose to promote and or suggest that landlords and tenants sign two or three-year term leases. This would reduce paperwork involved in renewing tenants. For programs like BRHP who already administer property inspections every two years, this would be especially attractive for landlords. However, caution should be taken to ensure a longer lease is appropriate and beneficial

for tenants as well. Second, since rent amount and payments are a major motivator for landlords participating in voucher programs, automatically sending rent increase request paperwork to landlords can be helpful—especially if it's done through an online form that can be instantly submitted, instead of having them search for the form themselves, and then scanning and returning it. Last, to make up for longer wait times, we recommend vacancy credits for landlords. Although conversations with BRHP staff indicate the existence of funds to pay landlords for vacancies while paperwork is being processed, few of our respondents mentioned this incentive, indicating the need to underscore this benefit to landlords within BRHP. The recent CMTO program helped families lease-up in high opportunity areas in Seattle and King County by providing "housing navigator" staff to work directly with landlords to maintain contact, streamline paperwork, and facilitate landlords' communication with prospective tenants (Bergman, Chetty, DeLuca, Hendren, Katz and Palmer, 2020).

Upgrade Technical Systems

Landlords in our study longed for a transparent process for rent setting. Many, particularly those who managed larger buildings, used systems that calculated rent based on vacancies, time of year, competition in the area, and other factors, which meant they did not have flexibility to lower their rents to meet voucher program payment standards. The technical systems of large corporate owned residential buildings far outpaced those used by voucher programs, indicating the potential need for technical systems upgrades.

Advertise Added Benefits of the Voucher

Mobility programs can be successfully rebranded to emphasize the many attractive features that go beyond the typical incentives of voucher programs



(i.e. guaranteed rent, long-term tenants). Added incentives include the support offered to participating tenants (e.g., housing counselors, security deposit assistance, workshops), as well as the benefits to low-income families moving into higher opportunity areas. With a few exceptions, landlords in our study were unaware of any tenant support offered by any voucher program, something that should be consistently communicated to landlords.

CAUTIONARY ADVICE

Enforce Accurate and Transparent Rent Reasonableness

As noted above, landlords often think of rent reasonableness as a negotiation technique by public housing authorities. We recommend that agencies greatly increase transparency about the process, but of course do not recommend weakening a process that represents one of the only safeguards against cost inflation in the program. Many of the landlords we spoke with noted that in order to dispute a rent reasonableness claim, they merely had to produce evidence of three comparable units renting at the same price.

This process suggests a strong distrust of the agency's own rent reasonableness process. Anyone who has ever needed to convince their employer's travel office that a particular flight is the cheapest available knows just how easy it is to cherry pick comparable options to prove one's point. Instead of essentially negating the power of rent reasonableness, it would be more appropriate for agencies to adopt some of the dynamic pricing

tools available on the market or develop their own database of comparable units.

Recognize How the HCV Benefits Landlords

In a world of rising rents and falling lease-up rates it is tempting to feel the need to give away the store in order to get landlords to participate in the program. As described in detail above, there are many ways in which agencies can improve services to landlords. But agencies should also be aware that private landlords who accept vouchers do so because it represents a profitable aspect of their portfolio. Even when required by law, vouchers have enormous benefits to landlords that should not be minimized in the discussion of how to improve participation rates. Indeed, they should be amplified as all landlords – from the inner city to surrounding suburbs – value tenant stability and ease of rent collection.

Avoid Stigmatizing the HCV Program

Finally, it is easy to see mobility programs and the standard HCV programs as competing for scarce units in opportunity areas. As noted above, past negative experiences with PHAs make rebranding a successful strategy for agencies implementing mobility programs. But this too should be done cautiously. HCV families are immensely stigmatized by landlords and the public at large, and PHA staff labor under significant funding and regulatory limitations. Designers of mobility programs must not to play into these narratives no matter how focused they are on the mission of affirmatively dismantling residential segregation.

CONCLUSION

HCV programs across the country, including mobility programs, are tasked with recruiting and retaining landlords to rent to families with housing vouchers. This study highlights the barriers and benefits landlords in opportunity areas experience when they participate in such programs. Despite the well-known social, programmatic, and bureaucratic barriers to landlord participation, we find evidence that administrative streamlining, damage guarantee funds, and relationship building make a big difference to landlords. The additional resources provided by the BRHP, like housing counseling and educational workshops also

improve tenant and landlord relationships. However, most landlords in our study could not pinpoint what those added services were (because they were unaware of them) and instead some referred to “luck” to account for these differences. If housing authorities and mobility programs are to have the highest impact in persuading opportunity landlords to join and continue their HCV participation, findings indicate the need for programs to better elevate the support systems they provide and work to build relationships with landlords. Doing so will allow voucher programs to further understand how to expand and improve these and other services.



Table 1. Sample Demographics

Total Sample	40.0
<i>BHMP Sample (n)</i>	30.0
<i>non-BHMP Sample (n)</i>	10.0
Respondent Race	
<i>Black (%)</i>	22.5
<i>White (%)</i>	70.0
<i>Other (%)</i>	7.50
Gender	
<i>Women (%)</i>	57.5
<i>Men (%)</i>	42.5
Age	
<i>25-35(%)</i>	62.5
<i>36-45 (%)</i>	22.5
<i>46-55 (%)</i>	27.5
<i>56-65(%)</i>	7.50
<i>66-75 (%)</i>	2.50
Business Activities	
<i>Mom and Pop Landlord 1-7 units (%)</i>	40.0
<i>Large Single-family Landlord 90-460 units (%)</i>	7.50
<i>Manager (%) 60-1350 units (%)</i>	52.5



Table 2. Landlords' Voucher Participation and Property Characteristics (N=40)

	BHMP Sample	non-BHMP Sample	Total
Voucher Program Participation			
<i>BHMP alone (%)</i>	10.0	0.0	10.0
<i>HCV alone (%)</i>	0.0	2.5	2.5
<i>Both BHMP and HCV (%)</i>	52.5	12.5	65.0
<i>Neither (%)</i>	0.0	22.5	22.5
Type of Property Owned or Managed			
<i>Multi-family alone (%)</i>	22.5	32.5	55.0
<i>Single-family alone (%)</i>	25.0	0.0	25.0
<i>Both Multi-family and Single-family (%)</i>	12.5	7.5	20.0
Number of Units			
<i>1-5 (%)</i>	15.0	5.0	20.0
<i>6-30 (%)</i>	7.5	5.0	12.5
<i>31-100 (%)</i>	7.5	0.0	7.5
<i>100+ (%)</i>	45.0	15.0	60.0
Location			
<i>Baltimore City (%)</i>	17.5	7.5	25.0
<i>Surrounding Counties (%)</i>	57.5	17.5	75.0



REFERENCES

- Baltimore City Council. 2019. Community Relations, Housing Discrimination, Source of Income Ordinance. (<https://baltimore.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3769176&GUID=ED30A9DB-C4A6-45C0-80F8-DC90FA212128&Options=&Search=>).
- Bergman, Peter, Raj Chetty, Stefanie DeLuca, Nathaniel Hendren, Lawrence F. Katz, and Christopher Palmer. 2019. Creating Moves to Opportunity: Experimental Evidence on Barriers to Neighborhood Choice. *The National Bureau of Economic Research*, 1-88.
- Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez. 2014. "Where is the Land of Opportunity: The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129 (4): 1553-1623.
- County of Marin 2016. "New Program Rolls Out for Marin's Landlords on October 5." (<https://www.marincounty.org/main/county-press-releases/press-releases/2016/cda-landlords-092916>).
- Cunningham, Mary, Martha Galvez, Claudia L. Aranda, Rob Santos, Doug Wissoker, Alyse Oneto, Rob Pitingolo, and James Crawford. 2018. "A Pilot Study of Landlord Acceptance of Housing Choice Vouchers," U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, September.
- DeLuca, Stefanie and Peter Rosenblatt. 2017. "Walking Away from The Wire: Housing Mobility and Neighborhood Opportunity in Baltimore," *Housing Policy Debate*, 27:4, 519-546.
- DeLuca, Stefanie, Anna Rhodes, and Philip ME Garboden. 2016. "The Power of Place: How Housing Policy Can Boost Educational Opportunity." Abell Foundation Report: Baltimore, MD.
- Ellen, Ingrid Gould, Keren Mertens Horn, and Amy Ellen Schwartz. 2016. Why Don't Housing Choice Voucher Recipients Live Near Better Schools? Insights from Big Data. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 35: 884-905.
- Evidence Matters. 2019. "Landlords: Critical Participants in the Housing Choice Voucher Program." *Office of Policy Development and Research*. (<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/winter19/highlight1.html#title>).
- Finkel, Meryl, and Larry Buron. 2001. *Study on Section 8 Voucher Success Rates. Volume I, Quantitative Study of Success Rates in Metropolitan Areas*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates.
- Freeman, Lance. 2012. "The Impact of Source of Income Laws on Voucher Utilization," *Housing Policy Debate* 22 (2): 207-319
- Garboden, Philip M.E., Eva Rosen, Stefanie DeLuca, and Kathryn Edin. 2018. "Taking Stock: What Drives Landlord Participation in the Housing Choice Voucher Program," *Housing Policy Debate* 28 (6): 9-10.



Garboden, Philip M.E., Eva Rosen, Meredith Greif, Stefanie DeLuca, and Kathryn Edin. 2018. "Urban Landlords and the Housing Choice Voucher Program: A Research Report," U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 36.

Greenlee, Andrew J. 2014. "More Than Meets the Market? Landlord Agency in the Illinois Housing Choice Voucher Program," *Housing Policy Debate* 24(3): 500-524.

Juracek, Andrea, Alison Bell, Nicole Rolfe, Philip Tegeler, Heidi Kurniawan, and Micah Herskind 2018. "Housing Mobility Programs in the U.S." *Mobility Works and Poverty and Race Research Action Council*.

Mazzara, Alicia and Brian Knudsen. 2019. "Where Families with Children Use Housing Vouchers A Comparative Look at the 50 Largest Metropolitan Areas" *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Poverty & Race Research Action Council*.
(<https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/1-3-19hous.pdf>).

McClure, Kirk, Alex F. Schwartz, and Lydia B. Taghavi. 2015. Housing Choice Voucher Location Patterns a Decade Later, *Housing Policy Debate*, 25 (2): 215-233.

Nisar, Hiren, Jim Murdoch, Dallas Elgin, Mallory Vachon, Charles Horseman, and 2M Research 2018. "Landlord Participation Study Multidisciplinary Research Team." *U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Office of Policy Development and Research*.

Rosen, Eva. 2014. "Rigging the Rules of the Game: How Landlords Geographically Sort Low-Income Renters." *City & Community*, 13(4): 310-340

Rosenblatt, Peter and Jennifer E. Cossyleon. 2018. "Pushing the Boundaries: Searching for Housing in the Most Segregated Metropolis in America." *City & Community*, 17 (1): 87-108.

Rinzler, Dan, Philip Tegeler Mary Cunningham and Craig Pollack. 2015. "Leveraging the Power of Place: Using Pay for Success to Support Housing Mobility," Community Development Investment Center Working Paper 2015-4, Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. (<https://prrac.org/pdf/LeveragingThePowerOfPlace2015.pdf>)

Sard, Barbara, Douglas Rice, Alison Bell and Alicia Mazzara. 2018. "Federal Policy Changes Can Help More Families with Housing Vouchers Live in Higher Opportunity Areas." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, 1-30. (<https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/9-4-18hous.pdf>)

Sard, Barbara and Douglas Rice 2014. "Creating Opportunity for Children: How Housing Location Can Make a Difference." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, 1-83.
(<https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/9-4-18hous.pdf>)





Mobility Works is a collaborative technical assistance project that includes PRRAC, the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, the Inclusive Communities Project, the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership, and Housing Choice Partners. Mobility Works partners directly with public housing authorities seeking to develop effective housing mobility programs, and has also received core support from Funders for Housing & Opportunity, the Kresge Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.