

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No Place to Call Home: Navigating Reentry Housing in Chicago

For individuals with criminal records, finding a place to live in Chicago can be extremely challenging. Through interviews with 81 individuals with criminal records, this study shows how the presence of a criminal record creates barriers for individuals on the private housing rental market regardless of the individual's age or the age of their record.

Participants were asked to sketch on a map where they think they could find a place to live. This report juxtaposes their answers with information about where they have experienced rental rejection in the past. The presence of a criminal record can multiply other forms of disadvantage, deepening racial, class, and gender divides. By discriminating against individuals with criminal records, landlords not only undermine individuals' attempts to build stable lives, but also reproduce and multiply large-scale social inequities.

Nationally, 95% of state prisoners will be released from prison at some point, while an estimated one in three Americans has a criminal record. In Chicago alone, approximately 11,000 individuals return from Illinois prisons each year, so the challenges experienced by people with criminal records are widespread. Moreover, in Illinois, about 48% of individuals released from prison will return within three years—a figure that reveals the pressing need for improved reentry opportunities and supports. Housing in particular comprises a crucial component of successful reentry—a key building block that promotes steady employment, fosters mental and physical health, supports individuals in their recovery from substance abuse, and provides the other advantages of stable shelter that are vital to basic human wellbeing.



No Place to Call Home proposes policy solutions to help overcome systemic discrimination against renters with criminal records and mitigate the ripple effects of that discrimination. Through a combination of reforms, this report proposes a pathway to expand housing access to those with criminal records in order to make Chicago and other cities more equitable and hospitable places for all residents to call home. This study was approved by the Roosevelt University Institutional Review Board: IRB No. 2018-028.

KEY THEMES

1. Participants are unhappy and discouraged with the quality and availability of transitional housing resources.
2. Participants favor small-scale property owners over large property managers.
3. Men and women face different challenges on the rental market.
4. Parole officers can disrupt efforts to find a home.
5. Discrimination against people with criminal records reinforces housing segregation.
6. Rental discrimination based on criminal records intersects with and reinforces other forms of disadvantage.
7. Criminal records and poor credit go hand-in-hand.
8. Returning citizens are more vulnerable to predation and exploitation.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Bolster legal protections, and then enforce them.**
 - Treat persons with criminal records as a protected class.
 - Provide city-funded, universal legal representation for all renters.
- 2. Reduce barriers to subsidized housing.**
 - Lift remaining public housing bans based on type of conviction.
 - Eliminate prohibitions on returning citizens living with family members in subsidized housing.
 - Strengthen state-level protections and promote education efforts.
- 3. Streamline reentry services.**
 - Require the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to proactively identify housing opportunities for those being released.
 - End the practice of paroling individuals to shelters.
 - Align parole with evidence-based practices.
 - Make the record sealing and expungement process easier and more transparent.
- 4. Formalize and expand reentry advocacy.**
 - Create reentry steering councils at both city and state levels.

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