



*Testimony of Open Communities Alliance  
before the Housing Committee  
February 3, 2015*

***RE: Proposed H.B.6138, An Act Concerning Mobility Counseling for Subsidized Housing and assorted bills addressing Senior Housing***

Good afternoon Senator Winfield, Representative Butler and members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today. My name is Erin Boggs and I am the Executive Director of Open Communities Alliance (OCA). Today I would like to testify on two issues, mobility counseling and elderly housing.

***Mobility Counseling***

Where you live affects the opportunities you have in your life and there is now a large body of research showing dramatic negative affects for families – and especially children – who are isolated from opportunity. From gross health disparities to the achievement gap, neighborhood conditions affect life outcomes. Because Connecticut is one of the most segregated states in the country, the opportunity gap is particularly felt by Black and Latino children. (For more on this, see Appendix A.)

There are many steps we can take to address opportunity isolation and segregation. These include directing state housing programs creating mixed income housing to areas that are thriving, and in particular to areas with high-resource schools. We can ensure that all towns in Connecticut are fulfilling their obligations under CGS Sec. 8-2 to provide opportunities for multifamily and subsidized housing. We can also help counter the many barriers intrinsic to the Housing Choice Voucher and RAP programs that result in participants living overwhelmingly in high poverty minority-concentrated areas. Done right, these strategies will create access to opportunity without generating new pockets of poverty concentration.

According to the preliminary data collected for the forthcoming Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice, around 80% of Housing Choice Voucher holders live in areas that are high poverty (the 10.5% of the land area of Connecticut that has a poverty rate above the state's average of 9.2%) and disproportionately minority (the 5.8% of the land area of the state that has a higher percentage of people of color than the state as a whole at 29%). Interestingly, White voucher holders are far more likely to find housing in lower poverty areas than voucher holders of color – about 20% more likely – demonstrating that it

housing affordable with the rents offered in the program in areas that are thriving. (For more, see Appendix B.)

Mobility counseling is an innovative counseling strategy that is working in many places around the country to provide people using government housing vouchers with full information to find housing in thriving areas in a way that does not reconstitute poverty concentration. The programs generally consist of search assistance, information on how a neighborhood affects a family's opportunity access, rent readiness training and more. In Baltimore, for example, over 4,000 families have moved with the help of mobility counseling and are starting to see differences in health, education, and employment outcomes. (Information on this is available on OCA's website, see [http://www.ctoca.org/mobility\\_counseling](http://www.ctoca.org/mobility_counseling).)

Connecticut has a mobility counseling program funded by the Department of Housing. This program needs to be held to the higher standard that is used elsewhere in the country and better funded. Eventually, it should be expanded to housing authorities outside of DOH.

H.B. 6138 is a great first step in exploring mobility counseling as a solution in Connecticut. Open Communities Alliance's thoughts on it are these:

- We do not have sufficient data to suggest that all housing authorities should be required to undertake mobility counseling. There may be some that are doing a great job.
- We would suggest that, instead, a process be undertaken to require the collection of data from housing authorities that would help policymakers identify the housing authorities that are struggling with offering higher opportunity housing placements to their clients. Such data is already collected by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and can be gathered on a census tract basis that does not reveal the identities of the residents or exact location of their homes.
- A range of assistance could then be provided to housing authorities that are facing mobility challenges including expanding their jurisdiction, implementing mobility counseling, and increasing program rents.
- Any mobility counseling used needs to adhere to national standards such as using nuanced measures of a successful move. We would like to recommend opportunity mapping which involves multiple factors such as education, poverty, crime and other neighborhood measures. Successful mobility counseling programs elsewhere in the country also include benefits such as move assistance, security deposit assistance, post-move counseling, and active landlord recruitment.

For this legislative session Open Communities Alliance's two primary recommendations are:

- (1) **Data Collection Legislation:** To pass legislation requiring the collection of Housing Choice Voucher data from all housing authorities and Rental Assistance Program placement data from DOH. This data could be submitted to the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission or some other entity to conduct a placement analysis that would be published. This report can then inform the Legislature as it develops more comprehensive legislation to address opportunity isolation and segregation in government housing subsidy programs going forward.
- (2) **Pilot Mobility RAPs:** The country's flagship mobility counseling program is in Baltimore, MD and is the result of litigation. The Baltimore program actually has Housing Choice Vouchers that are only available to program participants making successful mobility moves. OCA recommends that we try such program here in Connecticut making use of RAPs. A bill proposed that would do this, H.B. 6462.

Open Communities Alliance recommends support for both such pieces of legislation.

### *Elderly Housing*

On a separate note, about 8 bills on the agenda today address elderly housing. There is certainly a need for elderly housing, but we really do not have the data to know exactly what that need is and how it compares to the need for other types of subsidized housing, such as housing for people with disabilities and housing that is simply open to all, which is what we currently call family housing. OCA strongly encourages the Committee to undertake a full analysis of these needs as it allocates subsidized housing benefits.

A dynamic that affects perceptions of the need is that low income families are more likely to live in urban areas and are disproportionately people of color. In the thriving suburban towns which have strong representation here in the Legislature and a growing elderly population, elected officials are much more likely to hear about the need for elderly housing. We need to be careful that the legacy of segregation that we are all living with does not mean we are allocating subsidized housing benefits in a way that is uneven given the need. OCA urges that a full analysis be undertaken to help guide policy on these issues and consideration of the fact that "family" housing is actually open to elderly individuals and people with disabilities.

*Open Communities Alliance*

*Appendix A*



# OPEN COMMUNITIES ALLIANCE

*Embracing Diversity to Strengthen Connecticut*

## What is the Open Communities Alliance?

The Open Communities Alliance (the Alliance) is a new civil rights organization that promotes access to opportunity for *all* people through education, organizing, advocacy, research, and partnerships. The Alliance's initial and primary focus is on promoting housing integration as a means of reversing opportunity disparities.

## Identifying the Challenge

Connecticut is one of the most racially and ethnically segregated states in the country.<sup>1</sup> This segregation is closely linked with patterns of concentrated poverty. Such high levels of segregation isolate people of color from the opportunities that lead to success in

life, like thriving schools, safe neighborhoods, health resources, and social networks that connect to employment. In fact, *81% of Blacks and 79% of Latinos are living in areas of "low opportunity" compared to 25% of Whites.*<sup>2</sup>

**open** *adj.* \ 'ō-pən, -p<sup>ə</sup>m \: having no enclosing or confining barrier

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**com·mu·ni·ties** *n.* \kə-'myü-nə-tēs \: a unified body of individuals: as (1) state, commonwealth or (2) the people with common interests living in a particular area

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**al·li·ance** *n.* \ə-'lī-ən(t)s \: a union between people, groups, countries, etc. in which people agree to work together

<sup>1</sup> The Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport areas all rank in the top 10% of 362 areas around the country for Latino/White segregation as measured by the dissimilarity index. These same areas rank in the top 20% for Black/White segregation. Diversity Data and the Harvard School of Public Health, 2010, <http://diversitydata.sph.harvard.edu/>.

<sup>2</sup> Reece et al., *People, Place and Opportunity: Mapping Communities of Opportunity in Connecticut*, Kirwan Institute, 2009/2010, <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/connecticut-op-mapping-temporary/>.

The impact of opportunity isolation is patently felt in Connecticut in a variety of ways.

- Connecticut is home to some of the most severe disparities in school performance between White children and Latino and Black children in the nation.<sup>3</sup>
- Connecticut has some of the widest gaps in unemployment rates by race and ethnicity in the country. While the unemployment rate for Whites is around 8.4%, it is about 17.3% for Latinos and 17% for Blacks. Connecticut has the second widest gap in the U.S. in unemployment rates between Latinos and Whites and the 10<sup>th</sup> widest gap between Blacks and Whites.<sup>4</sup>
- Connecticut has some of the highest incarceration rates by race and ethnicity in the country. With 12 Blacks incarcerated for every White inmate, Connecticut has the fourth highest Black/White ratio in the country.<sup>5</sup> Connecticut has *the highest* Latino/White incarceration rate in the country – 6.6 Latinos are incarcerated for every White inmate.<sup>6</sup>
- Starkly different health outcomes for Black and Latinos and Whites are longstanding and cut across health indicators. For example, in Connecticut, infant mortality rates for Blacks and Latinos are three and two times greater, respectively, as compared to Whites. In 2009, Connecticut asthma hospitalization rates for Blacks and Latinos were almost five times that for White non-Latinos.<sup>7</sup> A wealth of research has documented the connections between health outcomes, race, and geography.<sup>8</sup>
- Race and income are almost inextricably intertwined and the income gap between the rich and poor is growing in Connecticut. Since the 1970s, Connecticut has experienced the greatest increase in the income disparity between the top 20% and bottom 20% of income earners in the nation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Not including Washington, DC, Connecticut has the largest gap between White and Black fourth graders based on reading test scores and ranks near the bottom for math (42 out of 46 states, including DC) and science (33 out of 40 states, including DC). Connecticut also has the largest White Non-Hispanic/Hispanic achievement gap for fourth graders on reading, math and science standardized tests. National Assessment of Educational Progress Database, National Center on Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/statecomparisons/>.

<sup>4</sup> Algernon Austin, *No relief in 2012 from high unemployment for African Americans and Latinos*, Economic Policy Institute, February 16, 2012, <http://www.epi.org/publication/ib322-african-american-latino-unemployment/>.

<sup>5</sup> Marc Mauer and Ryan S. King, *Uneven Justice: State Rates of Incarceration By Race and Ethnicity*, The Sentencing Project, July 2007, pg. 10, [http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd\\_stateratesofincbyraceandethnicity.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd_stateratesofincbyraceandethnicity.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>7</sup> Nepaul, A.N., Peng, J., Kloter, A., Hewes, S., & Boulay, E. (2012). *The Burden of Asthma in Connecticut*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut Department of Public Health, p. 114, [http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/hems/asthma/pdf/full\\_report\\_with\\_cover.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/hems/asthma/pdf/full_report_with_cover.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Dolores Acevedo-Garcia and Theresa Osypuk, "Impacts of Housing and Neighborhoods on Health: Pathways, Racial/Ethnic Disparities, and Policy Directions," Chapter 6 from *Segregation: The Rising Cost for America*, eds. James H. Carr and Nandinee K. Kutty, pg. 197 (Rutledge, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth McNichol et al., "Pulling Apart: A State-by-State Analysis of Income Trends," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, 11, <http://www.cbpp.org/files/11-15-12sfp.pdf>.

### **Central to the Alliance's mission are the convictions that:**

- Where people live can have a significant impact on health outcomes, education, and job access, exposure to crime, and food security, among other factors.
- The disparities in access to opportunity available to different groups are caused by historical factors, contemporary government policies, discrimination, and lack of full information on housing options and neighborhood characteristics.
- Opportunity disparity must be addressed by both bringing resources to areas that are struggling and connecting people in need of opportunity to areas that are thriving. Many people in "lower opportunity" areas want to move to lower poverty areas. Many other people want to stay and strengthen their neighborhoods. The Alliance works to make this choice possible.
- A broad cross section of Connecticut residents from all areas of the state care about diversity and want their children to grow up with others who reflect the "real world."
- Because the population that is growing in Connecticut is the population of color, promoting diversity and integration is critical to the future economic success of Connecticut.

### **How do we meet the challenge?**

To support opportunity access and housing integration, the Alliance undertakes four primary activities:

- (1) Building and supporting an urban-suburban interracial coalition advocating for housing policies that promote integration such as inclusionary zoning, mixed income housing and regional housing solutions.
- (2) Producing well-researched and thoughtful policy analyses and proposals to influence policymakers, especially at the municipal and state agency level.
- (3) Exploring a range of advocacy strategies including legislative, administrative, and civil rights litigation approaches.
- (4) Mobilizing the coalition and other partners to advocate for changes to housing policy at the federal, state, and local level that foster integration and housing choice.

## **Who is The Alliance?**

The Alliance was created by a small group of civil rights advocates, affordable housing experts, and academics who understand the critical connection between where people live, life outcomes, and race and ethnicity. The Alliance's founding supporters recognize that there is an urgent need in Connecticut for an independent voice on issues of integration and opportunity.

The Alliance's Executive Director is Erin Boggs Esq., formerly with the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, including, most recently serving as Deputy Director. Ms. Boggs brings twenty years of housing and civil rights policy and litigation experience to her position at the Alliance, as well as a proven fundraising track record. Ms. Boggs is a graduate of the Washington, D.C. public schools, Wesleyan University, and Georgetown University Law Center.

**The Alliance is grateful for the support and participation of our board and advisors. These include:**

**Julie Alleyne (Board Member):** Currently, Ms. Alleyne is the CEO of a startup Deposit Group, of which she is a co-founder. The company is providing alternatives to the cash security deposit for renters. Prior to Deposit Group, Julie Alleyne served as a Director in the Bond Claim Department of The Hartford, where she managed a team of attorneys and claim professionals. She was with The Hartford from 2002 to 2011, prior to which she was in-house counsel with Travelers. She has focused her career in the area of Construction, Surety and Fidelity law for over 17 years, originally starting in private practice in CT. Ms. Alleyne is a regular speaker at industry conferences and contributing author for industry publications, including the ABA Torts and Insurance Practices Section's Fidelity and Surety Law Committee and the Pearlman Conference in Seattle, WA. She received her B.A. from Drew University in 1992 and her J.D. from Syracuse University College of Law in 1995.

**Anthony De Jesús (Board Member):** Dr. De Jesús is an Assistant Professor of Social Work and Latino Community Practice and Director of Field Education for the new MSW Program at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, CT. Dr. De Jesús has extensive experience as a social work practitioner, administrator and researcher in urban schools, community based organizations, and institutions of higher education and previously served as an Assistant Professor at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College and as a researcher and Interim Director at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College. Dr. De Jesús holds an Ed.D. in Administration, Planning and Social Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, an MSW from the Boston University School of Social Work and a BSW from Dominican College. Dr. De Jesús' current research focuses on examining pathway models into health and social work careers for Latinos, the post-secondary experiences of Latinos within higher education, the effectiveness of cultural competence training in child welfare and the

evaluation of supportive housing and mental health services provided to formerly incarcerated women.

**Shelley Geballe (Advisory Board):** Ms. Geballe is a Visiting Clinical Lecturer at Yale Law School and Lecturer at the Yale School of Public Health (Department of Epidemiology and Public Health), she served as President of Connecticut Voices for Children from its start in 1995 until October 2008. At Yale Law School Ms. Geballe co-teaches the Legislative Advocacy class. At Yale Medical School she teaches a course in Health Disparities. Attorney Geballe received her law degree from Yale Law School (1976) and her public health degree from Yale Medical School (1995).

**J. L. Pottenger, Jr. (Board Member):** Professor Pottenger, is the Nathan Baker Clinical Professor of Law and Supervising Attorney at Yale Law School. His subjects include housing and community development, legislative advocacy, prison legal services, trial practice, landlord/tenant law, and professional responsibility. Professor Pottenger received his A.B. from Princeton and his J.D. from Yale.

**John Relman (Advisory Board):** Mr. Relman is the founder and director of Relman, Dane & Colfax PLLC. Mr. Relman has represented scores of plaintiffs and public interest organizations in individual and class action discrimination cases in federal court. Prior to the formation of the firm, Mr. Relman served as project director of the Fair Housing Project at the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs. Under his leadership the project achieved national recognition, winning some of the largest housing, lending, and public accommodations discrimination jury verdicts and settlements obtained in the country. Prior to joining the Lawyers' Committee, Mr. Relman worked as a staff attorney at the National Office of the Lawyers' Committee. Mr. Relman received a A.B. from Harvard University, *cum laude*, and a J.D. from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

**Philip Tegeler (Board Member):** Mr. Tegeler is the Executive Director of the Poverty and Race Research Action Council, a civil rights policy organization convened by major civil rights, civil liberties, and anti-poverty groups. Mr. Tegeler is a civil rights lawyer with more than 25 years experience in fair housing, educational equity, land use law, and institutional reform litigation. Before coming to PRRAC, he was with the Connecticut ACLU, where he served as Legal Director from 1997-2003. He has also worked as Legal Projects Director at the Metropolitan Action Institute in New York City, and taught in the University of Connecticut School of Law clinical program. Mr. Tegeler is a graduate of Harvard College and the Columbia Law School. (Member of the Connecticut and District of Columbia Bar).

## **Why do we need the Alliance?**

Connecticut is fortunate to have several housing non-profits performing critical work. These include the Partnership for Strong Communities, the Connecticut Housing Coalition, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, and the Connecticut Fair Housing Center. However, a necessary component is missing. Connecticut needs an independent organization that:

- Focuses on the intersection of race and housing, education, and child health outcomes.
- Operates with the support of an interracial urban/suburban coalition.
- Brings a thoughtful and robust reform agenda directly to state policymakers.

The Alliance will add a needed dimension to housing advocacy by creating partnerships with current housing organizations and filling the void in Connecticut's housing advocacy landscape.

## **How can you help?**

Consider supporting the Alliance! The Connecticut Urban Legal Initiative of the University of Connecticut School of Law is acting as a fiscal agent for the Alliance while 501(c)(3) status is pending. Tax-deductible checks can be made payable to ***CULI FBO Open Communities Alliance*** and mailed to:

Connecticut Urban Legal Initiative, Inc.  
Room KT-202  
University of Connecticut School of Law  
35 Elizabeth Street  
Hartford, CT 06105

## **How do I learn more about the Alliance?**

Call us! Erin Boggs can be reached at 860-857-6971.

*Open Communities Alliance*

*Appendix B*

### What is mobility counseling?

Mobility counseling is assistance for people using **tenant-based government housing subsidies** who are interested in moving to areas that offer greater opportunities in terms of school performance, personal safety, employment, and other benefits. Counseling can include assistance with credit repair, help identifying potential units, and information about neighborhood amenities. Mobility counseling creates choice in programs that, when left to their own devices, do not promote housing choice.

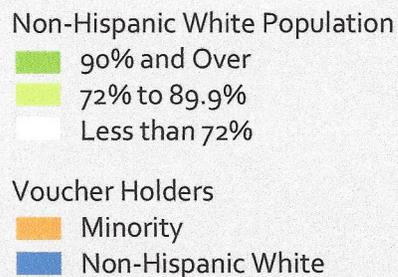
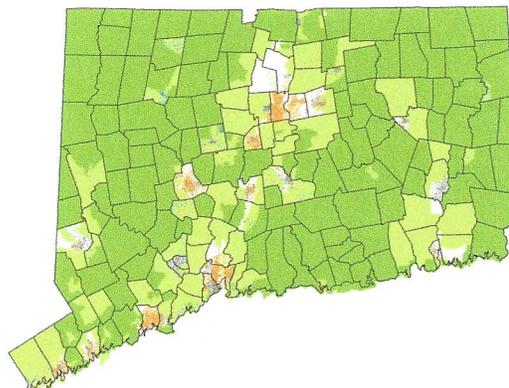
### Why do we need mobility counseling?

Connecticut is one of the most segregated states in the country. With segregation comes isolation from the building blocks to success in life and stark negative outcomes by race and ethnicity like the educational achievement gap. We need to work to bring resources to struggling areas, but we also need ensure true choice in housing. Years of research, and data from CT (below), demonstrate that without mobility counseling, the only option for many people using government housing subsidies are high poverty areas isolated from opportunity.

### What are tenant-based government housing subsidies?

Tenant-based government housing subsidies are financial rent supplements provided to landlords renting units to people earning less than 50% of Area Median Income. The two biggest programs in Connecticut are the federal **Housing Choice Voucher Program** (HCV or Section 8) and the state-funded **Rental Assistance Program** (RAP). Typically, subsidy programs cap the maximum rent they will pay at a certain level and require tenants to pay 30-40% of their income towards rent. Any rent due over this amount is covered by the subsidy.

Connecticut Voucher Holders (VCH) By Location and Minority Status (by tracts)*			
Voucher Holder Race/Ethnicity	Disproportionately Minority Areas (30% or >)	High Poverty Areas (9.2% or >)	Racially & Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty (50+% minority + 3x regional poverty)
All	83%	79%	33%
Minority	92%	85.5%	40%
Non-Hispanic White	62%	65%	40%
Size of Land Area in CT	5.8%	10.5%	<1%



## Does mobility counseling work? YES!

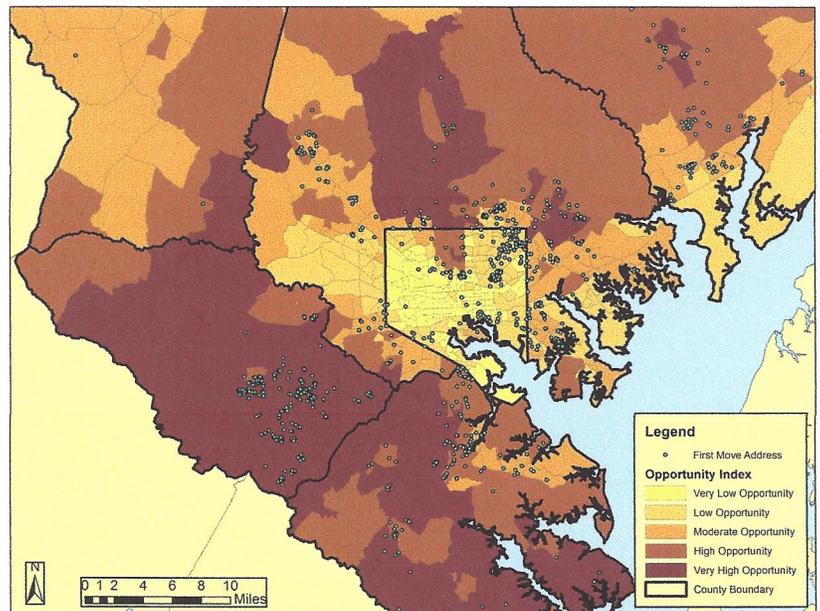
Mobility counseling in Baltimore, MD has assisted over 2,500 Housing Choice Voucher Holders opting into the program to move from struggling areas to thriving neighborhoods. Across the country, families making mobility moves are seeing positive changes in their lives as a result of their choice to work with mobility counselors.

"He was happy to go to school, he was excited; came home to do his homework; wasn't getting in no trouble; cried to go to school ... Everything was great when we moved here. The move was just like a breakthrough for everybody; a change for everybody." *Lola, mobility program participant, Maryland*

"When we first moved, the children didn't like it because it was so quiet...and then one of the children woke up and said, 'We slept good. We don't hear the ambulance, we don't hear the police cars.'" *Marie, mobility program participant, Maryland*

"The school realized my kid was smart. He just never applied himself because he didn't feel like he had to at that old school." *Rhonda, mobility program participant, Maryland*

Baltimore Mobility Program: First Move Address



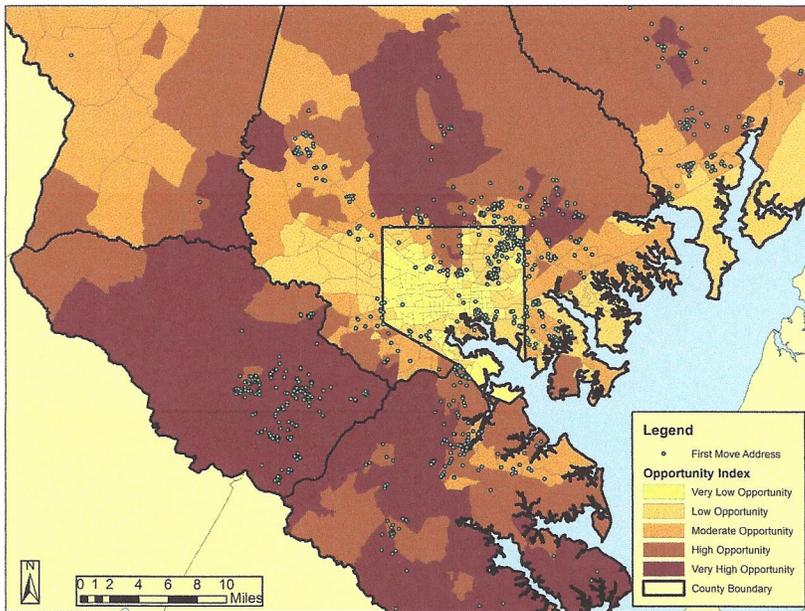
## Why is mobility counseling important?

A large body of research links mobility moves to:

- Improvements in educational attainment for low-income children.
- Increased graduation and college attendance rates.
- Improved physical and mental health for voucher holders and their families.

These will all translate into cost savings for the state in the form of lower per pupil education costs for low-income students and reduced health expenditures on things like emergency room visits for asthma-related issues.

Baltimore Mobility Program: First Move Address



## Baltimore Before and After Mobility Counseling

Baltimore – Pre- and Post-Counseling voucher locations over an 8-year period. These special vouchers were available only to families making mobility moves. Map provided courtesy of Professor Stefanie DeLuca, Johns Hopkins University

## Recommendations

### How can we make mobility counseling better in Connecticut?

We are fortunate that since 2002, the Department of Housing (DOH) has used Housing Choice Voucher administrative funds to support a voluntary mobility counseling program for its voucher holders and RAP recipients. The program averages a payment of \$1,962 per successful mobility move, excluding the cost of the Housing Choice Voucher or RAP.

While the contractors working for DOH are performing as they should under the contract, the program is outdated in the sense that it relies solely on poverty measures to define successful moves and does not include other incentives. As a result, there could be more clients moving to neighborhoods that most effectively generate access to opportunity and integrative moves. Over the last decade, standard national definitions of true “mobility programs” have evolved that consider the availability of neighborhood assets like low levels of crime and thriving schools. These programs cost more, around \$4,000 per mobility move (excluding the subsidy itself and security deposit assistance), but they produce better results, with voucher holders moving to safer neighborhoods with access to fully-resourced schools and other benefits. Connecticut should adopt these standards.

### In order to improve Connecticut’s current mobility program, we need:

- Strong definitions of successful moves, ideally using “Opportunity Mapping”
- Increased search times at counselor discretion
- Dedicated mobility vouchers/RAPs
- Enhanced access for existing voucher holders/RAP recipients about mobility
- Appropriate counselor/client ratios
- Post-move and second-move assistance
- Enhanced rents
- Greater financial assistance for voucher holders:
  - Security deposit assistance
  - Move financial assistance
  - Application fee assistance

*To learn more, see:*

Open Communities Alliance website information on mobility counseling:  
[http://www.ctoca.org/mobility\\_counseling](http://www.ctoca.org/mobility_counseling) and other mobility resources listing,  
<http://opencommunitiesalliance.nationbuilder.com/tags/mobility>

*Expanding Choice: Practical Strategies for Building a Successful Mobility Counseling Program*, Poverty and Race Research Action Council and the Urban Institute (2012), available at  
<http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412745-Expanding-Choice.pdf>

Jennifer Darrah and Stefanie DeLuca, "Living Here Has Changed My Whole Perspective': How Escaping Inner-City Poverty Shapes Neighborhood and Housing Choice," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2014): 350–84, available at <http://www.baltimorearegionalhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/JPAM-2014.pdf>

Patrick Sharkey, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013),  
<http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/S/bo14365260.html>

\* Data for 31,315 Housing Choice Vouchers for 2009 were provided by HUD for the forthcoming Connecticut Analysis of Impediments. The data set includes 30,280 vouchers with race/ethnicity information (where more than 11 vouchers in Census tract) mapped to their corresponding Census 2000 tract. The number of minority voucher holders is 23,559, and non-Hispanic White voucher holders number 6,721.



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