

## **Chicago Housing: The Players, Problems and Solutions**

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Many tenants in buildings slated for demolition do not simply see a set of buildings being torn down--they see their community being erased. They fear that forced relocation to an unfamiliar neighborhood could well be worse than their current situation. In many respects, certainly, Chicago's high-rise complexes are inhospitable environs that house a disproportionate share of the city's social ills. However, economically distressed private rental communities also confront high crime, unemployment and family instability. All of Chicago's segregated poor African-American communities face great problems (Venkatesh, sec. 3).

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with residents for over seven  
years

### A CLOSE LOOK

Elma Glover, 55, who has lived in a Robert Taylor Homes high-rise for 18 years, wants out. She describes the building as "really raggedy, work orders go unfulfilled and garbage chutes aren't clean." Unlike many of her neighbors, Mrs. Glover has remained, hoping to some day get a Section 8 voucher so that she can move to a rental unit. The numbers tell the story: in January 1996, 3,261 families lived in the Taylor development and by August 1998, 2,064 families remained. During this period, 198 families were evicted and 368 families had moved out with Section 8. This meant that 1082 families left on their own with no assistance from the housing authority (Rogal, sec. 30). These families are entering an already crowded housing market and will have nowhere to go but other slums or the streets. While it may seem illogical to leave housing for the streets, the poor quality of the buildings forced them to make such a terrifying choice.

While many leave their former homes because of its substandard condition, some hold out, calling for renovations of their current building so they can remain in their community. Louise Williams, a resident at Cabrini Green for over 41 years, wants to stay in her building as long as she can. While Mrs. Williams admits that the elevators in her building do not always work and that there exists some "abusive elements" at Cabrini Green, she wishes to remain because of the "close-knit community". In 1998, the fate of Mrs. Williams' building was still uncertain pending action by the Habitat Company, a private real estate firm that oversees Chicago public housing, to demolish the building against many residents' wishes (Rogal, sec. 54).

"[I] saw four children killed in the mid-1990s and can't say how many I saw actually get shot," said Myra D. Silas, a resident of the Cabrini-Green high rise. Violence threatened the quality of Mrs. Silas and her four children's lives. In 1997, after a gang truce, Mrs. Silas saw her building become a community again. Nevertheless, on June 25th, 1998, Silas and her family moved out of Cabrini-Green. With her Section 8 subsidy, she obtained an apartment to occupy until her building was renovated. Due to a 15-month dispute between Cabrini residents and the Habitat Company, Silas remains in her Section 8 apartment. Silas' temporary apartment is in an area of high crime and violence, causing her to once again fear for her children's safety. Silas also misses the comfort and familiarity she felt in her former community (Rogal, sec. 1).

While relocation programs appear to solve problems of crime and violence, they often relocate many against their will, placing them in unfamiliar communities that may be no safer than the ones from which the residents came. Questions arise whether it is more important to integrate blacks into white communities or renovate the crumbling

black neighborhoods and public housing buildings themselves. The answers are neither straightforward nor simple, but their solutions should have one absolute: whatever action is taken should correspond to the tenant's best interests guided by an experienced staff's good judgment.

### THE SITUATION

The Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) history marks decades of mediocre policy decisions resulting in concentrated poverty and substandard housing options. Beginning in the late 1930s, after the passage of the National Housing Act, Chicago began building public housing units for its most impoverished citizens. As years and decades passed, these units became more and more massive while black inhabitants became more and more concentrated. These high-rises created neighborhoods and communities, but they also bred crime, violence and a virtually inhuman standard of living. The Gautreaux legislation, beginning in the late 1960s and having continued policy implications today, theoretically changed the CHA forever. The Gautreaux case, which pitted 40,000 Chicago Public Housing residents against the CHA and later HUD, determined that the CHA practiced racial discrimination in its housing policies. To alleviate the problem, the CHA and later HUD were loosely ordered to develop new housing policies that would integrate both black and white and rich and poor. HUD and CHA each implemented programs designed to decentralize the inner city black population by bringing some of it out into white areas surrounding the city. Some of these policies achieved limited success, but they also brought up many new questions and problems for public housing residents. While many residents welcomed the chance to move out of their crumbling and filthy buildings, they were reluctant to abandon what for

some had been the only communities they had ever known. Public housing residents, the housing authorities and the many other governmental and societal actors must find some way to work together to meet the tenants' needs and create affordable, safe housing while communities and the culture of its people are maintained. Throughout the CHA's history, the issues of integration, community, quality of housing, quantity of housing, cost of housing, and overall residents' choices have recurred, pointing out the shortcomings in public housing policy. These issues must be addressed and confronted to overturn decades of bad policies and discouraging socioeconomic trends.

## HISTORY

The World War I era saw the initial formation of Chicago's black ghetto. In 1920, 85% of Chicago's 110,000 blacks lived in a relatively small area south of the city (Hirsh 3). By 1940, three-quarters of blacks lived in areas that were more than 90% black (4). During the World War II era, black migration into Chicago increased because of war-depleted industries. The migration expanded the ghetto, forcing some blacks into white neighborhoods triggering white hostilities (9). An insufficient quantity and poor quality housing plagued Chicagoans, especially in the black belt<sup>1</sup>, at this time (22). In the 1940s, it was estimated that 375,00 blacks lived within the Southside black belt, an area in which only 110,000 could realistically be housed (23). During this same period, whites fled to the outskirts of the city to escape blacks and begin the formation of modern suburbs (28).

In 1937, Congress passed the United States Housing Act that established local public housing authorities to construct, own, and manage public housing. The Illinois legislature created the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA). The agency was legally

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<sup>1</sup> Chicago's "black belt" formed during the great migration in the early 20th century. The "black belt" is an area on the South side of Chicago that contained an extremely concentrated black population that steadily grew beginning at the time of the great migration.

independent of the city, but the mayor appointed commissioners who helped determine the authority's policies and regulations (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 19). The CHA began large-scale housing construction in the late 1930s and early 1940s with the erection of the Ida B. Wells and Francis Cabrini homes. They consisted of apartments, row houses and some two to three stories buildings (Struyk 25). As some city officials noticed the segregation of these housing projects, they attempted a program of integration. In 1947 black families were integrated into Fernwood and Airport Homes, both largely white housing projects, and were met with white riots and violence. White response to these CHA efforts further supported many whites' belief that the two races could not harmoniously live together and that segregation was the best policy (Meyerson and Banfield 127-28).

Many businesses located on the outskirts of these burgeoning ghettos used their influence, personnel and money to shape housing policies to sustain their interests (Hirsh 238). The Federal Relocation Act of 1947 granted city councils, such as Chicago's, power to oversee public housing site selections. This policy ensured that blacks would remain in the inner-city because the city council, safeguarding their white middle/upper class interests, denied alternative sites outside of the "black belt" (Hirsh 224).

Some on the national level recognized the increasing segregation of public housing and enacted legislation to halt the trend. The Federal Housing Act of 1949 called for the equitable treatment of all races and close attention used in relocation programs. CHA site selection committees knew they violated this standard, but realized their sites would be approved because of their strong local government positions. The PHA

association recognized the CHA's power and decided not to challenge the site selections, believing that poor housing was better than no housing (227).

In 1949, the CHA brought a proposal before Mayor Martin H. Kennelly to build 40,000 units of public housing over the next six years (Meyerson and Banfield 29). The city council site selection committee, all but one of whom opposed public housing, chose sites that were unsuitable; they wanted to embarrass the CHA and force them to either oppose public housing or settle for the undesirable sites (189). Due to the limited space in the black belt area and the growing demands for public housing, the CHA constructed more high-rise structures (Struyk 25).

In 1952, the Committee Against Discrimination (CAD) challenged the CHA's unwritten policy of excluding blacks from certain housing projects. After months of altercation, CHA responded after CAD threatened to go public with their complaints. The CHA claimed that fears of violence was what kept it from integrating housing and promised action to desegregate public housing (Hirsh 231). The CHA continued to stall integration through empty promises and weak deadlines. As long as white public housing residents reacted violently to integration efforts, CHA stalled assimilation.

By the time housing projects of the 1950s and 60s were completed, only one of the thirty-three public housing structures in the area was less than 84% black (241). The Chicago Commission of Human Relations and the local NAACP chapter were not powerful enough to challenge these segregationist policies (246). Acting with unchecked authority, the CHA built 14,895 high-rise public housing units from 1957 to 1968. These units included Robert Taylor Homes, a south side project consisting of 28 identical 16-story buildings; Stateway Gardens that consisted of 1,684 units and connected with

Robert Taylor homes to form an unbroken strip of public housing 2 miles long and a half mile wide. In addition, Cabrini-Green, 3,021 units on the city's near north side; and Henry Horner, 1,656 units on the near west side, were erected (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 21).

In the summer of 1966, after numerous complaints from local residents, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) challenged the CHA. The ACLU claimed that CHA knowingly violated Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that prohibited racial discrimination in federally funded activities (Meyerson and Banfield 23). The litigation became known as the Gautreaux case after Dorothy Gautreaux, a black community activist and public housing resident who lent her name to the class action lawsuit filed on behalf of more than 40,000 black families (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 1).

In February of 1969, Judge Richard Austin ruled that Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the equal protection clause of the constitution had been violated by the CHA (Polikoff 149-50). Judge Austin ordered that the CHA desegregate housing and allow black families to move into predominantly white neighborhoods. This effort became known as the "scattered-site" program (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 1-2). The lawsuit also separately pursued HUD's responsibility in allowing discrimination. In 1976, the United States Supreme Court ruled that HUD had to implement a program that would move blacks beyond the city limits into the six county-area surrounding the city. These efforts became known as the Gautreaux Assisted Housing Program (2).

Judge Austin proposed that the plaintiffs and the CHA work together to agree on a housing strategy that met both sides' needs. The sides did not cooperate, so Austin adopted the plaintiffs' proposal in July of 1969. The plaintiffs called on the CHA to

provide public housing for blacks in predominantly white areas. The first seven hundred apartments were to be built in predominantly white neighborhoods referred to as a "general" area. "General" areas excluded areas that were more than 30% black. Austin also ordered that CHA make additional housing available as quickly as possible (although no timetable was provided). The CHA was also supposed to adopt a nondiscriminatory tenant-assignment plan to ensure that potential residents were given access to as many varied housing choices as available.

Despite these proposals, current segregated housing was left untouched, and all proposals for new housing were subject to approval by the Chicago City Council (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 24-6). This initial inactivity resulted from administrative weaknesses and white communities' opposition (28). The City Council as well as Mayor Richard Daley despised the scattered-site program and took a position of inaction on the issue (30). Mayoral opposition diminished with successive mayors, but the CHA still lacked appropriate administrative capacities to carry out an effective program (31). Blacks did not fight public and community resistance because most were too busy attaining political power for their budding organizations or building their own communities (32).

Only several hundred units were built during a twenty-year period after the ruling. In 1987, after Judge Austin's death, Judge Marvin Aspen took over the case and abolished the CHA's authority. He appointed the Habitat Company, a Chicago-based developer of housing, as the receiver or representative to carry out the court-issued orders (27). The Habitat Co. had the freedom of being accountable only to the courts and not the CHA and the advantage of possessing a more experienced staff than the CHA (33).



During its stint as receiver, the Habitat Co. built or renovated 1,846 scattered-site units in predominantly white occupied areas. The company encountered community resistance; had difficulties finding land in white neighborhoods; and was continually slowed down by the need to acquire building permits. The Habitat Co.'s efforts proved admirable but thwarted by monetary deficiencies and community opposition.

At this same time, HUD was litigating the Gautreaux case. The plaintiffs claimed that HUD was accountable for having approved and funded the CHA's segregated housing sites. Judge Austin dismissed the case against HUD, but a court of appeals found HUD implicated in the illegal proceedings (36). By early June 1976, HUD and the plaintiffs' lawyers reached a one-year agreement to confront public housing segregation. Known as the Gautreaux Assisted Housing Program, this arrangement would be evaluated at the end of the year to see what changes, if any, needed to be made (39). A permanent policy agreement was reached in 1981, which remained in place till 1998. The program learned from the successes and failures of the scattered-site program and planned to implement new measures that would overcome some of the impediments encountered by the scattered-site program.

The program sought to go beyond a Section 8 program<sup>2</sup> by providing participants with more than just vouchers to attain private market housing. The Gautreaux program educated participants concerning the particulars of housing programs so that they could utilize the opportunities they offered. The program also introduced landlords to public housing participants to break down stereotypes and raise participants' comfort level about

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<sup>2</sup> The Section 8 subsidy program, started in 1976, is divided into two parts: Project-based Section 8 and Tenant-based Section 8. Project-based Section 8 involves privately owned developments that receive federal rent subsidies. Renters pay no more than 30% of their rents as income. Tenant-based Section 8 act as rent subsidies that enable low-income renters to lease housing in the private market (Chicago Reporter, "Families Still Waiting on CHA").

the housing search process. Acknowledging the need for highly skilled and well-trained administrators to carry out the program, all parties agreed to let the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities act as a regulatory body to ensure that needs were understood and met (42). The Leadership Council was created a decade earlier as a result of Dr. Martin Luther King's Chicago Freedom Movement's open housing marches. It was a non-profit organization with goals to end discrimination and inequality in the Chicago housing market. The Council was well-respected within the Chicago community and had established good contacts from its work with participants in the housing system.

#### THE GAUTREUX PROGRAM: LIMITED SUCCESS

The Gautreaux program achieved a level of success well above that of the scattered-site program and any other such program at that time in the U.S. While Gautreaux became a model for national mobility programs, it took over two decades to reach its goal of relocating 7100 families. The program's steady yet slow success resulted not from lack of interest or organized resistance both of which the Leadership Council effectively dealt with, but because of limited HUD funds (49-50).

The Leadership Council's duties included counseling families looking for housing, recruiting landlords to participate in the program, and working with area public housing agencies. It closely monitored each stage of the housing selection process to ensure that participants would have the most beneficial experience and the greatest chance for success. The Council chose families that would best adjust to a vastly different environment and aided in their transition. It trained families how to conduct housing searches. Ensuring that housing sites were close to schools, jobs, old neighborhoods and family, eased the transition for the participants. The Council also performed landlord

searches with great care. Its experienced staff explained the program to local landlords making sure to reiterate the benefits of the program and quelling any stereotypes that the landlords may have had.

The Council also asked local public housing authorities to assist in the Gautreaux program. Some local PHAs refused, stating their local housing markets were already too crowded with Section 8 voucher holders. Others responded that they wished to solely look after the housing needs of those residents in their area. Despite opposition, many agreed, especially compared with the scattered-site program that obtained no aid from local PHAs (52-53).

Public housing residents' response to the program proved overwhelming. The Leadership Council sent mailings and offered information sessions to sell the program and increase residents' understanding of the plan. Many residents jumped at the chance to get off long CHA waiting lists for alternative housing and/or Section 8 vouchers. They recognized the shrinking housing market and decided that anyway or place they could find housing was good enough. Others wanted to leave the filth and violence of their housing projects for nicer neighborhoods where they would not have to fear for their children.

While many public housing residents signed up for the program, great numbers wished to remain with their friends and families in their established neighborhoods. Most surveys of blacks indicated that they believed 50/50 integration was the best policy; the Gautreaux program did not use this standard. The Gautreaux program placed most black families in predominantly white communities. Some blacks feared the program, believing

that white neighborhoods would be bastions of racism and harassment and could possibly diminish their children's attachment to and understanding of black culture (56-7).

Despite these reservations by some black families, the Gautreaux program struggled to attain enough housing to meet residents' demand. While a moderate supply of possible rental units in desired locations existed, the Section 8 cost and quality requirements used by the Gautreaux program heavily depleted the rental pool.<sup>3</sup> Program administrators constantly reassured landlords of the program's benefits and maintained confidentiality to quell community opposition and anger towards the landlord. Despite these efforts, many landlords declined, most likely due to their inability to overcome stereotypes and to disturb the racial and social structure of their communities (60-1).

Maintaining positive community and local government response helped the program achieve its relative success. Before initiating the program, the Council approached local government officials and societal leaders with an explanation of the plan. The Council stressed the dispersal tactics of the program to reassure local officials that no large concentrations of participants would result. It also pointed out that the program was no different from the Section 8 plan already in place in their communities. Because of the program's careful and inconspicuous tactics, the participants experienced little racism or community-wide opposition (62-4).

The program ended in 1998 after more than 20 years of service to public housing residents. HUD, mostly due to its own fiscal constraints, had never planned for the program to become a permanent institution. The program achieved success on a very limited level. While the achievements appear promising, the project's work illuminated

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<sup>3</sup> Section 8 cost requirements are determined on a county to county basis based on comparative rents in the area. Other requirements include the unit meeting the local housing authority's quality standards (<http://www.state.tn.us/thda/Programs/Section8/sec8cvt.html>).

that many of the problems it confronted will become only larger and seemingly more unsolvable in the near future. As HUD and CHA demolish more and more public housing, the problem of a shrinking rental market becomes only more acute. The tightening market will further complicate residents' ability to more closely meet their needs as well as find housing that satisfies Section 8 quality and cost requirements. Other problems such as some residents' unwillingness to move out of their troubled yet familiar neighborhoods have been magnified due to their forced exodus because of the large scale demolition. Gautreaux as well as other housing programs have not maintained and strengthened communities; instead, they have demolished or displaced them. Many new problems have arisen since 1990 that seem to have only the same limited solutions that never worked in the first place. In this new era, the voices of public housing residents must be heard as their neighborhoods are torn apart and they are scattered throughout the city, oftentimes against their will.

#### CHA'S RECENT HISTORY

Over the last decade, HUD underwent many changes on the federal level that affected local housing authorities like the CHA. In 1995, some in the Republican controlled Congress called for the elimination of HUD. While this never occurred, the Congress cut funding for HUD. Congress also greatly altered the scope and power of HUD programs. First, Congress repealed the one for one replacement requirement for HUD in 1995, which had required that torn down public housing units be rebuilt. Next, Congress changed the Home Ownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere (HOPE VI)<sup>4</sup> from a program directed mostly towards rebuilding or revitalizing housing to a

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<sup>4</sup> The HOPE VI program was started in 1993 with the goal of building new housing units on the same land as the dilapidated high-rises that would be demolished. The strategy behind this program was to decrease

program focused more on demolition. Lastly, Congress enacted an act some refer to as the vouchering out program.<sup>5</sup> Initial estimates by HUD have shown that more than 16,000 Chicago units will be lost through vouchering out and HOPE VI demolition (Wilén and Stasell)).

These Federal changes and their harmful consequences appear most evident in three main divisions of Chicago public housing: Henry Horner Homes, Cabrini and the ABLA (Addams, Brooks, Loomis, Abbot) developments.<sup>6</sup> These three divisions have witnessed numerous disputes and litigation over the goals and direction of Chicago public housing. Some of these disagreements predate recent changes in HUD policy, but many others have followed from this legislation and program modifications (Wilén and Stasell).

In May of 1991, the Henry Horner Mothers Guild brought a suit on behalf of all Horner residents and families over the poor condition of their housing. Half of the units at the site were empty and uninhabitable while HUD and CHA stood by and did nothing. The plaintiffs blamed the CHA and HUD for de facto demolition of their housing because of their negligence and failure to maintain a 1:1 ratio for demolition and rebuilding of public housing. An agreement was eventually reached in which the high-rises would be demolished and mid-rises would be rehabilitated. The ultimate issue boiled down to how many units would be built in the area and how much housing would be provided for Horner residents in other areas or issues of residents' choices and community. The CHA,

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the concentration of poverty by either placing new public housing in non-impooverished neighborhoods or by promoting mixed-income communities on the site of established public housing (Chicago Reporter).

<sup>5</sup> Section 202 of 1996 Omnibus Consolidated Recissions and Appropriations Act is referred to as the "vouchering out" law. Local housing authorities perform a two-step viability assessment: first they identify projects with at least 300 units and determine whether it would be more cost effective to 1. demolish the building and voucher out the residents or give them Section 8 housing subsidies to find rental housing on the open market or 2. if the this is not cost effective to develop a strategic plan to redevelop the area through a mixture of demolition, rehabilitation, new construction and vouchering out.

<sup>6</sup> The Robert Taylor Homes was excluded from this investigation of Chicago public housing because of a lack of information on the development's recent struggles.

the Gautreaux plaintiffs and the concerned Horner residents agreed to the demolition of 3 mid-rises and 1:1 replacement for destruction as well as the construction of 2 or 3 new mid-rises and several hundred low-rise town houses. These agreements accommodated the housing choices of Horner residents, half of whom chose to remain in their current area. Congress's retraction of the 1:1 ratio spawned more private construction in the Horner area and frustration of public housing residents partly because the CHA did not rehabilitate mid-rises as Horner residents desired. The developments with the Horner Homes illustrate how residents' needs are often voiced, such as the need to maintain community and to have a choice in where they will live, but are then frequently pushed aside if other government or private interests become more important (Wilens and Stasell).

Developments in the Cabrini housing were much more charged, mostly because of its prime location in the Chicago "gold-coast" area of expensive homes and trendy restaurants. In August of 1996 the Cabrini Local Advisory Council filed a suit against the CHA and later the city of Chicago; they claimed that revitalization plans for their area displaced mostly poor, black women and children and was substantially reducing the number of public housing units in the Cabrini area. In effect, the CHA and the city were displacing communities and disregarding residents' living preferences. Many disputes occurred between the CHA, Gautreaux plaintiffs and the Cabrini residents about where their new housing was to be built and where residents would move. The CHA appeared most interested in maximizing profits in this prime real estate area. The Local Advisory Council was appalled by these actions. It appealed to Judge Aspen that local residents' interests were not being met. Aspen decided that the Habitat Company had the final say

in housing matters resulting in the displacement of Cabrini residents out of their communities (Wilén and Stassel).

The ABLA Development, located on the Near West Side about two miles from downtown, has experienced many of the same circumstances as Cabrini because of its location in an area of prime real estate. In 1996, the CHA submitted the first of three HOPE VI applications for the area. The first, which was approved, called for 24.4 million dollars for the demolition of Brooks extension high-rises and establishment of 200 replacement units, half of which would be for low-income families. The application passed with the approval of the "elected" ABLA tenant representatives; ABLA residents responded by forming the Concerned Residents of ABLA because they felt their interests were overlooked. This council was particularly upset that Addams residents were being evicted because the housing authority did not maintain their units, a result of what the council saw as private interests taking over. They demanded the CHA to maintain their units and include tenants in the redevelopment process; the CHA refused stating that they would only listen to the original "elected" ABLA representatives. The eventual revitalization plan and the exclusion of tenants from it followed much the same path as the earlier dispute over the demolition of the Brooks buildings. The revitalization plan drawn up for all of ABLA called for just 1,089 replacement units for public housing residents, just 37% of the overall development that was to occur in the area (the rest of which would either go to private interests or mid to high income renters). In July of 1999, residents challenged CHA's recently proposed revitalization plan. They claimed that the CHA violated Fair Housing standards by excluding citizens from participating in the planning process. They also maintained that the Fair Housing Act and HUD's regulations



implementing title VI were being violated because residents were being moved to segregated areas. As the courts slowly decide on these matters, more and more ABLA residents vacate their buildings marked for demolition because they had gone without repair for months. The CHA ignored ABLA's residents' communities and the quality and quantity of their housing (Wilens and Stasell).

### A STEP BACK: EXAMINING THE POLICIES GOVERNING RECENT PUBLIC HOUSING REFORM

The HOPE VI program, originally intended for revitalization of decrepit neighborhoods, has displaced many families against their will. From January 1, 1995 through August 31, 1998, the CHA evicted 1,003 families from the buildings it planned to revitalize. Many accuse the CHA of using evictions as a displacement tool for sites marked for demolition. Evictions have been highest in the four projects (ABLA, Cabrini-Green, Henry Horner and Robert Taylor Homes) recently awarded HOPE VI funds. In 1996, HUD labeled 14 of the CHA's family housing developments, containing 62% of total family housing, "distressed". A "viability test" was then performed for the "vouchering out" program to determine whether it would be cheaper to provide vouchers for the residents or revitalize the buildings. Thirteen of the public housing buildings, containing 17,589 units, failed the test and would have to be demolished. The populations in these areas marked for revitalization have fallen noticeably from January of 1995 to August of 1998. Over 14,687 families had lived in the developments in 1995 and that number had fallen to 9,073 by 1998, a decline of 38%. By contrast, in 1995, 7,749 families lived in the rest of Chicago public housing and, in August of 1998, 6,854 lived there, a decline of only 11% (Rogal).

The importance of the Section 8 subsidy program has greatly increased as more CHA buildings are closed or demolished. In 1995, HUD hired CHAC Inc., a subsidiary of a Washington D.C.-based private firm, to manage the Section 8 program. CHAC members devised a new waiting list to better handle the large number of applicants. In a two-week period in July of 1997, CHAC received 104,162 applications and randomly selected 35,000 from the list. Around 2,000 Section 8 subsidies became free each year because of turnover; this system could not possibly fulfill all the applicants' housing needs. Along with rental unit scarcity, inflation has caused rents to increase. A 1999 rental market study reported that Chicago's rent levels were rising even faster than inflation. While prices increased by 2% from 1998 to 99, rents increased by 4.3% during the same period (Rogal).

The Urban Institute conducted a study of CHAC's Section 8 program from the summer of 1998 to the spring of 1999. The survey consisted of those participants that failed to find units. While their views may be biased, their perspective is important and will help shed light on problems in the system. The survey found that applicants commonly face discrimination in their Section 8 housing search. This discrimination proved more socioeconomic than racial. Others believed that CHAC information sessions on the Section 8 program were confusing and they found the CHAC staff unaccommodating. This along with time constraints made housing searches very difficult for some participants and decreased their chances of finding a desirable unit within Section 8 price and quality standards.

The survey concludes with a list of recommendations from both the participants and The Urban Institute. The participants suggested more housing search assistance.

Others requested that a list be compiled of up to date rental housing opportunities as well as their locations. Information and assistance would help participants perform a more focused and successful search resulting in them finding better quality and affordably priced units. The Urban Institute suggested that CHAC ensure that its staff closely monitor participants' needs. They believed that CHAC officials need to make information sessions understandable and that officials comprehend the specific needs of clients. All housing programs should strive to meet the needs of its participants more precisely (Popkin and Cunningham 6-8).

#### MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In February of 2000, HUD's approval of the CHA's Plan for Transformation marked another in a long line of the CHA's attempts to change the face of the city's public housing. The plan will reduce the CHA's housing supply by 14,000 units over the next five years. HUD's approval of the CHA's plan gives the CHA the ability to reduce the stock of public housing and further privatize the housing market (Lindsey).

The Transformation Plan focuses mainly on the demolition of 51 high-rises and several thousand mid-rise and low-rise units. CHA intends its ultimate housing stock to consist of 25,000 rehabilitated or newly constructed units; that total is down from the current 39,000 units. Public housing will coexist with private housing awarded to the highest-bidding private firms. The CHA intends for the mixture of private and public housing to reduce the concentration of poverty and decrease incidence of drugs, violence and gang activity. The current plan calls for the CHA to rehabilitate over 20,000 units and construct approximately 4,500 new units. These new units will be concentrated at the

Cabrini-Green, Henry Horner, and the ABLA developments. The plan will also utilize Section 8 subsidies to make up for the destructed housing (Lindsey).

The plan includes large aspects of tenant relocation. Most of the families will receive tenant-based Section 8 vouchers to find housing in Chicago's private market. These residents will enter an already crowded private market in which the vacancy rate is only 4% (HUD considers a 6% or lower vacancy rate as a tight market). The plan also includes a resident protection agreement. This consists of HUD conducting an annual study on the availability of rental units in Chicago's housing market. The CHA agreed to alter the pace of demolition and relocation programs according to the annual findings. However, a provision exists that allows the CHA to continue on pace with its original plan if HUD fails to conduct the survey. The agreement also grants resident relocation rights and gives them a right to return to public housing, a stipulation completely dependent upon the availability of Chicago public housing (Lindsey).

### ASSESSMENT

Many components of the CHA's Plan for Transformation ignore residents' needs and complaints as well as discount the current state of the Chicago housing market. The plan has angered many residents both because of the loss of units and due to its termination of residents' and the CHA's prior redevelopment plans that had taken a lot of time and cooperation to create (Wilén and Stasell).

([www.povertylaw.org/articles/discart/wilen.htm](http://www.povertylaw.org/articles/discart/wilen.htm)). Plans for demolition and Section 8 relocation overlook the shrinking Chicago housing market. A recent housing market study, conducted by researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Urban Institute, found that the population of Chicago has increased by over 500,000 during the

1990s, while the housing stock has decreased by 50,000 units. Extremely low income renters (i.e. a family of four making between \$0 and \$19,050) amount to 308,200 families in Chicago. There exists only 125,700 nonpublic housing units available at rents they could afford. Housing quality also makes finding adequate units difficult. Between 99,300 and 104,800 renter households in Chicago live in substandard housing (Lindsey).

Many view the plan for transformation as a scheme that takes money away from public housing and puts it into the hands of Chicago's real-estate developers. The CHA has increased funds due to the recent layoffs of 700 CHA employees who run and maintain the agency's housing placement and counseling programs. Twenty million dollars will be cut from resident social programs to free up capital. The plan will also collect more than \$429 million that will allow real-estate developers to transform low-income housing into mixed-income communities that exclude many of their former residents (Venkatesh).

Recent surveys have also shown that most public housing residents do not wish to be relocated. A survey conducted by Robert Taylor Homes' residents and the University of Illinois at Chicago's Natalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement in April and May of 2000 found that Taylor families preferred to remain in their existing neighborhoods than to be displaced by Section 8 or other relocation programs. In the survey, 21 families named Section 8 as their top choice, 67 wanted to stay in rehabilitated Taylor housing, 31 wanted to move into new housing built on site, 36 decided on scatter-site housing and 31 said they wanted replacement housing close to the current Taylor Homes' neighborhood (Rogal).

#### RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE GOALS

The CHA, HUD, the Gautreaux program, Section 8, HOPE VI, and the current Plan for Transformation have all contributed to the enhancement of Chicago public housing. Each of these plans or agencies have addressed needs and deficiencies confronted by public housing residents and within area public housing. While each of these plans/agencies has experienced limited success, none has faced the full scope of the problem. Most allowed government and/or private interests to dilute their initial objectives. Legislators and policy makers must incorporate successful ideas and guidelines from the previous policies in order to ensure that each public housing resident's needs are met and their communities are not destroyed.

Public housing residents need the mobility that the Gautreaux program provided and Section 8 currently offers combined with restoration efforts, both in and outside their current communities, originally enacted by the HOPE VI program. Restoration and mobility must compose any fair and successful housing policy. These policies have failed to sort out the problem because they overlooked what should have been their primary purpose: to serve the residents. Policies should be for the residents and should be made by the residents in consultation with the government, the city and other vested interests. Driven by profit and plans for integration, policy makers have forgotten the people and allowed outside interest groups to influence them. These officials have moved many inhabitants into new and oftentimes, unwelcoming communities.

To alleviate these injustices, policy makers must be more in tune with resident needs and desires. This heightened understanding will only occur if housing agencies and organizations increase their staff size so that the needs of public housing residents are more closely met. Programs such as the Gautreaux plan matched participants with trained

staff who felt a vested interest in their client's case. Staff/resident ratios always remained low, ensuring that participants would get the attention and time they needed. This extra consideration ensured that participants' had housing choices that met cost and quality requirements while acknowledging their community and location preferences. Lower ratios also give staff more of a sense of ownership and responsibility for their clients' well-being, which will make the staff work harder.

The system should empower residents so that their interests are met. Local housing authorities need to give their residents better forums through which their concerns and complaints can be heard. Many of the CHA's policies claimed that housing decisions would not be made without resident input; up to this point, it appears that other interests have monopolized the planning process. Policies have displaced residents and destroyed their housing oftentimes against their will. Many residents want to move out of public housing and use Section 8 subsidies to relocate in neighborhoods far away, but many others want their buildings renovated so they can remain within their current communities. Despite these differing individual interests, public housing residents have been relocated without a voice in the matter. Many have entered the crowded private housing market with Section 8 subsidies only to find that their choices are limited or non-existent and place them in communities as dangerous as their former ones. Others have been relocated to predominantly white neighborhoods. While some have prospered in this environment, many others have faced harassment and prejudice. Housing agencies and policies must recognize that every housing resident has different preferences that merit attention.

Public housing organizations and policies hold hundreds of thousands of lives in their hands: the fate of Elma Glover in her search for adequate Section 8 housing, Louise Williams and her desire to remain in the Cabrini Green community, and Myra D. Silas's wish to return to her former Cabrini Green community and leave her unsafe apartment where the CHA temporarily relocated her. Tearing down high-rises means the destruction of thousands of peoples' homes and neighborhoods. It is unjust for housing agencies to exclude residents from participating in decisions that will affect where they will live and work. It is unjustifiable to throw public housing residents into a full housing market and expect them to find safe and affordable housing. Staff and policy makers must realize the importance of their decisions and how personal their policies really get. High-rises, in most cases, should not remain and integrated communities should exist to some degree, but the residents, advised by experienced staff, can only answer these questions and more concerning the policies and future of public housing.



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