

To: MPA Admissions

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Re: Housing for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals in Washington State:  
An Exploration of Policy Solutions

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### Problem Definition Argument

Housing insecurity has been an ongoing struggle for formerly incarcerated individuals in Washington State and across the United States. This marginalized population in Washington State is estimated to be approximately 75,000 individuals (Washington State Department of Corrections, 2020). After release, many of these individuals face significant barriers to obtaining and maintaining safe, secure housing. These barriers can be structural, such as criminal background checks, and economical, such as limited resources and support. As a result, many formerly incarcerated individuals in Washington State do not have access to safe, affordable, and secure housing, leading to increased recidivism and further destabilizing the individual and their family. This memo will explore the housing crisis for formerly incarcerated individuals that face a lifetime of challenges in finding and maintaining stable housing, from legal barriers to stigma to a lack of resources.

### Policy Evaluation Argument

According to a recent study by the Washington State Department of Corrections, approximately one-third of formerly incarcerated individuals in Washington State are homeless or unstably housed (Washington State Department of Corrections, 2020). This is significantly higher than the general population, in which only 5.3% of individuals are homeless or unstably housed (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). This disparity highlights the need for targeted public policy interventions that can address the unique needs of the formerly incarcerated population.

Housing insecurity, recidivism, drug and alcohol issues, and overdoses will continue steadily increase for formerly incarcerated individuals in the State of Washington if we continue to do nothing. It is essential to develop and implement public policy solutions that can improve our housing crisis for these individuals. The solutions outlined provide a starting point for developing effective public policy interventions.

### Policy Recommendation

1. Expanding access to housing vouchers.  
Housing vouchers are a critical tool to address housing insecurity. They can subsidize the cost of rent and provide individuals with resources needed to secure safe and secure housing. In order to expand access to housing vouchers, the state of Washington needs to increase funding and

strengthen relationships with housing authorities/landowners to prioritize access for this population.

2. Expand eligibility for public housing.

Most individuals are not eligible for public housing due to their criminal background. The Federal Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination in housing based on an individual's criminal record, has had limited impact in addressing the problem. Many landlords continue to discriminate against individuals with criminal records, and the law does not provide solutions or support to address this injustice. Washington state should consider expanding eligibility for public housing and seal certain criminal charges for those who have demonstrated a commitment to reintegration, rehabilitation, and completion of any required probation through county, state, and federal court systems.

3. Improved housing programs.

Creating housing programs that address the unique needs of the formerly incarcerated population. These programs should include a range of wrap-around services that include case management, drug & alcohol treatment, peer counseling, job placement, and educational training that can help individuals transition back into the community.

#### Works Cited

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2018, November). 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress. Retrieved from <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2018-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

Washington State Department of Corrections. (2020). Reentry Resources. Retrieved from <https://www.doc.wa.gov/corrections/reentry/resources.htm>