Housing Mobility:
What Do Housing Voucher Recipients Want?
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*Housing Mobility: What Do Housing Voucher Recipients Want?*

2013, Connecticut Fair Housing Center

The Connecticut Fair Housing Center, Inc. (CFHC) is a statewide non-profit organization working to make sure that all who seek housing have an equal opportunity to rent, purchase, finance or insure the property they choose. CFHC identifies and strives to eliminate barriers to fair housing in Connecticut. Because the state’s low-income residents are particularly affected by discriminatory housing practices, CFHC’s resources are devoted primarily to assisting them.

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Introduction

The Connecticut Fair Housing Center (CFHC) believes that Connecticut’s low-income people of color should have access to opportunity. This can be accomplished both by encouraging policies that bring resources to lower opportunity communities and by ensuring that low-income people of color who wish to move to higher opportunity communities are able to do so.

In January 2013, as part of its federally-funded Opportunities Project, CFHC conducted a series of discussion groups with housing choice voucher holders in major urban centers in Connecticut. The housing choice voucher program (formerly known as “Section 8”) is the federal government’s major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford housing in the private market. CFHC’s objective was to determine what factors influence the housing choices of low-income housing choice voucher holders and what inhibits these residents from using their vouchers to move from struggling communities to areas with less crime, thriving schools and lower poverty rates (so-called “opportunity moves”).

This report explores how low-income people of color make their housing decisions and identifies impediments to those who have considered, but not made, opportunity moves. The findings include a series of recommendations from the participating voucher holders themselves about strategies for eliminating barriers to such opportunity moves.

1. Background

Place matters.

Neighborhoods make a difference in the lives of families. More than fifty years of quality academic research confirms that where families live affects the life opportunities they will have and, ultimately, the quality of that life.\textsuperscript{1} The stress children experience from growing up low-income, particularly in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, can be toxic to their health, education, and long-term economic well-being.\textsuperscript{2}

Thus, low-income families can benefit when they move away from distressed and dangerous environments to live in safe, opportunity-rich neighborhoods. Their physical and mental health improves — especially so, for women and girls.\textsuperscript{3} Low-income children who get the opportunity to attend high-performing, economically integrated schools score significantly higher on math and reading tests than do their counterparts who attend poverty-concentrated schools.\textsuperscript{4} Thus, for many, a move outside of a poverty-concentrated area improves quality of life.

Race matters, too.

Indeed, in Connecticut, racial disparities are striking. Income varies significantly based on race and ethnicity. People of color in Connecticut are disproportionately low-income. The median income for Black families is only 55% of what non-Hispanic White families earn. Hispanic families earn only 44% of what non-Hispanic Whites earn.\textsuperscript{5}

Connecticut’s Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk region is more segregated by residence than Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Little Rock, Arkansas and Columbia, South Carolina.\textsuperscript{6} Only eight urban centers out of 362 in the nation exhibit more White-Hispanic segregation than Connecticut’s capital city, Hartford. Just seven cities come in ahead of Connecticut’s most populous city, Bridgeport.\textsuperscript{7}

Significantly, eight of ten Blacks and Hispanics in Connecticut live in “low opportunity” areas—communities with struggling schools, high crime rates and significant concentrations of poverty.\textsuperscript{8}

In sum, racially segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods are a continuing reality in Connecticut. Access to opportunities differs greatly by race. People of color are far more likely to live in communities without thriving schools, safe neighborhoods, and the social networks that can lead to good jobs. In Connecticut, race goes a long way towards determining place, and the two factors in tandem can make or break a child’s future.
2. The Opportunity Project

CFHC is a statewide non-profit organization working for nearly two decades to make sure that all who seek housing have an equal opportunity to rent, purchase, finance or insure the property they choose. CFHC believes that housing, free of discrimination, is both a right and an opportunity.

As demonstrated above, where families live often determines the quality of education their children receive, the employment options and health services they enjoy, and access to other important life opportunities. And Connecticut is racially segregated into high opportunity and low opportunity communities.

In 2012, CFHC sought and received multi-year funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for its Opportunity Project. The goal of the Opportunity Project is to address the housing needs of people of color in Connecticut by helping such residents of low opportunity communities overcome the obstacles preventing them from relocating to high opportunity communities — an opportunity move — if they so desire.

To better understand the factors affecting the housing choices of low-income people of color and the barriers preventing mobility moves, CFHC held discussion groups with residents living in three of Connecticut’s most populous cities: New Haven, Norwalk and Stamford. The purpose of the Opportunity Project discussion groups was to gather information about how participants came to live where they live, how they felt about where they lived, if they had ever thought about living in higher opportunity communities, what obstacles they saw to such a move, and what measures they believed might help them overcome those obstacles.

For participants in the discussion groups, CFHC recruited residents with housing vouchers.

3. Housing Vouchers

The housing choice voucher program (formerly known as “Section 8”) is the federal government’s major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants are able to find their own housing, including single-family homes, townhouses and apartments.9

Housing choice vouchers are administered locally by public housing authorities that receive federal funds from HUD to administer the voucher program.10

Housing choice voucher holders pay 30-40% of their income towards rent, and the housing authority pays the difference — up to a specific payment standard — directly to the landlord. Landlords sign a contract with the housing authority, and tenants have a lease directly with the landlord. This arrangement forms a three-way contractual agreement binding together the housing authority, tenant and landlord. Tenants are eligible for the vouchers if their income is 30% of area median income or below. Rental units must meet minimum standards of health and safety, as determined by the local housing authority. Under certain circumstances, if authorized by the housing authority, a family may use its voucher to purchase a modest home.11

“Portability” is the ability of a family with a housing voucher to move from a location in one public housing authority’s jurisdiction to a new location in another public housing authority’s jurisdiction (also referred to as “porting”).12

In Connecticut, it is illegal to deny an apartment to an otherwise-qualified prospective tenant based on his or her lawful source of income, such as housing vouchers.13

Some states and housing authorities offer the services of mobility counselors to voucher holders. Mobility counselors help families make successful moves by providing them with such resources and services as comprehensive and current lists of available units; housing search coaching; transportation, healthcare, child care, education, and employment information and guidance; and, in some instances, post-move support and problem-solving assistance.14

In theory, housing vouchers would appear to expand a family’s ability to choose where to live. They could be perfect vehicles for moves from low to high opportunity communities.

But that has not been happening. A growing body of evidence reveals that families with vouchers live in only slightly less poor neighborhoods than similar tenants without vouchers.15

The map at right shows the significant clustering of Connecticut’s housing vouchers in urban areas that are generally poverty-concentrated and disproportionately minority (compared with the rest of the state).
A smaller share of voucher households with children live near schools ranked in the top 50 percent (based on performance) than poor households generally. Black voucher households with children live near schools that are only slightly better performing than other poor Black households.17

Nowhere is this phenomenon more conspicuous than in Connecticut. In a comparison of the nation’s 100 largest metropolitan areas, voucher holders in New Haven and Hartford were found to be more likely to live near struggling schools than program participants in almost all other areas in the country — entering the national rankings at second and third, respectively, from the bottom.18

In addition, the latest research finds that households with vouchers tend to settle in high crime areas.19

Finally, in Connecticut, the mobility counseling that could facilitate opportunity moves is scarce. There are 30,647 housing choice vouchers in Connecticut. Of those, 6,518 are administered by the state’s Department of Social Services (DSS). Only residents using those 6,518 DSS-administered vouchers — or 21% of the total number — have access to mobility counseling programs.20
CFHC determined that much could be learned by listening closely to housing voucher holders: low-income urban residents who, in theory, could be living in high opportunity neighborhoods — but were not. What is preventing these residents from making opportunity moves to communities with lower crime rates, higher-performing schools and greater access to decent jobs? What can be done to eliminate the obstacles?

One discussion group was held in each of the chosen cities: New Haven, Norwalk and Stamford (for city demographics, see Appendix B). CFHC worked with the housing authorities in these cities to identify qualified participants: people of color living in the cities and using housing vouchers.

The overwhelming majority of the discussion group participants were also single mothers (see Appendix A).

More than 80% of the discussion group participants live in low or very low opportunity areas, as identified and defined in the 2010 report, “People, Place and Opportunity: Mapping Communities of Opportunity in Connecticut,” commissioned by CFHC from the Kirwan Institute (for more about the report, see Appendix E).21

The topics covered in the two-hour sessions were:

• “Getting to Where You Live Now”
• “Satisfaction with Current Home”
• “The Moving Option”
• “Your Ideal Neighborhood”
• “Breaking Down the Moving Barriers”

The discussion groups were held over the course of two days in January 2013. They were facilitated by Stefanie A. DeLuca, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Sociology at the Johns Hopkins University. Dr. DeLuca is the recipient of a William T. Grant Foundation Scholars award for her research on housing and a fellow at The Century Foundation.

In addition to the guided discussions, each group session included a PowerPoint slide presentation by Erin Boggs, Deputy Director of CFHC, about the history of housing segregation in Connecticut and some of the ramifications of this segregation for modern-day state residents — especially low-income people of color (see Appendix D).

Prior to the start of each discussion group, participants were asked to fill out a brief survey about their housing situations (see Appendix C).

Participants received refreshments, free child care, and a $25.00 gift card as a token of appreciation.

Notes


10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.


18 Ellen and Horn, op. cit., Table 1.


21 Reece, op.cit.
Discussion Topics and Responses

Below are the discussion group topics and questions developed by CFHC and the responses shared by participants, as summarized by CFHC. Also included are selected verbatim comments made by participants.

Section 1: Getting to Where You Live Now

How did you come to live where you live right now?
Did you feel that you had a choice about where to live?
Did you consider, or have a chance to consider, other neighborhoods, cities or towns?

Responses:
• Many participants were desperate when searching for their apartments and felt they had few options and little time. Often, the need to move quickly was caused by the deteriorating conditions of their dwellings.
• Frequent comments were made that the value of the housing vouchers was too low and prevented participants from renting in many neighborhoods.
• There were numerous stories of discrimination by landlords during the house-hunting process, severely limiting housing choices.
• Many participants were told by landlords that they did not accept Section 8 vouchers.
• Participants reported that some landlords insisted on visiting voucher holders’ current apartments before considering them as tenants — which served as another obstacle to a successful rental and move.
• Many participants felt they were discriminated against because of their race.
• It was clear that most participants did not wish to live in a unit where the landlord did not want them.
• A number of participants mentioned housing authority officials who would try to steer them to a limited number of communities.
• Participants said that onerous security deposits prevented them from renting many apartments.
• Many participants relied on family connections and recommendations to find their apartments.
• Others found their apartments by: driving by a “for rent” sign; seeing a posted flyer; or receiving a referral from their shelter.

• Some participants found their apartments by using lists maintained by housing authorities. However, there was consensus that the lists of units kept by housing authorities served to limit respondents’ housing choices. Participants consistently related that the lists had few units in total, no units in higher-opportunity communities, and, in any event, were always out-of-date.

“My aunt was telling me about the apartment across the street from her. So she took me up to see the landlord; she knew the landlord, so that’s how I got into the place where I’m at now.”

“They gave me a voucher. I was told that I had to hurry up and find an apartment, okay? You know, so I had to find something. So I moved in there quickly, always resented it, hated it.”

“But what I was looking for was better schools for my kids… I’m not going to be able to move to Greenwich and the better areas, but I wanted to be able to go to a better school. So I took what I could get…”
Section 2: Satisfaction with Current Home

Are you happy about the neighborhood you live in now?
What do you like about it?
What do you dislike about it?

Responses:
• A locus of participant dissatisfaction with their present circumstances was their landlords. Many respondents told stories about units in disrepair and irresponsible and unresponsive landlords.
• Participants who had helpful and responsive landlords were extremely grateful and described themselves as “blessed.”
• Some landlords had agreed to take tenants without security deposits, or they let security deposits be paid slowly, over time.
• Several respondents connected housing problems to family health problems, such as mold exacerbating asthma. One participant had an autistic son who could not sleep due to infestations of bed bugs.
• Respondents were also quite worried about safety issues, including shootings, theft, drugs, pedophilia and child kidnapping.
• Many participants spoke positively about some features of their present neighborhoods, including a strong sense of community, neighbors who will watch out for their children, familiarity with neighborhood resources, and — for a few — peaceful and pleasant surroundings.

As one participant put it, “They all know his [my son’s] name. They all look out for him. That’s one thing about my neighborhood. My neighbors are all very nice.”

A number of participants had decidedly mixed feeling about their neighborhoods.

“It’s just so scary and every time you hear gunshots, I mean your heart starts racing. I’m always picking up the phone to call my son, ‘Where you at, where you at,’ and just to hear his voice.”

 “…because where I live at now, they broke into my car three times. The last time they stole my car, they totaled my car… They found it up on I-91 North, flipped over and everything. I came home and cried.”

“So where I’m at now, I love where I live at, I just don’t like the owners, because the owners are not stepping up, doing nothing — nothing. It’s crazy.”

Section 3: The Moving Option

Have you considered moving? If so, how seriously?
What reasons would you have for moving?
If you could choose, would you prefer to move within your neighborhood? To a new neighborhood? To a new town or city? Why?

Responses:
• In each discussion group, several participants (the exact number varying from group to group) expressed the desire to make an opportunity move.
• In each discussion group, there also were several participants (again, the exact number varying from group to group) who expressed reluctance to leave their neighborhoods.
• Participants in the discussion groups appeared very comfortable discussing these alternative preferences.
• The leading reason mentioned by participants for considering moving was to increase their family’s safety.
• After safety, the most frequently mentioned reasons for considering a move were to get out of a poorly maintained dwelling or to get away from an irresponsible landlord.
• Others might consider moving for better schools, less crowded and dense neighborhoods, and more parks and open space.

• When asked where they would move if money were no object — and after mentioning out-of-state locations including Hawaii, Texas, Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas and Belize — participants listed specific higher opportunity suburban towns in Connecticut.
• Among Connecticut locations mentioned were these higher-opportunity towns: Greenwich, Hamden, New Canaan, West Haven, East Haven, North Haven, Darien and Ansonia.
• Several participants said they valued and might consider moving to a neighborhood that is more racially diverse than their present neighborhood.

“I never tried to move into an all-White neighborhood or anything like that… I wouldn’t have a problem if I lived in an all-White neighborhood. It’s okay, because I would live in my house.”

“I want to live in a good area. I want my kid to go to a good school.”

“I would like to go anywhere if you could better my quality of life.”

**Participant Survey**

Discussion group participants filled out surveys before group discussions began (see Appendix C). They were asked to choose the two neighborhood qualities most important to them. In rank order, from most to least, they chose:

1. Safety
2. Cost
3. Good schools
4. Good public transportation
5. Close to my work
6. Close to family/friends
7. Ethnic/racial diversity
7. Economic diversity (tied)

**Section 4: Your Ideal Neighborhood**

*What would your ideal neighborhood look like?*

*What does your ideal community provide for its residents?*

*How important would these specific qualities be to you in a new neighborhood?*

**Responses:**

• Safety was clearly a priority for participants in defining an ideal neighborhood.

• Participants talked about needing to be in a neighborhood with easy access to public transportation.

• A number of participants mentioned wanting to live close to schools — especially participants whose children have special needs.

• Others mentioned the importance of well-maintained neighborhood buildings.

• For several participants, the ideal neighborhood would be racially mixed.

• Some participants expressed apprehensions about a neighborhood in which they would be in the racial minority; for others, this was not a concern.

• One participant expressed her concerns about a high opportunity neighborhood: “Like if you were to offer me an apartment in North Stamford, it wouldn’t be good for me. It’s like me throwing my son that’s been in public school for all of these years in Brunswick or Greenwich Academy. We don’t live that same lifestyle.”
• Other desirable neighborhood qualities mentioned included: safety, good schools, close to shopping, affordability, close to medical services, no abandoned houses, people who are working, close to churches, “room to breathe,” non-prejudiced, good neighbors, and people “looking out for each other.”

“My main thing is for the children—to make sure that they’re safe, and to make sure they’re able to go outside if they want to ride their bikes.”

Section 5: Barriers to Moving

What do you think has stopped you, or might stop you, from moving?

If you were to move, what might be the hardest things about the move?

What might be the hardest things about adjusting to a new location?

What might be the hardest things about adjusting, specifically, to living in a new town that has thriving schools and a very low poverty rate?

Responses:

• Many participants said that they did not receive sufficient funds through the voucher program to rent a better apartment.

• Saving enough money for a security deposit was also a concern.

• Some talked about the difficulty of finding a landlord who will accept a security deposit guarantee (offered through the state’s “Security Deposit Guarantee Program”).

• Also discussed was the outright refusal by many landlords to accept any housing vouchers.

• Many were frustrated by the extremely limited offerings on the list of available units kept by housing authorities.

• A repeated theme among participants was the need for a program of landlord education, so that landlords could overcome their negative stereotypes about housing voucher renters — and so that landlords would know the housing laws.

• Also reported as frustrating was the general lack of search assistance and support from housing authorities, although there was acknowledgement that housing authorities have had their budgets cut in recent years.

• There was consensus that voucher holders needed access to much better housing search resources, including: client-focused mobility (or “relocation”) counselors; legal advisors; web-based search-and-map utilities; explanations of tenant rights (especially concerning discrimination); and comprehensive, current housing lists.

• Some voiced general concerns about racism in a high opportunity community.

• Also, increasing the availability of security deposit guarantees would be a big plus, said many participants.

• A good number of participants feared racial discrimination by police in a high opportunity community.

• Several felt that the cost of living in a high opportunity community would be prohibitive for them (food and utilities were of particular concern).

• Others believed that their credit histories or their income level would prevent such a move.

• Some participants experienced significant difficulties attempting to relocate by “porting” (transferring) their voucher from one jurisdiction to another.

• A number of participants expressed the concern that their children would feel “different” or “out of place” in a high opportunity community — especially if they could not afford to buy the same possessions that their wealthier friends owned.

• Others expressed the worry that the lack of a strong public transportation system in a more distant community would lead to isolation — as well as the inability to travel for affordable groceries, familiar health care services and familiar churches.

“Some place where there’s not abandoned houses and lots that are not kept up and stuff like that. It’s kept up.”

“I don’t want to just move here. I want to go to Hamden, somewhere out. I don’t want to just go in New Haven.”
• Some participants expressed trepidation about moving for fear of not being accepted in a mostly White community, although participants who already had more interactions within majority-White communities – for example, two women who worked in a high opportunity community – were dismissive of these fears.

“I mean, you could call to look at an apartment. Then when you go there and they talk to you, but when you call back they’re like, “The apartment has been rented,” or “We don’t take Section 8,” or ‘We don’t participate with this.’”

“Also, they do credit checks and if your credit is so-so they’ll jack it up, or say “I want 2½ months security.” I’ll be like, ‘What?’”

“Speaking of [high opportunity] Wallingford... I lived there for like five years. I loved it. I never had a problem. I worked at [a hospital]. I had no problems. They treated me very well.”

“The police, they have issues, especially if you’re not a quote unquote [person].”

Section 6: Breaking Down the Moving Barriers

What might make a move easier for you?

What might make adjustment to a new location easier for you?

What might make adjusting, specifically, to living in a new town that has superior schools and a very low poverty rate easier for you?

Would these specific types of assistance make such a move more likely for you?

Responses:

Participants suggested these measures and policies that would make a move to a high opportunity community easier for them:
• Mobility counselors to provide various information and supports before, during and after a move.
• Help with moving expenses.
• Help with paying higher taxes.
• Help with paying higher utility bills.
• Help with buying a car, if public transportation is limited.
• Opportunities for would-be movers to meet with residents in prospective new communities so that all can overcome stereotypes they might hold.
• Good jobs for them available in the new community.
• A local public transportation system that could get them where they need to go, at a reasonable price.

• As noted in Section 5 (above), educated and ethical landlords, particularly regarding the benefits of the voucher program, such as guaranteed rent payments.
• Strong enforcement of fair housing laws in the high opportunity communities.
• Some participants liked the idea of a “welcome wagon”-type group that would greet them and help them acclimate to a new community, with information about schools, buses, shopping, churches, etc.
• In-depth information about schools from the school systems.

“Whenver there’s a BMW dealer in the area, there’s a high tax rate.”

“[A] relocation specialist. That’s nice. That would be nice. That could help.”

“You need to get to know some of these people [in high-opportunity communities]. They’re people, just like us.”
Analysis and Recommendations

It was clear from the discussion group sessions that Connecticut’s housing voucher holders face daunting challenges on a near-daily basis: crime and violence, including gun shots; health crises; poor dwelling unit conditions; unresponsive landlords; unsupportive police. Their perseverance and their determination to make the best lives possible for their families under such circumstances struck all involved as extraordinary.

Discussion group participants provided valuable information about how and why they live where they live. Common themes readily emerged. One theme was the clear desire to live in neighborhoods with safe streets and strong schools. There were participants in each discussion group who wished to move to high opportunity areas to obtain that quality of life.

Another theme was apprehension about the notion of a move to a high opportunity suburb. This apprehension was fueled by perceived racism and insularity in high opportunity majority-White suburbs, as well as by worries about high costs (for rent, utilities, groceries, clothing, etc.) and the absence of adequate public transportation.

Those with more experience in White suburbs, through their work or by virtue of having lived in such a suburb previously, expressed much less anxiety about racism and social isolation.

Most participants believed that voucher amounts were simply too low to allow for moves to the majority of high opportunity communities. They also felt that high security deposits are a primary obstacle to opportunity moves and that the state’s Security Deposit Guarantee Program is too limited, ineffective, or simply unavailable.

Participants were able to articulate a comprehensive list of characteristics for a perfect neighborhood and, to a certain degree, reflect on how their current neighborhood, or a neighborhood they have lived in at some point, did not fit these criteria. They discussed the importance of school quality, peace and quiet, responsible neighbors, and other amenities. Of primary importance was safety. The persistent vandalism of a respondent’s property or a violent crime on or near a respondent’s property was more likely to prompt action than other quality-of-life factors discussed in the groups. The primacy of concerns about family safety was confirmed by the results of the written survey given to discussion group participants.

Strong consensus was reached that hostile, racist or incompetent landlords could be, and in many cases were, a primary obstacle to both a decent, well-maintained apartment and to an opportunity move into a better neighborhood. The participants described flagrant discrimination by landlords when home-hunting, based on both their race and their housing voucher status. In their experience, fair housing laws were simply not enforced.

Public housing authorities, which could be a nexus for housing counseling and search assistance, were described as overwhelmed at best and genuinely antagonistic at worst. Their housing lists were narrow and dated, their staff unhelpful, and their bureaucracy stifling. Many participants felt that the housing authorities put the interests of landlords well ahead of the interests of tenants. There was also recognition that housing authority resources have been reduced over recent years.

Some participants believed that the level of violence is the same no matter where you live (despite clear evidence to the contrary). Most felt good about the schools their children were attending (despite significant disparities in the performances of lower and higher opportunity area schools). Other misperceptions included the assumption that taxes are inevitably higher in non-urban communities (when, in fact, Connecticut’s urban areas generally host the highest property tax mill rates in the state).

For certain participants, discussions about the potential benefits of a move to a high opportunity community triggered a strong sense of pride in their present neighborhoods—this despite the complaints about their current situations which they voiced at other points in the group discussions.

And throughout the group discussions, participants voiced a deeply-felt allegiance to the principles of self-reliance, pride and belief in a higher power.

Discussion group participants believe that these reforms would make a move to a high opportunity community more likely for them:

**Affordability**

1. Vouchers of higher value
2. More vouchers
3. Greater availability of security deposit guarantees
4. Assistance with meeting the higher (non-housing) costs of living in a high opportunity community

**Searching**

1. Easy access to mobility counseling
2. Availability of legal advice, especially for review of leases and for fair housing issues
3. Sufficient funding for housing authorities
4. Properly staffed, trained and tenant-focused housing authority staff
5. Comprehensive and up-to-date lists of available, affordable, voucher-ready dwellings in all communities, accessible online as well as at the housing authorities
6. Real-time maps indicating where units are currently available
7. More information about tenant fair housing rights
8. Additional time for apartment searches
9. An easier process for moving with a voucher from one jurisdiction to another (“porting”), and clearly written, readily available explanations of that process
Landlords

1. Outreach to landlords to break down stereotypes about voucher holders
2. Education of landlords about fair housing laws
3. Financial incentives to landlords who rent to voucher holders
4. Strong, consistent enforcement of fair housing laws in high opportunity communities
5. Reactive litigation so that the volume of judgments discourages other landlords from discriminating

Information

1. In-depth information about schools in high opportunity towns
2. In-depth information about public transportation in high opportunity towns and about any special programs designed to assist low-income families meet their transportation needs
3. In-depth information about population demographics, types of housing, rental levels, shopping, and employment in high opportunity towns, at a neighborhood level

Other

1. More public transportation options in high opportunity communities, with broader route coverage and more frequent service

In addition to endorsing the recommendations generated by discussion group participants, CFHC offers these observations and suggestions:

1. The discrepancy between how participants’ neighborhoods objectively measure on such quality-of-life factors as crime and the perceptions of many participants about their neighborhoods suggests that they could be making housing decisions without full information and could benefit from mobility counseling about the potential benefits of opportunity moves.
2. The reluctance on the part of some participants to consider opportunity moves for fear of a poor reception in majority-White higher opportunity communities suggests that there is more that those communities can do to make themselves welcoming to low-income people of color.
3. The numerous participant testimonials that voucher amounts were too low to let them live in higher opportunity neighborhoods strongly suggest that steps should be taken at the state and federal level to increase these amounts in communities where they now are below actual market value.
4. The calls for assistance with security deposit payments suggest that increased funding of Connecticut’s Security Deposit Guarantee program would enable more opportunity moves to occur. Guarantees could be targeted to those wishing to make opportunity moves.

The information provided by discussion group participants, including their recommendations about what would facilitate opportunity moves for them, is extremely valuable and will be used by CFHC to advocate for reform. The experiences and opinions of the members of the discussion groups will inform our entire Opportunities Project and, indeed, all of the work performed by CFHC in advancing fair housing in Connecticut.

In particular, the discussion group results will be incorporated into Connecticut’s next “Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (AI),” a federally-mandated document being drafted for the state by CFHC. The AI will identify obstacles to fair housing choice in the state’s public and private sector and make recommendations for the elimination of those obstacles.

Finally, these results will be shared with mobility counselors, policy makers, city and town officials, and others assisting people in moving. We urge them to make similar use of the experiences and insights of these experts on housing voucher programs – that is, the participants themselves.

“Never give up, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn.” —Harriet Beecher Stowe

Notes

23 Pro Publica (website), retrieved 3/21/13 from http://projects.propublica.org/schools/states/ct
### Appendix A

#### Recruitment and Participation

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<th>Discussion Group Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Recruitment</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Participant Information</th>
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| New Haven                  | January 22, 2013 | Interested parties responded to a mailing by local housing authority to all eligible voucher holders | 12                     | • 12 female  
• 10 Black; one Native America; one did not self-identify  
• All were parents |
| Norwalk                    | January 23, 2013 | Participants were identified by local housing authority through informal outreach | 14                     | • 14 female  
• 10 Black; two Hispanic; one White; one did not self-identify  
• All were parents |
| Stamford                   | January 23, 2013 | Participants were identified by local housing authority through informal outreach | 11                     | • 11 female; one male  
• Nine Black; two did not self-identify  
• All but one (male) were parents |

### Appendix B

#### Demographics of Discussion Group Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>White, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Black, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino Origin</th>
<th>Median Household Income</th>
<th>Below Poverty Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Haven</td>
<td>129,585</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>$39,094</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwalk</td>
<td>86,460</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>$76,384</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stamford</td>
<td>123,868</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>$78,201</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix C

SURVEY

Name: ____________________________________________
Address: ____________________________________________ Phone: ____________________________
_________________________________________ E-mail: ____________________________

1. Do you have a Housing Choice Voucher (RAP or Section 8)? Yes or No (circle one)

2. Do you have children under 18 living with you? Yes or No (circle one)

3. Your race/ethnicity (circle one): ▪ Black (not of Hispanic origin) ▪ White ▪ Hispanic
   ▪ Native American ▪ Asian/Pacific Islander ▪ Other (Please specify) ____________________________

4. Are you currently employed? Yes or No (circle one)

5. Do you have access to a car when you need it? Yes or No (circle one)

6. Please list your two most recent previous addresses:
   1) _______________________________________________________________________________
   2) _______________________________________________________________________________

7. Are you happy with the neighborhood you live in now? Yes or No (circle one)

8. Have you considered moving? Yes or No (circle one)

9. Which two of these qualities would be most important to you in a new neighborhood? (circle two):
   ▪ cost ▪ safety ▪ good schools
   ▪ close to my work ▪ good public transportation ▪ close to nature/outdoors
   ▪ ethnic/racial diversity ▪ economic diversity ▪ close to friends/family
   ▪ friendly neighbors ▪ neighbors not prejudiced ▪ accessible medical services
   ▪ many new job opportunities ▪ access to grocery store & other shopping
   ▪ most people of my ethnic/racial/economic background

Thank you!
Appendix D

Does Place Matter?—PowerPoint Presentation

Does place matter?

Presented by:
Erin Boggs, Esq
Deputy Director
Connecticut Fair Housing Center
New Haven, Connecticut
January 22, 2013

Connecticut Fair Housing Center

We are a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to ending housing discrimination and segregation.

We want to ensure that all people in Connecticut can choose where they live, free of discrimination.

Looking at the rankings

Hispanic/Non-Hispanic White Segregation:
- Bridgeport Area: #8 out of 362 areas in the country
- Hartford Area: #9
- New Haven: #20

Non-Hispanic Black/Non-Hispanic White Segregation:
- Bridgeport Area: #18
- Hartford Area: #34
- New Haven: #42
## We are increasingly diverse

29% of Connecticut’s population are people of color.

By 2020 nearly half of our 25-29 year-old population will be people of color.

## Where are we now in 2013?

*We are segregated by race, but does that matter?*

Professor John Powell of Berkeley and others developed a way to see whether segregation matters.

## What is opportunity?

### What do we know?

- 50 years of research says that where you live effects the opportunities you have.

- Education, crime, parks, nearby grocery store - can all be connected to where you live.

## Capturing “opportunity” in an image...

Some people ride the “Up” escalator to reach opportunity. Others have to run up the “Down” escalator to get there.
Appendices (continued)

Does Place Matter?—PowerPoint Presentation (continued)

How do we define “opportunity”?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Opportunity</th>
<th>Economic Opportunity</th>
<th>Neighborhood/Housing Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students Passing Math Test Scores</td>
<td>Unemployment Rates</td>
<td>Neighborhood Vacancy Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Passing Reading Test Scores</td>
<td>Population on Public Assistance</td>
<td>Crime Index or Crime Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attainment</td>
<td>Economic Climate (Job Trends)</td>
<td>Neighborhood Poverty Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Commute Time</td>
<td></td>
<td>Home Ownership Rate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Map 2: Comprehensive Opportunity with non-White population overlay

Race analysis: % of total racial population in each opportunity area

Who lives in lower opportunity areas?
- 81% of African-Americans
- 79% of Latinos
- 44% Asians
- 25% of Whites

Does changing “opportunity” matter?

Opportunity is like a web.
- Health
- Education
- Economic/Employment
**Why opportunity matters: Health**

**Health**
- Asthma attacks for kids decrease when they move out of high poverty environments.
- Lead levels are higher in lower opportunity areas.
- Obesity levels decrease with a move to a higher opportunity area.

**Why opportunity matters: Education**

Connecticut’s white/black educational performance differences are among the *highest in the country*.

**Educational Opportunity:**
- Low income children with the chance to attend higher income schools do much better than their counterparts who attend poverty-concentrated schools.
- Students in higher income schools cut their achievement gap in half over five to seven years.

Section 8 Project-Based Developments in Connecticut are near some of the most challenged schools.

Housing Choice Voucher Holders in Connecticut are living near the most challenged schools.
Towns near New Haven
- Hamden
- North Haven
- Woodbridge

Comparing crime rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Number of Violent Crimes (2009)</th>
<th>Number of Murders (2009)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamden</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Haven</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodbridge</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Haven</td>
<td>2,191</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing schools

Students eligible for free or reduced lunch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hamden</th>
<th>North Haven</th>
<th>Woodbridge</th>
<th>New Haven</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advanced classes

Students taking advanced placement classes

- North Haven: 14%
- Hamden: 12%
- New Haven: 10%
So what comes next?

Solutions often framed as an either/or:

- Allocate resources to lower opportunity areas
- Promote integration by creating the option for low income people of color to move to higher opportunity areas

*We need to do both.*

*Our job today is to find out if there is interest in moving and, if so, what is stopping people from moving.*

Contact information

Connecticut Fair Housing Center
Erin Boggs, Deputy Director
[eboggs@ctfairhousing.org](mailto:eboggs@ctfairhousing.org)
860-263-0725
Appendices (continued)

Appendix E

Opportunity Mapping
CFHC’s opportunity mapping bases its analysis on eleven data points:

<table>
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</table>

The analysis generates this coded census tract map:
Acknowledgements

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