

Proposed Housing Mobility Demonstration Would Improve Families' Access to High-Opportunity Areas



The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program can enable low-income families with children to move to safe neighborhoods with high-quality schools. But many families participating in the program remain in high-poverty areas, for a variety of reasons. The proposed Housing Choice Voucher Mobility Demonstration, now moving through Congress, provides incentives to public housing agencies (PHAs) to help thousands of families realize their goal of moving to high-opportunity communities. The House funding bill for the departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) includes \$50 million for the demonstration: \$30 million for housing mobility services and \$20 million for new vouchers for families with children.

Why Do We Need a Housing Mobility Demonstration?

PHAs have limited resources and incentives to help low-income families gain access to neighborhoods that traditionally have been out of reach. The demonstration program would help PHAs plan and implement a housing mobility program to provide this assistance. It includes an evaluation component to help determine which interventions are most cost effective and beneficial to families.

A growing body of evidence shows that children who move to low-poverty areas do better in the long term. As the funding bill report issued by the House Appropriations Committee explains:

Low-income families, including voucher holders, tend to be concentrated in high-poverty neighborhoods where schools are under-resourced, transportation is limited, and well-paying jobs are scarce. This demonstration will harness the power of the housing choice voucher platform to help families with children seek housing and successfully move to privately-owned units in lower-poverty areas. A growing body of research finds that when families move to higher opportunity areas with less poverty, more jobs, and quality schools, their children experience significant earnings and educational attainment improvements that persist into adulthood. The persistence of the improved outcomes for children is remarkable and gives hope that family mobility could hold the key to arresting generational poverty in families served by HUD.

Funding for Services

PHAs need additional resources to offer robust services to give more families access to high-opportunity communities. The House appropriations bill includes \$30 million for services, which would allow selected PHAs and their partners to work together to develop and operate a housing mobility program. Those services might include:

- Informing families of the advantages of areas of opportunity.
- Working directly with individual families to address barriers they may need to overcome to successfully move to a high-opportunity area, such as by providing financial coaching.
- Providing outreach to landlords to recruit more of them to participate.
- Providing housing search assistance to help families find affordable units that meet their individual needs.
- Providing post-move services, such as regular check-ins, resource coordination, and landlord/tenant mediation, to help families living in areas of opportunity remain there.

Funding for Vouchers

The House appropriations bill provides \$20 million for new vouchers for families with children that participate in the demonstration. This would fund about 2,000 new vouchers, which would boost incentives for PHAs to undertake the substantial planning needed to meet the demonstration's goals.

The demonstration also allows participating agencies to use voucher funding for security deposits in designated opportunity areas. Lack of funds for security deposits is a significant barrier for poor families to move to higher-opportunity areas, where landlords often require large deposits.

What's the Status of the Proposal in Congress?

This proposal has bipartisan support in both the House and Senate and is moving on separate but related tracks. It has already been:

- Approved by the full House Financial Services Committee ([H.R. 5793](#)); this bill authorizes the demonstration.
- Approved by the full House Appropriations Committee in its [2019 Transportation-HUD bill](#), which funds the demonstration.
- Introduced in the Senate by Senators Todd Young and Chris Van Hollen ([S. 2945](#)).

The full House likely will approve both the authorizing and appropriations bills in the near future. The Senate Appropriations Committee will consider its HUD funding bill in the first week in June. Final action by Congress may not occur until the end of calendar 2018, and possibly later.

How Would HUD Select Agencies to Participate?

HUD would select PHAs to participate in the demonstration through a competitive process. The proposal requires HUD to prioritize regional collaborations that have high concentrations of voucher holders in low-opportunity neighborhoods, or one or more small housing agencies, or a high-performing Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program and a commitment to allow families in the demonstration to maintain FSS participation, among other factors. PHAs selected for the demonstration would coordinate with partners and other service providers in the region to:

- Identify low-poverty areas and analyze access barriers for voucher holders.
- Determine what information, services, and resources families need to access high-opportunity areas.
- Develop a plan to recruit families and landlords to participate in the program.
- Create educational materials, including maps of the region, transportation options, and educational resources to help families understand the regional housing market.
- Collaborate to make it easier for a family to move from one PHA's jurisdiction to another.
- Modify agency policies, such as payment standards and search time, as needed to facilitate moves to areas of opportunity.
- Enhance the quality of the Housing Choice Voucher program generally, to encourage more landlords to participate.

If funding for the demonstration is included in a final fiscal year 2019 appropriations bill, HUD will issue a Notice of Funding Availability, likely up to six months later. PHAs would then apply for the funding. HUD is unlikely to make awards before the third quarter of calendar 2019.