

Brown, Percy

From: Georgie Nazos [gnazos@gmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, April 11, 2013 12:51 PM
To: Brown, Percy
Subject: Regarding Potential Changes to CDA Procedures

Hello Mr. Brown,

First of all, I'd like to thank you so much for allowing the community a voice in the potential changes to CDA's procedures.

I have been a social worker serving families experiencing homelessness, past and present, in Madison for the past 4 years. During this time I have been privileged to meet and serve many resilient individuals that have overcome the incredible hardship of homelessness to re-gain stability for their families. I have worked with CDA to assist with advocacy for families trying to gain access to subsidized housing, and with families currently residing in CDA housing as a case manager. Due to this, I see the substantial barriers our families already face attempting to find affordable housing in our community.

I am therefore strongly advocating against the proposed changes to CDA's screening and eviction processes. It benefits our community as a whole to have vulnerable families in stable housing. The costs of homelessness both tangible and not are incredibly injurious on a societal and individual level.

The families that walk through our doors often have poor credit or an eviction on their record. A vast majority of the time this is due to the inconceivable poverty people are living in. We often see a single mother with children attempting to afford rent on a two-bedroom in Madison with an income of \$700 a month. The average rent for a 2-bedroom in Madison is over \$800 a month. It is no wonder this mother is unable to afford her rent, and is evicted. That this eviction should thereafter impair her ability to get subsidized housing and rent that she could afford to pay is tragic. The same goes with the credit we will also see our families carry. When one does not have an income enough to afford their basic needs, I am not surprised to see bills unpaid that later go to collections. These two issues already commonly stand in the way of our families, and I am therefore pleading that we not set another roadblock in the path of these individuals that have already survived so much. Most of our families are striving to improve their situation, gain employment, engage in mental health care, go back to school, and create stability for their children. It is near impossible for these families to work on these larger issues when they do not know where they are going to have their children sleep the next night.

The proposed changes to CDA that I have gotten wind of and my concerns regarding these are as follows:

- 1) For screening purposes, suggestions of criminal activities (such as information from past landlords) can be used to deny acceptance into CDA housing.
-When there is no verifiable or credible source this becomes a case of 'he said, she said'. Landlords and property management companies are human and oftentimes the references given may already be skewed by emotion. Using an opinion or conjecture as a basis of a CDA decision is not a reasonable way to screen a family for housing.
- 2) For screening purposes, individuals may be denied CDA housing based on bad credit or past debts.
- I believe I have referenced this above. In addition, many of our families do attempt to pay back creditors. Unfortunately, the amounts families can afford to pay on top of their current rent and bills is so minimal they are unable to make a dent by the time they are screened by subsidized housing.
- 3) When an adult member is evicted from the property (such as an adult child living with the family), the family must provide proof (such as a new lease) that the member no longer lives on the property, otherwise the entire family could face eviction.
- Once someone has been evicted it is incredibly difficult to find other housing options. Especially now, with the vacancy rates in Madison falling under 2%, housing options are more and more slim. It is not reasonable to require a lease when most likely the evicted individual does not have a new stable place of residence.
- 4) Any illegal drug use either on or off of the CDA property within the last year will be grounds for eviction.

- I completely understand the dual responsibility CDA holds of providing stable housing to families while maintaining safe communities. However, if an individual struggling with addiction has not been able to recover yet or has relapsed, but was able to keep the drug use away from their home, community, and children, it does no good to punish them for this and have them additionally lose their housing. It has not hurt the community they reside in through their use elsewhere, it has only harmed the individual themselves. People are much more likely to seek and engage in treatment and heal from addiction if they have a safe place to reside while they do so. All of us know someone in their personal or professional life that struggles with an addiction to something, legal substance or not. We should all be able to understand the difficulty prying oneself from the jaws of addiction and additionally the propensity for relapse even after someone has gained the ability to free themselves from the addiction initially.

I apologize for my long-winded statement. I feel passionately about providing effective resources to our community and about using our government's money appropriately to support all of our residents.

Thank you,
Georgie Nazos

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Georgie Nazos, CAPSW