



SUBSIDIZED HOUSING AND A CRIMINAL RECORD IN COOK COUNTY: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

What are my local public housing authorities?

The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) is the public housing authority for the City of Chicago. The Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC) is the public housing authority for most of suburban Cook County.

What is public housing? What is subsidized housing?

The government funds two main housing programs for low-income individuals: Traditional public housing, in which housing developments are owned and administered by public housing authorities, and the housing choice voucher program (formerly known as Section 8), which provides rental subsidies for tenants renting on the private market. That means that the housing authority provides you with a voucher that pays a portion of your rent based on your income for a qualified apartment.

I have a criminal record. Am I eligible for public housing?

Having a criminal record alone does not disqualify you from living in public housing or receiving a housing choice voucher. Unless you have been convicted of a sex offense and are subject to a lifetime registration under a state sex offender registration program OR you have been convicted of manufacturing or producing methamphetamine on the premises of federally assisted housing, it's possible—even likely—that you qualify for public or subsidized housing.

Is there housing available in my area?

If you are interested in living in public or subsidized housing, you can sign up the next time that CHA or HACC opens one of their waitlists. Keep reading for instructions on how to do that.

Or, if you have family currently living in public or subsidized housing, you may apply to move in with them. If you think this applies to you and you have family living in CHA housing (City of Chicago) who pay their rent with a voucher administered by CHA, call 312.935.2600. You should also consult with CHA's Administrative Plan for guidance on how to be added to an existing household. This can be found at <http://thecha.org/about/plans-reports-and-policies>.

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If you think this applies to you and you have family living in HACC housing (suburban Cook County) or who pay their rent with a voucher administered by HACC, please send an email including your name, mailing address, and phone number to reentry@thehacc.org and a Housing Specialist will reach out to you.

How will I know when a waitlist opens?

CHA and HACC will announce publicly when their waitlists are open. You can check their websites periodically for updates. See <http://thecha.org> and <http://thehacc.org>. To receive updates about HACC's waitlists, email phwaitlist@thehacc.org and ask to be added to the email list.

How do I get on the waitlist?

Both housing authorities ask that you apply to the waitlist via an online portal that will become available when the waitlist opens.

The waitlist for CHA's senior housing is always open. While most properties have an age requirement of 62, some buildings allow individuals as young as 55 to live there. Application to a CHA senior housing development can be found at <https://applyonline.thecha.org> and select senior housing for housing type.

What is the screening process like? What information should I provide about my criminal history?

Both CHA and HACC encourage applicants with criminal backgrounds to present their "mitigating circumstances" upfront. In other words, be honest with the housing authority about your record and be prepared to show what steps you have taken or are taking to turn your life around. Letters of support from probation officers, judges, service providers, counselors, faith leaders, and other mentors can help. In all cases, it is best to be as honest as possible – the housing authority would prefer to know about someone's record from the start than find out they hid information later on in the intake process.

At both housing authorities, decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, and both housing authorities are required to provide you with a copy of your background check if you are denied eligibility due to criminal activity. If this happens, you may appeal the decision. CHA outlines its admission policy for public housing in its Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP) and for the voucher program through the HCV Administrative Plan. Both can be found on CHA's website at <http://thecha.org/about/plans-reports-and-policies>.

HACC may (but does not always) deny public housing applicants with a history of drug-related or violent criminal activity within the last three years. For their voucher program, they may deny anyone evicted from subsidized housing for drug-related criminal activity within the past three years unless they have completed a drug rehabilitation program. Additionally, they may deny anyone with a history of drug-related or violent criminal activity within the past three years. Applicants must prove that they have been drug-free for at least 12 months.

For further questions about these programs, please contact reentry@thehacc.org or reentrypilotprogram@thecha.org.

Information compiled by BPI. For more information, visit bpichicago.org.