

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The District of Columbia has committed to making homelessness “rare, brief, and non-recurring” by 2020. Unfortunately, DC’s rapid re-housing program for homeless families is undermining this admirable goal and risks driving many of the District’s most vulnerable residents further into poverty.

The rapid re-housing model was originally designed to help a small subset of homeless families with children to regain self-sufficiency and stable housing by providing time-limited rental assistance and case management. It has since expanded into the one-size-fits-all tool for addressing the District’s family homelessness crisis. At this point, there are more than 4000 people, mostly children, in a deeply flawed program that cycles many participants right back into homelessness.

This report describes the experiences of five families in the program to provide a ground-level view of the many issues families face in rapid re-housing. Unfortunately, the problems highlighted by these stories are recurring features of rapid re-housing rather than one-off events, as this report demonstrates through the available aggregate data on the program. For example, this report found that families struggle to find decent, safe housing, which is unsurprising given that notorious slumlord Sanford Capital received more than \$100,000 of these government-funded subsidies in a single month. In addition, families face continued instability in a program that is theoretically meant to stabilize them, with some required to pay 60 percent of their limited incomes towards the rent, and the program sometimes failing to pay its portion of the rent. As a result, 45 percent of families that have been receiving rapid re-housing assistance for at least one year have ended up in eviction court while they are still in the program. Most troubling is the rapid re-housing cliff, where the subsidy expires and the family is expected to pay the full market rent. On average, families only have enough income to cover 40 percent of the market rent, making it impossible for them to afford the rent after the subsidy ends. After being terminated

Key Findings

Overreliance on the Rapid Re-housing Model

- Over 4000 people, mostly children, are in the DC rapid re-housing program
- Rapid re-housing is the primary tool for moving homeless families out of shelter
- Relative to the District, only one state is more reliant on rapid re-housing

Families Struggle to Find Safe Housing

- 4 out of 5 families interviewed report poor conditions in their apartments
- Sanford Capital received over \$100,000 in rapid re-housing subsidies in a single month

Barriers to Housing Stability

- By design, families are rent burdened the entire time they are in the program
- Over a one year period, only 10% of families were able to increase their income
- 45% of families end up in eviction court while they are still in rapid re-housing

The Rapid Re-housing Cliff

- On average, families’ total monthly income only covers 40% of the market rent
- 314 families were terminated due to time limits in the last 18 months
- 693 of the 1,358 families in the program are at risk of termination due to time limits

An Illusion of Success

- Rapid re-housing proponents argue that the program is 85% “successful” in the District
- But only 2 out of every 5 families are able to maintain their housing independently