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Criminal History and Public Housing: An Evaluation of Seattle Housing Authority's Applicant Denial and Eviction Practices


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As the number of persons living in the United States with permanent criminal records rapidly increases, finding stable and affordable housing for ex-offenders and their families becomes exceedingly difficult. In the interest of promoting and protecting public safety, complete exclusion of those with criminal histories from the both the workforce and public housing has proven to be ineffective. While housing and employment are fundamental in preventing recidivism, those with criminal backgrounds face inevitable obstacles. Nevertheless, landlords and other officials of public and subsidized housing programs have a legitimate interest in ensuring the safety and well being of their residents. An evaluation of Seattle Housing Authority's use of criminal history in determining which applicants to exclude from its various housing programs is thus necessary to address this conflict. By analyzing both the eviction notices and denial letters of housing applicants, our research aims to examine how criminal history impacts both potential and current residents, as well as determine whether the policies and subsequent actions of Seattle Housing Authority are consistent with the ultimate goal of providing secure housing for those in need. Through these findings we will develop policy recommendations that encompass a comprehensive understanding of the problem, while considering the legal, ethical, and social consequences of excluding applicants with criminal histories.

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