



City of Arts & Innovation

Human Relations Commission Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE COMMISSIONERS **DATE: MAY 26, 2022**

FROM: OFFICE OF HOMELESS SOLUTIONS **WARDS: ALL**

**SUBJECT: FAIR CHANCE HOUSING ORDINANCE ADDRESSING HOUSING
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE -
PRESENTATION FROM STARTING OVER, INC.**

ISSUE:

Receive a presentation from Starting Over, Inc. on Fair Chance Housing Ordinance addressing housing discrimination against formerly incarcerated people.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Human Relations Commission:

1. Receive and file the presentation on Fair Chance Housing Ordinance addressing housing discrimination against formerly incarcerated people, presented by Starting Over, Inc.;
2. Recommend to the Housing and Homelessness Committee that the City Council adopt a Riverside Fair Chance Housing Ordinance with the same level of protection offered by the Berkeley Fair Chance Housing Ordinance; and
3. Recommend to the Housing and Homelessness Committee that the City Council direct the Human Relations Commission to collaborate with Starting Over, Inc., to support the adoption of such ordinance.

BACKGROUND:

Lack of access to safe and affordable housing presents a significant barrier to successful re-entry for formerly incarcerated people in the City of Riverside. This presentation by the Local Riverside Team of the Solis Policy Institute will discuss the importance of stable housing to successful re-entry, some of the housing barriers faced by formerly incarcerated people, and possible next steps for the Housing and Homelessness Subcommittee to consider.

On January 24, 2022, the Housing and Homeless Subcommittee recommended that Starting Over Inc. present to the Human Relations Commission on Fair Chance Housing Ordinance addressing Crime Free Multi-Housing.

DISCUSSION:

The Inland Empire region is known to have disproportionately high incarceration rates. Riverside County's prison population is nearly 50% higher than the average California County. According to CDCR, incarcerated people are almost ten times more likely to be homeless than the general public. Another 15 percent of respondents reported homelessness prior to being incarcerated. Studies show that housing insecurity is common and is associated with an increased risk of recidivism among people on probation, above and beyond an array of other recidivism factors. Housing is critical to successful re-entry as well as public health as we navigate COVID-19.

Justice-involved Riverside residents face the same barriers other low-income individuals face in the search for housing: years-long Section 8 waitlists, lack of availability of affordable units, and rent increases. However, formerly incarcerated people and their families are additionally discriminated against for having a criminal record in their search for housing. According to the Ella Baker Center, 80% of formerly incarcerated individuals report obstacles in obtaining housing, especially due to "blanket ban" policies imposed by public housing authorities and private landlords. Barriers exist in both public and private housing options. Section 8 housing vouchers provided by HUD are limited in number and exclude individuals who have certain kinds of common felony convictions. Local housing authorities often have even more stringent guidelines for who can receive public housing assistance. In Riverside County, far more formerly incarcerated people are denied public housing assistance than is required by federal law. In most parts of California, including the City of Riverside, it is legal to deny a private housing application on the basis of the applicant's criminal conviction. This form of housing discrimination is further encouraged by the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program, a police department-run training that aims to empower landlords to evict or exclude tenants who have arrest or conviction records. Eleven distinct Riverside City ordinances currently require property owners to participate in the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program.

The Riverside SPI team hopes to continue working with the Human Relations Commission and Housing & Homelessness Subcommittee to ban the practice of refusing housing to people based on their criminal background. The subcommittee is encouraged to reevaluate the Riverside City ordinances that require participation in the Crime Free Multi-Housing program, and to solicit input from formerly incarcerated people and community-based organizations in the creation and implementation of the City's Five-Year Plan to address homelessness. We also encourage the subcommittee to collect data regarding the prevalence of housing insecurity among formerly incarcerated Riverside residents. In the future, we hope to see public housing programs and affordable housing become more widely available to people with arrest and conviction records.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

Because this is a presentation from Starting Over, Inc. it is not required to align with the City's strategic plan. The intent of this report is to present information regarding the topic in a neutral fashion for the Committee's review.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact related to this report.

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Approved as to form: Phaedra A. Norton, City Attorney

Attachments:

1. Berkeley Ordinance Text
2. Presentation