



What is mobility counseling?

Mobility counseling is assistance for people using **tenant-based government housing subsidies** who are interested in moving to areas that offer greater opportunities in terms of school performance, personal safety, employment, and other benefits. Counseling can include assistance with credit repair, help identifying potential units, and information about neighborhood amenities. Mobility counseling creates choice in programs that, when left to their own devices, do not promote housing choice.

Why do we need mobility counseling?

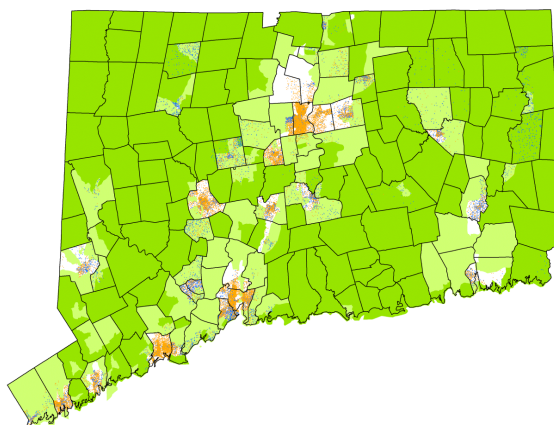
Connecticut is one of the most segregated states in the country. With segregation comes isolation from the building blocks to success in life and stark negative outcomes by race and ethnicity like the educational achievement gap. We need to work to bring resources to struggling areas, but we also need ensure true choice in housing. Years of research, and data from CT (below), demonstrate that without mobility counseling, the only option for many people using government housing subsidies are high poverty areas isolated from opportunity.

What are tenant-based government housing subsidies?

Tenant-based government housing subsidies are financial rent supplements provided to landlords renting units to people earning less than 50% of Area Median Income. The two biggest programs in Connecticut are the federal **Housing Choice Voucher Program** (HCV or Section 8) and the state-funded **Rental Assistance Program** (RAP). Typically, subsidy programs cap the maximum rent they will pay at a certain level and require tenants to pay 30-40% of their income towards rent. Any rent due over this amount is covered by the subsidy.

Connecticut Voucher Holders (VCH) By Location and Minority Status (by tracts)*

Voucher Holder Race/Ethnicity	Disproportionately Minority Areas (30% or >)	High Poverty Areas (9.2% or >)	Racially & Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty (50+% minority + 3x regional poverty)
All	83%	79%	33%
Minority	92%	85.5%	40%
Non-Hispanic White	62%	65%	40%
Size of Land Area in CT	5.8%	10.5%	<1%



Non-Hispanic White Population

- 90% and Over
- 72% to 89.9%
- Less than 72%

Voucher Holders

- Minority
- Non-Hispanic White

Does mobility counseling work? YES!

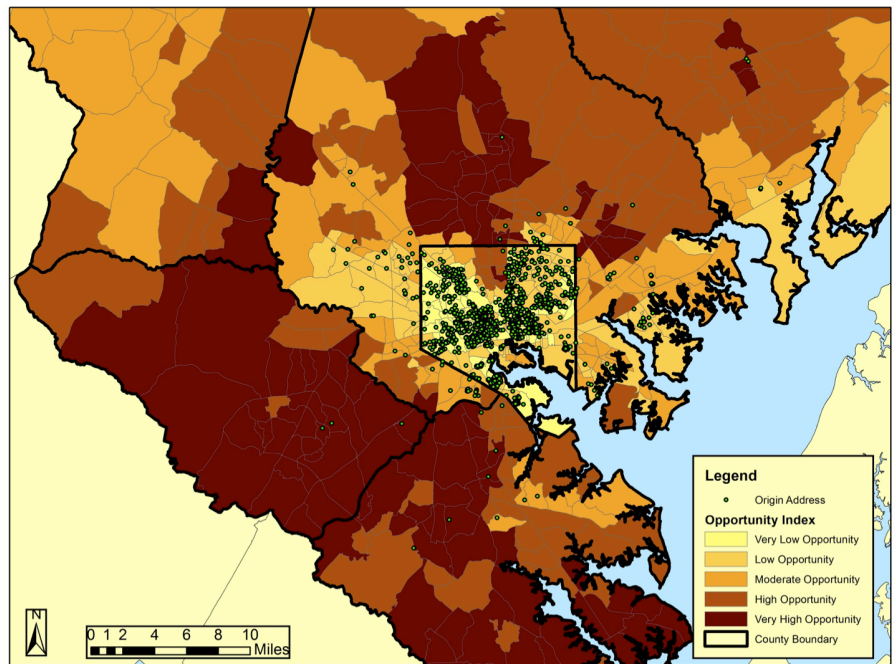
Mobility counseling in Baltimore, MD has assisted over 2,500 Housing Choice Voucher Holders opting into the program to move from struggling areas to thriving neighborhoods. Across the country, families making mobility moves are seeing positive changes in their lives as a result of their choice to work with mobility counselors.

"He was happy to go to school, he was excited; came home to do his homework; wasn't getting in no trouble; cried to go to school ... Everything was great when we moved here. The move was just like a breakthrough for everybody; a change for everybody." *Lola, mobility program participant, Maryland*

"When we first moved, the children didn't like it because it was so quiet...and then one of the children woke up and said, 'We slept good. We don't hear the ambulance, we don't hear the police cars.'" *Marie, mobility program participant, Maryland*

"The school realized my kid was smart. He just never applied himself because he didn't feel like he had to at that old school." *Rhonda, mobility program participant, Maryland*

Baltimore Mobility Program: Origin Address



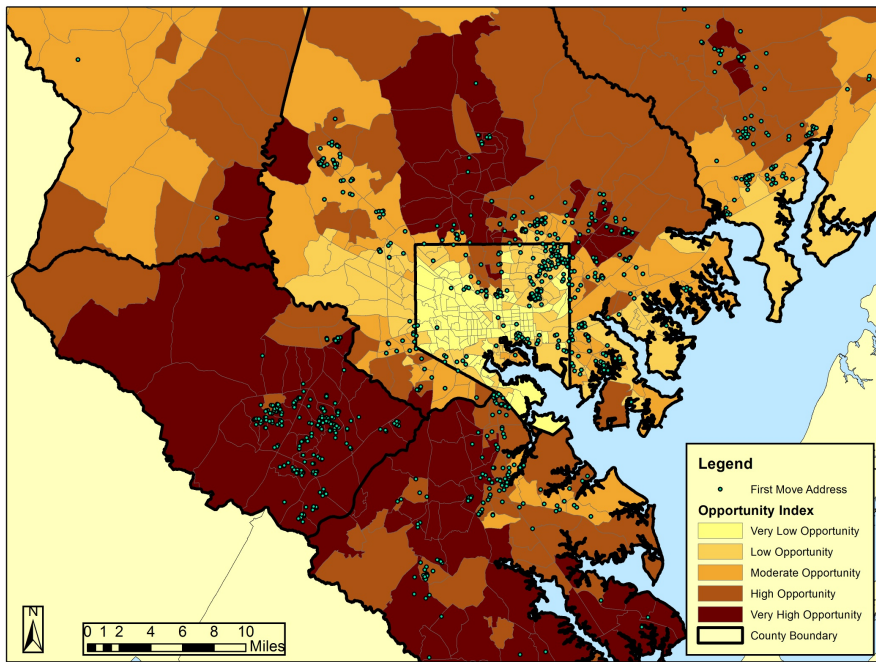
Why is mobility counseling important?

A large body of research links mobility moves to:

- Improvements in educational attainment for low-income children.
- Increased graduation and college attendance rates.
- Improved physical and mental health for voucher holders and their families.

These will all translate into cost savings for the state in the form of lower per pupil education costs for low-income students and reduced health expenditures on things like emergency room visits for asthma-related issues.

Baltimore Mobility Program: First Move Address



Baltimore Before and After Mobility Counseling

Baltimore – Pre- and Post-Counseling voucher locations over an 8-year period. These special vouchers were available only to families making mobility moves. Map provided courtesy of Professor Stefanie DeLuca, Johns Hopkins University

Recommendations

How can we make mobility counseling better in Connecticut?

We are fortunate that since 2002, the Department of Housing (DOH) has used Housing Choice Voucher administrative funds to support a voluntary mobility counseling program for its voucher holders and RAP recipients. The program averages a payment of \$1,962 per successful mobility move, excluding the cost of the Housing Choice Voucher or RAP.

While the contractors working for DOH are performing as they should under the contract, the program is outdated in the sense that it relies solely on poverty measures to define successful moves and does not include other incentives. As a result, there could be more clients moving to neighborhoods that most effectively generate access to opportunity and integrative moves. Over the last decade, standard national definitions of true “mobility programs” have evolved that consider the availability of neighborhood assets like low levels of crime and thriving schools. These programs cost more, around \$4,000 per mobility move (excluding the subsidy itself and security deposit assistance), but they produce better results, with voucher holders moving to safer neighborhoods with access to fully-resourced schools and other benefits. Connecticut should adopt these standards.

In order to improve Connecticut’s current mobility program, we need:

- Strong definitions of successful moves, ideally using “Opportunity Mapping”
- Increased search times at counselor discretion
- Dedicated mobility vouchers/RAPs
- Enhanced access for existing voucher holders/RAP recipients about mobility
- Appropriate counselor/client ratios
- Post-move and second-move assistance
- Enhanced rents
- Greater financial assistance for voucher holders:
 - Security deposit assistance
 - Move financial assistance
 - Application fee assistance

To learn more, see:

Open Communities Alliance website information on mobility counseling:
http://www.ctoca.org/mobility_counseling and other mobility resources listing,
<http://opencommunitiesalliance.nationbuilder.com/tags/mobility>

Expanding Choice: Practical Strategies for Building a Successful Mobility Counseling Program, Poverty and Race Research Action Council and the Urban Institute (2012), available at
<http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412745-Expanding-Choice.pdf>

Jennifer Darrah and Stefanie DeLuca, “Living Here Has Changed My Whole Perspective’: How Escaping Inner-City Poverty Shapes Neighborhood and Housing Choice,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2014): 350–84, available at <http://www.baltimoreregionalhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/JPAM-2014.pdf>

Patrick Sharkey, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013),
<http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/S/b014365260.html>

* Data for 31,315 Housing Choice Vouchers for 2009 were provided by HUD for the forthcoming Connecticut Analysis of Impediments. The data set includes 30,280 vouchers with race/ethnicity information (where more than 11 vouchers in Census tract) mapped to their corresponding Census 2000 tract. The number of minority voucher holders is 23,559, and non-Hispanic White voucher holders number 6,721.



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Embracing Diversity to Strengthen Connecticut