HB 6138: Strengthening Connecticut’s Mobility Counseling Program

Although Connecticut has had a mobility-counseling program for the past 13 years, Housing Choice Voucher Holders and RAP participants continue to be overwhelmingly concentrated in high poverty and disproportionately minority areas of the state. Something more is needed—a more comprehensive mobility counseling program.

Baltimore’s Experience: Effective Mobility Counseling in Action

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.
Proposed Amendments to Strengthen HB 6138

(a) The Department of Housing shall, within existing resources of the department, establish a residence mobility counseling program to assist individuals and families who have government housing subsidies in relocating their residences from high poverty to low poverty areas through education and support services “moderate” or “lower opportunity” areas to “higher opportunity” areas (or remaining in “higher opportunity” areas), as defined by Opportunity Mapping conducted by the Kirwan Institute. The commissioner may contract with one or more nonprofit corporations to provide such residence mobility counseling. Individuals and families eligible for the residence mobility counseling program shall currently have a certificate or voucher from either: (1) The federal Housing and Urban Development Section 8 program, or (2) the state rental assistance program.

Rationale: Poverty is a less comprehensive measure than Opportunity Mapping for evaluating the effectiveness of mobility counseling programs.
• Researchers found that even a “success” definition of moving to an area with 10% poverty or less did not yield the best results in the Gautreaux program in Chicago. The reason for this is, in part, that though the families moved to areas with lower poverty, the areas had other characteristics that mirrored their original neighborhood – like struggling schools.
• The Kirwan Institute’s opportunity mapping framework measures opportunity comprehensively by considering the range of factors that make a neighborhood “opportunity rich,” including high performing schools and access to jobs.

(b) Of the clients who participate in the program and who ultimately move, the program shall have the goal of helping 80—100% of them move to or stay in high or very high opportunity areas. 10% of moves may be to moderate opportunity areas if participants and counselors are unable to find qualifying housing in higher opportunity areas. 10% of moves will be considered successful if clients move from very low opportunity areas to low opportunity areas after seeking but failing to locate higher opportunity housing options.

Rationale: A truly effective mobility counseling program aims to maximize transitions to high or very high opportunity areas.
• HUD’s Moving to Opportunity experiment with mobility counseling demonstrated that the most meaningful life-changing results are produced by the more dramatic moves.