Chicago's Carceral Geographies: Public Housing and Prisoner Reentry in the City

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Abstract

The Chicago Housing Authority’s recently announced Reentry Pilot allows limited numbers and limited types of ex-offenders to live in Chicago’s public housing for the first time (officially). Through interviews with policymakers, advocates, resident leadership, and service providers, as well as ex-offenders enrolled in or waitlisted for the Pilot, this thesis explores how the various stakeholders envision the goals of this Pilot and what factors they identify that may limit its success. By reshaping housing policy not only for the limited number of ex-offenders included in the Pilot but indeed, by pushing for broader sets of reforms, the Pilot attempts to intervene in the carceral continuum that exists in the US: a fundamentally spatial continuum that regulates poor, racialized bodies rendered surplus under capitalism. In this way, the Pilot has the potential to be a system-pressuring “non-reformist reform.” What studying the Pilot teaches us is that, to begin to make inroads into addressing the carceral continuum and to make our cities more just for everyone—to the extent possible under current political and economic systems—we need a concordant policy continuum that is currently lacking in US political and administrative institutions.
CHICAGO’S CARCERAL GEOGRAPHIES:
PUBLIC HOUSING AND PRISONER REENTRY IN THE CITY

by

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Chapter 1 Second Chances in the Second City

Introduction

On June 17, 2011, then-Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Shaun Donovan sent a letter to the executive directors of all public housing authorities (PHAs) in the U.S., inviting them to loosen their policies around tenants with criminal records. A major shift from the tough admissions and eviction policies of the past—epitomized by the “One Strike Rule” of 1996—Donovan’s letter encouraged local PHAs to “join us in welcoming these deserving citizens back into our communities” (Donovan 2011, 2). In the five years that have passed since that letter was disseminated, PHAs around the country have responded by rethinking admissions criteria and reconsidering tough eviction rules. Additionally, several have also implemented pilot programs: official experiments to test the hypothesis that ex-offenders can successfully integrate or reintegrate into public housing and housing choice voucher (HCV) programs. For example, in Chicago, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) evidences this two-pronged response: while staff there have slowly begun to rethink and generally soften policies regarding ex-offenders in the years since Donovan’s letter, they have simultaneously implemented an official pilot, known as the “Reentry Pilot.”

But what are the concrete effects of these new policies and programs on the ground to date? What exactly are policymakers aiming to do with these pilots? And what is the potential of such pilots for creating long-term, structural change in the lives of ex-offenders and in their communities? Though not the only experiment of its kind in the country, Chicago’s Reentry Pilot is instructive for several reasons: first, it provides a case study of how one such program got

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1 In March of 2012, Donovan sent a similar letter to all owners and agents of HUD-assisted properties in the US (Donovan 2012).
2 As will be discussed further in the sections that follow, the One Strike Rule effectively banned anyone with just one criminal conviction from living in federally subsidized housing.
started in a city known for its history of entrenched racial segregation and infamous for its crime-ridden housing projects (see for example Hirsch 1998; Venkatesh 2000). Second, Chicago’s Reentry Pilot, like other pilots in Los Angeles and New York City, has been slow to start: as of this writing, few tenants yet understand that policies (or, perhaps more aptly, political sentiments) are changing toward ex-offenders when it comes to public housing, while even fewer are aware of or are making use of the Reentry Pilot. In this thesis, I detail how Chicago’s Reentry Pilot was started and where it is today. In doing so, I describe how various stakeholders define the Pilot’s goals, as well as discuss challenges that the Pilot has faced and will continue to face in the future. Ultimately, I argue that Chicago’s Reentry Pilot is unique among housing reforms because it aims to reshape not just public housing but also the criminal justice system—both fundamentally spatial institutions. This uniquely broad reach is what positions the Pilot to create structural change. However, it also, paradoxically, presents political and administrative challenges that have slowed the Pilot’s progress so far and may threaten its long-term success.

In the remainder of this chapter, I describe Chicago’s Reentry Pilot (from now on, “the Pilot”) and contextualize it among broader policy trends, stemming from a shift in housing policy at the federal level. In Chapter 2, I explore some theoretical underpinnings that help contextualize the Pilot, explaining how geographers, sociologists, criminal justice scholars, and policy analysts conceptualize the linkages between incarceration and housing. In particular, I introduce the idea of the carceral continuum, a phrase first coined by Foucault to describe the ways in which the disciplinary effects of the prison extend beyond its walls and begin to permeate “all the disciplinary mechanisms that function throughout society” (Foucault 1975/1995, 298). Writing more recently, Wacquant adapts Foucault’s idea to argue that the black ghetto and the American jail and prison system “now constitute a single carceral continuum
which entraps a redundant population of younger black men (and increasingly women) who
circulate in closed circuit between its two poles in a self-perpetuating cycle of social and legal
marginality with devastating personal and social consequences” (Wacquant 2002, 52-53). In
describing the linkages between the spaces and institutions of housing and criminal justice and
the ways in which the Pilot attempts to intervene in these linkages, the idea of the carceral
continuum thus offers a useful analytic.

In Chapter 3, I analyze the stated goals of the Reentry Pilot, as expressed by its creators
as well as those it aims to serve. In particular, Pilot participants’ experiences reinforce the idea
that prisons, public housing, and the street comprise nodes along a carceral continuum. Several
participants were homeless prior to arrest, while others have lived in public housing previously.
Their sentiments reflect the attitude that homelessness and incarceration are analogous
experiences and that the Pilot is not trivial but vital. Based on interviewees’ testimony, I argue
that the Pilot attempts to disrupt the carceral continuum by stemming recidivism and interrupting
the homelessness-incarceration nexus. Whether it can succeed at this lofty goal is another matter.

Chapter 4, then, explores in detail the mechanics of the Pilot’s implementation. In doing
so, it critically analyzes the logics behind the Pilot, which are largely based around discourses of
individuality and personal responsibility as well as white, upper-middle-class values of moral
rectitude. To gain access to housing, Pilot participants have to prove they will be upstanding
citizens with good attitudes; must move in with individuals with whom they have a legal, state-
approved relationship; and must agree to regular monitoring over the term of their lease. In many
cases, applicants are asked to present their mitigating circumstances to a housing committee who
will judge their worthiness for public housing (despite the fact that they have already been tried
in court and completed a sentence). By placing emphasis on individual character traits and
actions, such discourses shift attention away from oppressive systems and structural constraints and instead reinforce the idea that there are “good people” and “bad people.” Thus, the logics behind the Pilot’s implementation—which limit who is eligible and serve to continually discipline the participants—reveal internal tensions that may hinder it in meeting its stated goals.

The success of this Pilot—much like the process of its initial creation—will largely be determined by politics, both within and beyond the city. Even in early discussions, Pilot organizers met with resistance from unexpected corners, with advocates pitted against resident groups, for example. Chapter 5 explores these ongoing debates as well as concerns over the Pilot’s political feasibility vis-à-vis the public. Ultimately, what this Pilot attempts to disrupt—but struggles to overcome—is isolationist policymaking. In other words, the Pilot aims to improve housing services, but it equally, if not more so, aims to intervene in our broken criminal justice system. As such, sensing that the program’s goals were beyond the housing authority’s traditional reach, residents and CHA staff alike were initially resistant to it. As a result, despite changing attitudes, the program continues to suffer from a lack of coordinating structures: it belongs to everyone and no one at the same time. However, due to public housing’s key role in the reentry process, programs like these are essential if we are to work towards systemic change.

Finally, I conclude by re-contextualizing the Pilot within Chicago’s broader carceral geography. I consider alternative ways to gauge “success” in this and similar programs, arguing that while the Pilot emerges from and has also helped fuel a rising tide of policy shifts around these issues, these changes must continue to be struggled over. The Pilot provides a model for how to think about policy issues in a more holistic, structural way, in which social problems are not silo-ed into individual agencies, each with limited reach, but dealt with more
comprehensively and collaboratively. Perhaps by examining Chicago’s Reentry Pilot in detail, we can learn about how to build institutions more adept at doing that structural work.

CONTEXT

Federal Changes: From “One Strike and You’re Out” to “Welcoming Back Deserving Citizens”

Chicago’s Reentry Pilot, like others of its kind around the country, would not have been possible without preceding changes at the federal level and, specifically, the encouragement of Shaun Donovan’s 2011 letter. In the letter, Donovan explains that the roughly 7.5 million people released from prisons and jails every year in the US are more likely to recidivate if they do not find stable housing. However, as he explains,

> [P]eople returning to their communities from prison often face significant barriers to obtaining housing. Studies have shown that the majority of people released from prison intend to return to their families, many of whom live in public or other subsidized housing. The Department is engaged in several initiatives that seek a balance between allowing ex-offenders to reunite with families that live in HUD subsidized housing, and ensuring the safety of all residents in its programs. To that end, we would like to remind you of the discretion given to public housing authorities (PHAs) when considering housing people leaving the criminal justice system. The Department encourages you to allow ex-offenders to rejoin their families in the Public Housing or Housing Choice Voucher programs, when appropriate. (Donovan 2011)

With these five sentences, Donovan and his department struck a major shift in American public housing policy, effectively reversing the One Strike Rule. Introduced in 1996 at the urging of then-President Bill Clinton, the One Strike Rule reiterated and extended policies implemented in the late 1980s that allowed public housing authorities to screen tenants and potential tenants for drug-related or illegal activities. The Rule also gave PHAs the authority to evict or deny occupancy on the basis of such activities, with a wide range of discretion (HUD 1996).

HUD’s toughest admission and eviction ruling to date, the One Strike Rule was one of many “tough on crime” policies designed in the mid-90s as part of the War on Drugs and was
fueled by a widespread fear of violent crime. As President Clinton explained in his 1996 State of the Union address and as was reprinted in HUD’s One Strike ruling, “I challenge local housing authorities and tenant associations: Criminal gang members and drug dealers are destroying the lives of decent tenants. From now on, the rule for residents who commit crime and peddle drugs should be one strike and you’re out” (HUD 1996, 2). This fear-ridden discourse is evidenced again later in the ruling, which reads: “Public housing is a place to live, not a place to deal drugs or terrorize neighbors. Yet today, some of Americans [sic] public housing communities are under siege by gangs, violent criminals and drug dealers who threaten the safety and welfare of decent, responsible tenants” (HUD 1996, 4). For policymakers, the public threat was crime (fueled by drugs), and the state response was to be swift and heavy-handed. As their dichotomous rhetoric exemplifies, the job of public housing authorities was to protect the good, “decent, responsible” tenants from the bad ones—i.e., the “gangs, criminals, and drug dealers.” Fear of retribution via eviction, policymakers hoped, would help deter individuals from criminal activity, while ruthless evictions would clean up the projects, ridding them of their criminal element.

In other words, the One Strike Rule sent a clear message to tenants: we will screen you, and if we catch you, you’re out. Indeed, this infamous ruling has largely defined the ethos of American public housing ever since (see Goetz 2013; Petty 2013).³ Donovan’s 2011 letter thus presented a critical turning point in two ways: First, in pointing out what was and was not actually mandated by law under the One Strike Rule and, second, by marking a major shift in HUD’s ideological stance toward ex-offenders.

First, what Donovan points out in the letter is that although the One Strike Rule encouraged and authorized PHAs to screen and evict tenants with criminal records, it did not

³ It is also important to note that ex-offenders frequently face discrimination in the private housing market, leaving few housing options—or few quality housing options—for those with criminal records, who are often forced into substandard housing if they are lucky enough to find rental units at all (see Desmond 2016).
actually mandate them to do so. Aside from two HUD-mandated lifetime bans,⁴ PHAs “have broad discretion” to set their own admissions criteria for people with criminal records (Donovan 2011, 1). Next, concluding the letter, Donovan writes, “As President Obama recently made clear, this is an Administration that believes in the importance of second chances . . . We are grateful that you will join us in welcoming these deserving citizens back to their communities” (ibid, 2). This rhetoric of “deserving citizens” contrasts strongly with the 1996 Rule’s description of “gangs, criminals, and drug dealers” who “terroriz[ed] neighbors.” However, Donovan’s comments also highlight the fact that many ex-offenders are from the projects—a point that, on a concrete level, indicates the need for returning citizens to be reunited with their families and in their home communities while, on a more abstract level, implicates public housing as having some responsibility for these individuals and their outcomes.⁵

Thus, Donovan’s invitation to the PHA directors to rethink their screening, admissions, and eviction policies around people with criminal backgrounds marks a landmark shift in public housing policy. However, five years later, tenants in Chicago and elsewhere either have little understanding of the changes that have been made or have yet to see the impacts of these

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⁴ HUD regulations explicitly ban two categories of individuals: those convicted of manufacturing methamphetamine on the premises of federally assisted housing and sex offenders subject to a lifetime registration requirement under a state sex offender registration program. Additionally, PHAs must “establish standards that prohibit admission” if any household member is engaged in use of an illegal drug or has a pattern of drug or alcohol use that the PHA believes “may threaten the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents.” If a household member has been evicted from federally assisted housing for drug-related criminal activity, the PHA must prohibit admission of an applicant for three years from the date of eviction, though they may consider circumstances such as successful completion of a drug rehabilitation program (Donovan 2011, 1). The language of these latter two restrictions is slippery: the PHAs must “establish standards” to prohibit admission but do not necessarily have to prohibit admission as a blanket policy. Donovan continues that in the case of drug-related criminal activity, “PHAs retain discretion to consider the circumstances and may admit households if the PHA determines that the evicted household member who engaged in drug-related criminal activity has successfully completed a supervised drug rehabilitation program” (ibid).

⁵ It is also important to note that while ex-offenders have been restricted from living in public housing officially, ex-offenders frequently live in projects off-lease, either by staying with friends or family members willing to take on the risk of eviction, should they be discovered, or by sleeping in hallways, laundry rooms, and other liminal spaces. (F. Washington, interview, July 20, 2016; see also Fennell 2015, 169). This will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3.
changes in their lives (R. Ramirez, interview, July 19, 2016). To understand why this is the case, I will use Chicago’s Reentry Pilot as a case study, examining exactly who pushed for the Pilot’s creation, the debates around its approval, the logics behind its implementation, and its progress to date.

*Chicago: The Changes Take Root*

No one agrees on who started the Chicago Reentry Pilot. Residents, for example, will tell you that they have been pushing CHA to change their stance on ex-offenders for years. However, for whatever reason, no official policy changes were made until the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH)’s Reentry Committee brought an official proposal to CHA in 2013. CCH is a non-profit advocacy group, and their Reentry Committee—composed of advocates, academics, and service providers—is a ten-year-old sub-group focused on working with ex-offenders (or as they call them, “returning citizens”), especially those who are or have been homeless (R. Ramirez, interview, July 19, 2016). For the Pilot, CCH partnered with three area service provider agencies—St. Leonard’s Ministries, the Safer Foundation, and Lutheran Social Services—who collectively have over 100 years of experience working with formerly incarcerated men and women to help them find housing, find jobs, and successfully reintegrate into Chicago communities.

On paper, the Pilot design is simple: CCH works with the service providers to identify qualified ex-offenders for CHA housing. To qualify, an individual must have completed a minimum of one year in a reentry program with one of the service providers; for example, drug treatment and/or skills training. Additionally, the individual cannot have any of the HUD-prohibited crimes, nor murder, attempted murder, or terrorism (These categories were negotiated with CHA) (see CHA 2014b/Appendix A). Next, a qualified individual is slated into one of two
“tracks”: “Track 1” applicants must already have a CHA waitlist number while “Track 2” applicants must have family members who are current residents and are willing to take them in (ibid). Once identified, CCH and the service providers help the individual navigate the process of interviewing with CHA, which will then overlook the individual’s criminal background and either house the person as a regular leaseholder or allow them to move in with family members using a conditional tenancy agreement for two years, with the option of renewing for an additional two years (and the option to be added to the lease after that). In either case, the participant could be moving into CHA housing or moving into a private unit, using a housing choice voucher (ibid, CCH 2013). Reentry Pilot participants are not eligible for mixed-income housing (CHA 2014b).

Simple though it may sound, the process of negotiating this Pilot with CHA was far from straightforward. Indeed, despite being proposed in 2013, it wasn’t until November 2014 that the Pilot received approval from the CHA Board of Commissioners and not until January 2015 that it received approval from HUD. The Pilot has an enrollment target (and cap) of fifty individuals, yet as of this research in July 2016, the Pilot had only three participants. The reasons for the Pilot’s slow start are complex and will be explored in more detail in later chapters. Chief among them, however, is the fact that the need for affordable housing in Chicago in general is extremely high: when the CHA waitlist lottery last opened in November 2014, nearly 282,000 households registered (CHA 2014a). After two years and, undoubtedly, the elimination of many unqualified registrants from the list, the waiting list still had 119,000 households by the end of 2016 (Grotto

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6 According to Pilot organizers, HUD’s role in the Pilot was largely a supervisory one: Shaun Donovan’s 2011 letter set the tone for the Pilot’s creation and HUD approval was needed to implement it. However, no staff in Washington DC were directly involved with creating the CHA Pilot (R. Ramirez, interview, July 19, 2016).

7 This number is debatable. Staff at CCH were unaware of anyone housed through the program yet, while Safer Foundation reported three placements, and CHA staff were unsure altogether. I have chosen to trust the Safer Foundation on this, especially after I interviewed one man who—to his understanding—was a Pilot participant and had secured housing using an HCV. I will discuss the reasons for this uncertainty in more detail in the chapters that follow.
Thus, even if Pilot participants have a waitlist number, they may wait years before their number is called.

Additionally, the State of Illinois is in the midst of a record budget crisis: by the time Governor Bruce Rauner passed a stopgap budget on June 30, 2016—a temporary deal to keep the state government running until the November elections—Illinois had “operated” for an entire year without a budget, becoming the only state to do so in eighty years (Reuters 2016). By August, Moody’s forecasted that the state’s debt could reach a record high of $14 billion by the summer of 2017 (Garcia and Geiger 2016). This context has also impacted the Pilot: one of the original three service providers, Lutheran Social Services, was removed from the program, reportedly after being forced to shut down their local housing division due to lack of funds.

Thus, it is within a context of extreme austerity that this Pilot attempts to intervene in an already contentious issue: where to house people when they get out of prison or jail and the extent to which such individuals are entitled access to public services—in this case, subsidized housing. The Illinois prison system—with a capacity designed to hold 32,000 people—holds about 49,000 today, despite the fact that property and violent crime rates are at record lows (ICJIA 2016) (As of 2014, Illinois led the nation in most overcrowded prisons (Jackson-Green 2015)). Half of these inmates are from Cook County, where Chicago is located. About 58 percent are black, although only about 15 percent of the general population is black. While the crime rates for violent and property crimes have decreased 30 and 40 percent respectively over the past

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8 The CHA has been subject to extra controversy recently when the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability (CTBA) revealed that they have maintained their long waitlist while simultaneously stockpiling their cash reserves, which grew more than 250% between 2005 and 2015, to $379 million. According to CTBA, the CHA issued 14,000 fewer housing vouchers between 2008 and 2012 than were funded by HUD, funneling the extra money instead into cash reserves in the Authority’s general fund. While a statement from CHA claims this was done in an effort to put the Authority in good financial standing—much better, in fact, than other public agencies in the city—it was nonetheless done while hundreds of thousands of families awaited assistance (CTBA 2017; Grotto 2017).
9 “Operated” appears here in quotation marks because the budget crisis led to the closing of a number of crucial agencies, service providers, and even schools around the state. See the Illinois Austerity Atlas for more information at: http://www.illinoisausterityatlas.com/.
30 years, the incarceration rate has increased 600 percent. Meanwhile, the drug arrest rate has grown from about 182 arrests per 100,000 people in 1975 to between 700 and 900 arrests per 100,000 people for the past 15 years (ICJIA 2016).

These facts are telling: like that in other states, Illinois’ prison system continues to grow, even beyond its bed capacity, with more people being incarcerated for non-violent offenses. Like other states, Illinois incarcerates primarily people of color. And with the bulk of Illinois inmates coming from Cook County, this is where the bulk of them will return upon release: in fact, Cook County is ranked second in the country (after Los Angeles County) for most prison releases per year (Peck and Theodore 2008). An estimated 21,000 people returned to Chicago from prison in 2016 alone (City of Chicago 2016). Even more striking is the fact that parolees return primarily to just four Chicago zip codes (three on the west side and one on the south side – See Figure 1).
Figure 1 Distribution of Parolees in Chicago, by zip code (excludes 60608, which houses the Cook County Jail—an outlier). Map by the author, data from Moore 2014.

While this map shows roughly where parolees are returned after release from jail or prison, what it fails to depict is where they actually live. Unfortunately, Chicago, like other cities, is not currently meeting the challenges of ex-offender housing: Of 155 parolees surveyed by Chicago
Coalition for the Homeless in 2012, 75 percent reported being homeless or unstably housed. Additionally, 1,200 individuals are released from prison to homeless shelters in Chicago annually, while 48 percent of individuals in Chicago emergency shelters reported having a felony conviction (CCH 2013).

Studies show that having safe and affordable housing is an important condition for preventing recidivism (Donovan 2011; Herbert, Morenoff, and Harding 2015; James 2015). In Illinois, the state recidivism rate—the rate of those returning to prison within three years of release—is as high as 48 percent, with recidivism costing the state an estimated $16.7 billion over five years (SPAC 2015). This is the carceral landscape into which CCH and other Pilot organizers seek to intervene by providing returning citizens with safe, stable, and affordable housing via previously-restricted public housing channels.

_A Tale of Two Pilots_

CHA is able to run the Reentry Pilot by virtue of its status as a Moving to Work (MTW) program: like other large metropolitan PHAs such as those in New York City and Los Angeles, HUD gives CHA the funding flexibility required to test such local strategies. Indeed, the Reentry Pilot is only one of many pilots currently underway at CHA. Simultaneous to starting the Reentry Pilot at CHA, CCH helped organize a similar pilot at the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC), a non-MTW or “traditional” PHA that oversees the public housing and HCV programs for the rest of Cook County outside the City of Chicago proper. For the purposes of this project, my main focus will be the CHA Reentry Pilot. However, it is important to remember that the HACC pilot is running simultaneously and that HACC too is changing its rules to provide more flexibility for ex-offenders.
In contrast to the lengthy and cumbersome process of getting approval for the CHA pilot, CCH organizer Rachel Ramirez reports that HACC’s pilot, which also started in 2014, was approved much more quickly. Sheryl Seiling, the director of HACC’s HCV program, describes the pilot as a no-brainer, since it actually reduced administrative burdens and made processing rental applications more efficient: in the past, someone with a criminal record would get denied, then appeal their case, have a hearing, and potentially get accepted on appeal, but would likely lose their spot on the waitlist in the meantime. Now, as she describes,

[Allowing people to present their mitigating circumstances upfront reduced the administrative burden of having hearings. So while people still may get denied, because whatever their criminal background is just doesn’t go [along with our restrictions], we reduced the number of hearings that we had because people came into the interview process and said “Here’s what my situation is and here’s what I’ve done.” And so we were able to approve them without having to go through the whole hearing process, so really, it was less work for us. And not like we’re trying to get out of work or anything, but when you’re totally strapped for resources and trying to do things it just made the most sense to do that.

To date, HACC has three participants in its pilot, though Seiling says about nineteen people with recent criminal records have been admitted to HACC because they presented mitigating circumstances upfront and were not denied. They are not counted as pilot participants because they are not participating in programs via one of the service providers and are not subject to regular check-ins as pilot participants are.

This case exemplifies, however, the fuzziness between “official” pilot participation and general policy shifts around ex-offenders. As with CHA, part of the reason for the delay in registering official pilot participants has to do with HACC’s lengthy waitlist. The HACC voucher waitlist in particular has not opened since 2001, so no one new is going to be admitted for quite a while (S. Seiling, interview, July 26, 2016). This means that participants must already be on the HACC waitlist and will most likely end up in public housing (versus using an HCV) or
reuniting with family who already have HACC housing. If these policies seem complex, that is because they are. Sometimes even program managers do not know exactly who fits under what category or the current enrollment level of a given program. In Chicago, experimental pilot programs and top-down policy shifts often overlap, merge, and bleed into one another.

RESEARCH METHODS AND RESEARCH ETHICS

Similarly, undertaking the study of Chicago’s Reentry Pilot was not straightforward or without its challenges. This project is based upon extensive background research about the history of Chicago’s public housing and the history of policies related to ex-offender public housing in particular. Empirical data are drawn from semi-structured interviews conducted during the summer of 2016 with fourteen individuals who either helped create the Reentry Pilot in Chicago or are participating in it. Interviews typically lasted thirty to sixty minutes and were conducted at the offices of participating agencies and service providers, except for one telephone interview. Finally, I also analyzed documents related to the creation of the Pilot program, including various drafts of the Pilot proposal and marketing materials distributed by CHA or participating service providers.

It is worth noting that my attempts to get approval for research assistance through CHA’s official channels were flat-out denied. I requested interview access and documents related to the creation of the Pilot program and was refused. In response, I prepared a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to submit to CHA. But when I arrived in Chicago, another researcher advised that I attend the July 2016 board meeting and introduce myself to some of the senior leadership there. I did just that, and two senior staffers agreed to interview with me, though both opted to remain anonymous. During our interview, one of these individuals also printed me a
copy of CHA’s final, approved version of the Pilot description. Due to this turn of events, as well as other materials gathered from service providers, I no longer needed to submit the FOIA request to complete this project. However, it is worth noting the difficulty of getting information from a public agency in the United States, particularly when you cannot show up in person—a privilege that was ultimately afforded me by my able-bodied status and the generosity of the Syracuse University Department of Geography’s summer research funding.

Conducting this research, which considers a topic of not insignificant political sensitivity, forced me to make a number of ethical judgments about my role as a researcher. First, I made a decision early on that my stance toward the Pilot could not be neutral. Motivated by my own anti-racist and abolitionist politics, I realized that I could not act as a totally impartial observer. While I tried to come to the Pilot ready to learn honestly about its creation and implementation, I nevertheless was sympathetic to its goals, organizers, and participants from the start. Some interviewees, particularly those who had organized the program, were initially reluctant to speak candidly with me. However, sensing my general stance on the issues—for example, after I mentioned that I have worked in a prison education program in Illinois—they were more forthcoming. Similarly, while I did not offer compensation for interviews, I did connect Rachel Ramirez, an organizer at Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH), to that education program, the Education Justice Project (EJP), when I heard that CCH was having trouble identifying potential Pilot participants. At the time, EJP was collating a Reentry Manual for individuals preparing for release from Illinois prisons. The Manual included an appendix of housing

10 Going beyond prison reform, those who support prison abolition argue that prisons should be seen “as a site of injustice in and of themselves” (Smith 2015, 5). As Angela Davis describes in Are Prisons Obsolete?, prison abolition is best conceived of as a multi-pronged strategy to correct racial injustice and overhaul systems of punishment: “[P]osit[ing] decarceration as our overarching strategy, we would try to envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment—demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance” (Davis 2003, 107).
resources, and I suggested that CCH might be able to advertise the Pilot there. Thus, in this one instance, I took on a participatory research stance, making a connection that I hoped might show my gratitude to Rachel for her time and might help both CCH and EJP in their work.

While this was the only instance in which I did something concrete to assist in the Pilot organizers’ efforts, I also made a decision not to do anything (to the best of my abilities) that would harm or threaten the Pilot or its participants. For example, organizers from different agencies occasionally told me divergent stories about what was happening with the Pilot and in particular, CHA’s decision on one especially sticky issue: whether or not to prioritize Pilot participants above others on the CHA waitlist, in order to speed up the process of housing participants (I go into more detail about the specifics of that decision in later chapters). Because of the different understandings of what CHA had actually decided about this issue, I was warned that if I reported to some organizers that the participants were being prioritized (as one organizer told me they were), other organizers from the Pilot committee would be angered and might take the issue to the press, thus threatening to halt the Pilot’s progress. I realized then how circumspect I would need to be in not discussing interviews between different subjects and how careful not to raise questions that might stir up enough controversy to stop participants from being housed. Additionally, learning that even one such slip-up between organizers of the Pilot could threaten its success alerted me early on to the extremely sensitive nature of the Pilot in general.

For this reason, and to keep the scope of my project manageable, I decided to abandon one of my original research plans, which was to survey current CHA residents (as opposed to resident leadership) about whether or not they were aware of the Pilot and if so, what they thought of it. Realizing how little marketing had been done by the time I arrived in Chicago and
that, according to organizers, few CHA residents even knew about the Pilot yet, I decided that it was better for them not to hear about it for the first time from an out-of-state researcher. Again, my strategy was to minimize my own potential to derail the Pilot and stop people from being housed.

The warning I received not to tell other organizers about the potential waitlist priority was not the only instance in which I witnessed tensions between the Pilot organizers—something I had not expected prior to my visit. Again, I explore the politics of the program’s implementation further in the chapters that follow. However, it is worth noting that I did lose out on one interview with a CHA resident leader who had served on the Pilot committee due to such politics. Central Advisory Council (CAC) President and CHA Board Member Francine Washington, one of my interviewees, attempted to introduce me to another resident leader—handing me her cell phone with the woman already on the line—to ask for an interview. I briefly introduced myself over the staticky call, feeling somewhat on-the-spot. “Who else are you talking to?” the woman wanted to know. I explained that I had had some preliminary conversations with Rachel at CCH, who, I understood, was one of the leaders behind the Pilot’s implementation. This was enough for the woman to refuse an interview with me: to her, this program had stemmed from resident demands, and my suggestion that CCH had led the effort was insulting. She never did change her mind, even at Francine’s urging.

Finally, this project forced me to consider deeply my own positionality as a privileged, white female researcher from an elite, out-of-state private university, coming into Chicago to explore the largely poor, black geographies of housing and incarceration there. It was a positionality that left me feeling more than a bit exploitive, particularly as I collected my interviews, knowing that they would help me achieve my degree but would do little to help my
research subjects. At the end of my interview with John Stamps, a formerly incarcerated man who currently lives in a halfway house and is waiting for CHA housing through the Pilot, he asked me, “Do you think that you, doing this thesis or something, that it might get to the people that really need to know the way we feel?” I asked him who he thought needed to know. “The governor, the mayor, and whoever else has something to do with the pilot program,” he responded. I answered honestly, which is to say, I don’t know—I hope so—but probably not. My thesis probably does not have the power to change your situation, I told him, and I am sorry about that, though I also hope that it will contribute to a greater project of creating more just policies. “You got what you want and we still ain’t got what we want,” he laughed. And he was right.
Chapter 2 Public Housing as Prison?

As she describes in *High Rise Stories* (2013), when Chandra Bell’s seventeen-year old son was convicted of a drug charge, it changed both of their lives forever. Bell and her son were living in Cabrini-Green at the time, a Chicago housing project on the Near North Side that has since been demolished. Ruminating on her son’s incarceration, Bell says,

> They wonder why we can’t raise our kids the way we want, but they making the choices for us. He’s incarcerated, and it’s sad to say it, but prison is a better place for him because he can’t live here. He wasn’t on the premises when he was arrested, but he was on the lease. I shouldn’t have to get punished for what he did outside, and he’s been punished; he sees his mistake now. (quoted in Petty 2013, 170-171)

Bell’s comments speak, on the one hand, to the concrete effects of HUD’s One Strike Policy: as a parent, she is effectively punished for her son’s crime. To remain in her apartment, she had to remove him from the lease and not allow him back into her home upon his release. These are the tough choices that many a parent has had to make, in Chicago as elsewhere in the U.S. However, Bell’s comments also point, on a broader level, to some of the ways in which public housing and the criminal justice system, as two distinct public institutions, are deeply enmeshed: with many individuals arrested from public housing and others hoping to find a home within its walls upon release. Additionally, public housing projects are typically heavily policed and securitized spaces, often resembling a prison in their design, planning, and regulations.

To better situate the connections between these two public institutions and show how they play out in Chicago, in Part I of this chapter, I review some of the geographical literature on incarceration as well as literature from other disciplines that theorizes the spatiality of incarceration. In particular, I introduce the theoretical concept of the carceral continuum, which highlights the ways in which carceral practices are enacted in a range of spaces and institutions outside the traditional prison or jail. In Part II, I consider public housing’s role in the carceral
continuum, first through a review of how shifting tenant selection and project siting policies have historically constructed public housing as warehouses for poor (but not too poor) black Chicagoans. Next, I examine how prison-like architecture and disciplinary (even punitive) management techniques have rendered public housing a carceral space for these residents. As the Chicago Housing Authority contemplates whether to integrate ex-offenders into public housing, understanding the existing linkages between prisons and public housing is crucial. On the one hand, mapping the interplay between these two spaces can help us understand the world into which the Reentry Pilot seeks to intervene. On the other, this background helps us discern some of the challenges and limitations the Pilot may face.

PART I. CARCERAL GEOGRAPHIES

American-style mass incarceration has been widely theorized in the fields of sociology, public policy, law, and criminology. Compared to these disciplines, geography is arguably late to the study of prisons, despite the fact that incarceration is an inherently spatial phenomenon: prisons, jails, detention centers, and other carceral institutions all use space strategically to contain, control, and immobilize incarcerated populations (see Martin and Mitchelson 2009). Despite our lateness, geographers have nevertheless made important contributions in recent years to the study of international spaces and practices of incarceration; indeed, recent work has announced the emergence of carceral geography as a distinct sub-field within the discipline, focused on the “geographical engagement with the practices of imprisonment and migrant detention” (Moran, Conlon and Gill 2013, 1; Moran 2015; Turner 2014). ¹¹

¹¹ Note that, despite their many important points of intersection, my focus here is on domestic incarceration, rather than detention.
But what exactly do we mean when we talk about imprisonment? In their 2009 survey of the geographical literature on incarceration, Lauren Martin and Matt Mitchelson helpfully define imprisonment as “intentional practices that (i) restrict individuals’ ability to move from one place to another and (ii) impose orders of space and time so that individual mobility is highly constrained, if not eliminated. In short, detention and imprisonment refer to human beings ‘held’ without consent by other human beings. Violence distinguishes these practices from more banal or irritating events” (Martin and Mitchelson 2009, 460). This definition is useful in that it delineates imprisonment as a fundamentally spatial practice distinct from other forms of confinement (such as being stuck in a traffic jam), yet it maintains an analytical flexibility, such that incarceration as a practice can be witnessed across a range of spaces outside the traditional prison or jail. Examples of such spaces include refugee camps, military detention facilities, and ghettos, all of which, they write, “are decidedly more violent than everyday impediments to personal mobility” (ibid).

Geographers have also contributed to our understanding of why prisons exist; that is, what functions they serve. Using California as a case study, Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) argues that prisons are an integral, rather than exceptional, part of the project of capitalist state building. “Prisons,” she writes, “are partial geographical solutions to political economic crises, organized by the state, which is itself in crisis” (2007, 26). These political-economic crises12 are composed of four distinct yet interrelated forms of surplus: surplus finance capital (particularly municipal finance capital), surplus land, relative surplus population, and surplus state capacity (defined as “laws and lawmakers, offices and other built environments, bureaucrats, budgets, rules and

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12 Quoting Hall and Schwarz (1988), Gilmore explains crises as what “occur when the social formation can no longer be reproduced on the basis of the preexisting system of relations’ (96)” (Gilmore 2007, 54). Similarly, she continues, “[I]mplicit in capital’s imperative to accumulate is an equal necessity to disaccumulate. Systemic failure to disaccumulate constitutes crisis. . . . Surplus and crisis, then, are two sides of the same coin” (ibid 55, 56).
regulations, rank-and-file staff, the ability to tax or borrow, and direct access to mass communication and education”) (ibid, 78). She writes, “The new California prison system in the 1980s and 1990s was constructed deliberately—but not conspiratorially—of surpluses that were put back to work in other ways. . . . Make no mistake: prison building was and is not the inevitable outcome of these surpluses” (2007, 88). In other words, prisons are not the inevitable solution to political economic crises, but rather a deliberate tactic: “The state built itself by building prisons fashioned from surpluses that the newly developing political economy had not absorbed in other ways” (2007, 54; see also Gilmore 2002). In addition to political-economic explanations, Gilmore, like many other scholars (see especially Alexander 2010), highlights the role of race and racism in the American criminal justice system, so the question of who gets locked up is intimately tied up with racial and class identities (see also Wacquant 2009).

In explaining whom prisons serve and to what ends, Gilmore also refutes several popular explanations for prison expansion. First, she denies that prison expansion represents a new form of slavery, since few inmates work for anybody while incarcerated. She also refutes the explanation that the private prison lobby is a primary driver of prison growth, since private prisons make up only 5% of the country’s carceral institutions (Gilmore 2007). Thus, as Deborah Cowen and Amy Siciliano (2011, 2) succinctly summarize, the prison system is primarily “a means of warehousing a racialized reserve army of predominantly young male labor.”

However, as geographers have pointed out, there is a disjuncture between where this reserve army of labor comes from and where it is imprisoned. Using geospatial data, scholars have shown that the majority of prison inmates come from highly concentrated urban neighborhoods, where the state often spends in excess of $1 million per year to incarcerate the residents of a single city block (Spatial Information Design Lab 2006). Meanwhile, Anne Bonds
(2013) and Deborah Che (2005) have each contributed case studies showing how prisons are discursively positioned as rural development projects in prison siting debates. Thus, despite evidence to the contrary (see Gilmore 2007), local policymakers frequently argue that prisons will provide local jobs and generate local revenues in rural areas where they are built. As most prisons are rural and most inmates are from cities, the spatiality of prisons can thus serve to obscure their functionality (see Schept 2014, Gilmore 2007).

Through such studies, we can understand the American prison system as simultaneously a crucial component of state formation, a racist and racialized means of containing particular bodies, and a spatial solution to political-economic crises of over-accumulation. The circulation of urban bodies to mostly rural prison sites then becomes crucial to upholding, reproducing, and ultimately expanding the prison system. However, while incarceration is certainly a spatial phenomenon, it does not only “happen” within the prison, jail, or detention center.

*The Carceral Continuum*

Outside geography, theorists have made important claims about the spatiality of punishment. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975/1995), Michel Foucault described how the techniques of modern punishment rely upon the diffusion of power throughout society, for example, when the power to punish spreads to multiple institutions in society. Foucault described how, after the classical age, the frontiers between confinement, judicial punishment, and institutions of discipline . . . tended to disappear and to constitute a great carceral continuum that diffused penitentiary techniques into the most innocent disciplines, transmitting disciplinary norms into the very heart of the penal system and placing over the slightest illegality, the smallest irregularity, deviation or anomaly, the threat of delinquency. A subtle, graduated, carceral net, with compact institutions, but also separate and diffused methods, assumed responsibility for the arbitrary, widespread, badly integrated confinement of the classical age. . . . [T]his great carceral network reaches all the disciplinary mechanisms that function throughout society. (Foucault 1975/1995, 297-298)
Thus, for Foucault, the punitive techniques that reach their apotheosis in the prison extend throughout society into a “carceral continuum” or “carceral network” of institutions that serve to discipline populations and manage social deviancy. The carceral network, further, is hegemonic: as Foucault describes, “The carceral network does not cast the unassimilable into a confused hell; there is no outside” (1975/1995, 301).

Writing more recently, and in the American context, Loïc Wacquant extends Foucault’s concept of the carceral continuum, explaining how the black ghetto and the prison are linked functionally, structurally, and culturally. He explains,

[I]n the post-Civil Rights era, the remnants of the dark ghetto and the fast-expanding carceral system of the United States have become tightly linked by a triple relationship of functional equivalency, structural homology, and cultural fusion. This relationship has spawned a carceral continuum that ensnares a supernumerary population of younger black men, who either reject or are rejected by the deregulated low-wage labor market, in a never-ending circulus between the two institutions. This carceral mesh has been solidified by two sets of concurrent and interrelated changes: on the one end, sweeping economic and political forces have reshaped the structure and function of the urban ‘Black Belt’ of mid-century to make the ghetto more like a prison. On the other end, the ‘inmate society’ that inhabited the penitentiary system of the U.S. during the postwar decades has broken down in ways that make the prison more like a ghetto. (Wacquant 2001, 97, emphasis in the original)

Thus, for Wacquant, the ghetto functions both like a prison—to use Martin and Mitchelson’s definition, a space that confines through violence—and as a feeder for the prison system.

Meanwhile, the prison also functions like a ghetto, where black men from disenfranchised neighborhoods who have been locked out of the urban labor market are corralled and confined. In addition to the parallel functions, structures, and cultures of these two sites, Wacquant also highlights the circularity between them, with the same bodies caught in “a never-ending circulus between the two institutions.” Indeed, so monolithic is this experience that Wacquant in later writings argues that “reentry” is nothing more than a myth, as high rates of recidivism mean that “the vast majority of former convicts experience not reentry but ongoing circulation between the
two poles of a continuum of forced confinement formed by the prison and the dilapidated districts of the dualizing metropolis” (Wacquant 2010, 611, emphasis in the original). What Wacquant discusses as “the two poles of a continuum,” criminologist Todd Clear writes about as “prison places”—i.e. locales where the effects of mass incarceration are highly concentrated, such as schools and neighborhoods in heavily-impacted areas (Clear 2007, 68). Meanwhile, Chapman, Carey, and Ben-Moshe (2014) call for increased attention to the institutional continuum that mirrors Foucault’s carceral continuum: the agencies, service providers, and even hospitals that too frequently function primarily to discipline and punish rather than to serve and heal.

These spatial and institutional continuums are reinforced through policy: as Jonathon Simon describes in Governing Through Crime (2007), crime control has now become the de facto aim of a range of public agencies for whom it falls outside the ostensible mission. In particular, he shows how techniques borrowed from criminal justice—state surveillance and spatial control, for example—are increasingly employed in traditionally non-carceral spaces such as workplaces, homes, and schools. Similarly, in their analysis of the rise of neoliberal regimes of poverty governance, Soss, Fording, and Schram (2011, 295) argue that “mass incarceration, penal logics, and policing (in a broad sense) have become defining elements of poverty governance” in the U.S. Amidst the punitive welfare-to-workfare shift, “welfare and criminal justice operations now function as integrated elements of a single system for managing marginal populations” (ibid). As we can see, punitive techniques are today enacted in a number of interrelated spaces and institutions and through a variety of policy mechanisms targeted at controlling marginalized groups. But what does this carceral continuum look like on the ground?
Mapping the Carceral Continuum

Given that imprisonment is a spatial phenomenon, yet one that operates in a range of spaces outside the traditional prison or jail, many scholars have offered case studies that illustrate the connections between prisons and urban neighborhoods. For example, noting the unprecedented numbers of people (mostly men) caught in Wacquant’s “circulus” between prison and urban neighborhoods in Chicago each year, Peck and Theodore (2008) argue that urban labor market institutions (such as temp agencies) parallel carceral institutions by locking ex-offenders out of local labor markets and forcing them into increasingly informal and deregulated forms of labor. “If there is any logic at all to this regime,” they write, “it would seem to be one of institutional and spatial containment, dedicated to the futile and destructive task of circulating a supernumerary population between alternating states of institutional confinement—in the ‘downstate’ world of the prison system—and sociospatial confinement—in the slowly imploding ‘receiving communities’ of Chicago’s South and West Sides” (Peck and Theodore 2008, 275).

Thus, with few public services available to them upon release, ex-offenders are shuttled between already overwhelmed, overcrowded, and underfunded labor agencies who put ex-offenders at the bottom of their employment lists (see also Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011, 106-107).

Similarly, Purser’s (2012) ethnographic analysis of the day labor industry in Oakland and Baltimore shows how private day labor agencies both capitalize on and actively cultivate a pool of devalued ex-offender labor. Further, taking part in such precarious employment arrangements functionally extends incarceration for ex-offenders: for the job-seeking men forced to wait in cramped and uncomfortable conditions for precarious forms of employment, the waiting rooms of these agencies become alternative carceral spaces. In these ways, temp and day labor agencies (which often offer the only path to employment available to ex-offenders) continue to reproduce
ex-offender labor as low-wage and informal, while the practice of corraling ex-offenders into these disciplinary agencies expands the carceral reach into urban neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, based on interviews with people who had been banished from parks or other public spaces in Seattle, Beckett and Herbert (2010a and 2010b) explain how banishment has reemerged as a punitive technique. While theoretically not a penal mechanism, they show how banishment from public spaces is punitive in practice: in addition to limiting individuals’ use of urban space, banishment orders and mobility restrictions feed individuals into the criminal justice system by generating additional court cases and jail stays. In this way, Beckett and Herbert invert traditional notions of the spatiality of punishment (which is typically centered around confinement) and show how otherwise public urban spaces can be rendered carceral for some. Similarly, Mitchell (2005, 574) describes how trespass-barment laws are “designed to protect order and safety, and, seemingly, the net must be cast so broadly that it ensnares even those not involved in crime.” Aimed primarily at the protection of private property, such rules discipline individuals who have done nothing wrong by limiting their ability to move freely throughout the city, and thus impinging on their liberty. In effect, trespass-barment laws thus criminalize people whose biggest mistake was to move through an urban space—including public housing property—that has at some point been rendered quasi-private, where the state claims the right to act as landlord. Further, Mitchell (2010, 31) has also argued that “[B]lanket prohibitions on the use of public space. . . [are] really just a pretext for removing those who are suspect.” Thus, banishment and trespass-barment laws, which criminalize public space for urban residents deemed “suspect,” also widen the carceral web, targeting and punishing individuals whose worst crime, in many cases, is being poor, homeless, and/or of color.
Yet another way that we can witness the operation of the carceral continuum is through what Theresa Gowan (2002, 525) refers to as the “homelessness/incarceration nexus,” whereby individuals become caught in a cycle between homelessness and imprisonment. Based on ethnographic work in St. Louis and San Francisco, Gowan argues that homelessness and incarceration mutually reinforce one another, creating a racialized cycle of exclusion and punishment. Shut out of affordable housing options and often without strong family ties, many homeless individuals will be rounded up by local cops on heavily-policed streets and then incarcerated for minor infractions or crimes committed out of desperation. Then, upon release from prison or jail, some ex-offenders have nowhere to live and may see homelessness as a refuge from the disciplinary spaces of shelters. Living on the street, ex-offenders are then more likely to recidivate.

In this way, Gowan argues that the ensuing cycle between incarceration (punishment) and homelessness (exclusion) serves as a deliberate state mechanism for governing marginalized populations. Indeed, research by Metraux, Roman, and Cho (2007) supports Gowan’s thesis: reviewing the relevant policy literature, they argue that homelessness is associated with greater incarceration rates on the one hand, while incarceration also leads to greater rates of homelessness on the other. They add that for many homeless individuals, prisons and jails can comprise a form of housing in and of themselves. This too is the carceral continuum in action, stemming in part, they argue, from the practice of “isolationist policymaking” (3)—i.e. the lack of coordination between public agencies that allows people to fall through the cracks. For example, corrections departments rarely provide adequate support for individuals upon release, who often have no home to return to yet are not considered “homeless” and are simultaneously barred from housing assistance programs. Finally, even if ex-offenders do not experience
homelessness directly, they are subject to much higher rates of housing insecurity, defined as spending over 30 percent of their household income on housing, living in poor-quality housing, or living in overcrowded conditions (Herbert, Morenoff, and Harding 2015).

Taken together, these case studies support Foucault and Wacquant’s conceptualization of the carceral continuum as a spectrum of interlocking spaces and institutions, upheld through de jure policies and de facto practices, that serve to continually discipline marginalized populations—particularly black men who have been locked out of the mainstream urban labor market. For the individuals caught in its web, the continuum is hegemonic: it extends their punishment upon release by forcing them into precarious forms of labor administered by disciplinary institutions and service providers; it limits their ability to move freely through otherwise ostensibly “public” spaces in the city; and it furthers the homelessness-incarceration nexus.

PART II. PUBLIC HOUSING AND THE CARCERAL CONTINUUM

We have seen how the carceral continuum operates through a range of urban spaces, but where specifically does public housing fit on this spectrum? Before we can answer this question, which scholars have only just begun to explore, it is important to understand a broader history of public housing policies in Chicago. That is, to contextualize the current debate over whether to house ex-offenders, we must first consider how this question fits into ongoing debates over just which “public” public housing is meant to serve. In particular, I first examine how the CHA has historically decided policies regarding two key issues—tenant selection and project siting—which both have important consequences for the composition of public housing. Indeed, as the CHA considers allowing ex-offenders to live in their projects, these policy questions are no more
settled and no less relevant today than they were at the Authority’s founding eighty years ago. Finally, I will connect this broader history to some recent scholarship that begins to theorize how public housing can serve as an important node in the carceral continuum.

Public Housing for Whom?

Chicago’s decision of whether to admit ex-offenders is not anomalous, but rather highly representative of the types of decisions that the CHA has been making since its founding in 1937. From the very beginning, policymakers have had to decide exactly which public they were going to house. They did so—and continue to do so—by establishing tenant selection policies, which have continually shifted over the years.

The CHA’s first director was Elizabeth Wood, a Vassar College graduate and progressive reformer who had previously directed the Metropolitan Housing Council (a local civic group) (Bennett 2010, 151). In the CHA’s early days, Wood and her board prioritized housing Chicagoans with the lowest incomes (Hunt 2009, 106)—a policy that at least theoretically aimed at helping Chicago’s least (economically) advantaged. However, this ideal was not always realized in practice: even from the start, prospective tenants were submitted to a number of screenings before they were deemed eligible for selection, a process that continues today. In particular, Wood’s team developed a weighted scoring system that prioritized families living in substandard conditions and who paid a large percentage of their income toward rent. She hired social workers to perform home visits and assign numerical scores to an applicant’s housing conditions as well as moral factors such as “general thrift” and “good employment record” (Hunt 2009, 80-81). Similar, the CHA’s 1940 Manual of Operations specified that the Authority

13 The US Housing Authority (the precursor to HUD) was so pleased with the system that Wood devised that it recommended in 1938 that all city housing authorities adopt it (Hunt 2009, 81).
wanted tenants living in a “natural family unit” and would reject those with “evident criminal or anti-social tendencies” (Vale 2012). Thus, while claiming to prioritize the very poor, the CHA nevertheless implicitly specified that they wanted only the most worthy of the very poor, whose worthiness was measured quantitatively yet subjectively defined.

From the start, there were tensions in terms of which Chicago public the Authority was going to house: under Wood’s scoring system, low-income tenants were prioritized, but only so long as they proved themselves to be hard working, upstanding, and respectable according to the mainstream, middle-class sensibilities of 1930s and 1940s America. As historian D. Bradford Hunt describes,

Wood called the CHA’s tenants “poor but proud” families with “middle-class aspirations,” who blossomed when transplanted from slums “into a setting of apartments attractively planned and well-maintained.” . . . [S]he suggested that “underprivileged families moving into spic-and-span houses really do seem to experience a kind of social rebirth.” (Hunt 2009, 99)

Wood’s rhetoric here reveals an underlying ideology of environmental determinism: according to her, poor families could succeed if given the right environment, regardless of other social factors or economic opportunities. Thus, Wood saw public housing as a tool for slum removal, with public housing high-rises comprising “islands in a wilderness of slums” (Wood quoted in Hunt 2001, 100; see also Hunt 2009, 137-138; Bennett 2010, 154). If housing was seen as the key to middle-class achievement, planners believed that public housing could lift Chicagoans out of poverty.

Wood’s faith in the role of public housing in creating a more just city and the importance of investing in such a social welfare program is not to be dismissed. Nevertheless, her environmentally deterministic attitudes and moralistic sentiments about the poor reveal a tension

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14 Wood’s words were echoed more recently by former Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, who commented in 2006 that through the CHA’s “Plan for Transformation,” “We’re not just building homes. We’re building lives and building communities. And I’d describe it as we’re rebuilding souls” (Ewing 2015).
between theory and practice: by positing the ideal tenant as a respectable, hard-working citizen, Wood and her cabinet effectively overlooked or obscured the many material difficulties of living in poverty as well as, in many cases, the structural reasons for that poverty, including institutionalized racism.

Despite these tensions, the CHA did accept many families with very low incomes in its early days, a policy that ironically threatened the stability of the housing authority: by prioritizing the poorest Chicagoans, Wood’s tenant selection criteria “threatened to turn Chicago’s prewar projects into poorhouses by 1945” (Hunt 2009, 106). In an attempt to ensure the sustainability of the city’s rapidly developing housing projects, the CHA implemented income-based rents in 1942 (ibid, 87). During World War II, the CHA also repurposed a portion of public housing units to house war workers and military families (Vale 2012). During this time, the average income of CHA tenants rose due to wartime prosperity (Hunt 2009, 87-88). As Lawrence Vale (2012, 4) describes, the wartime shift in public housing “set in motion a lingering pattern of exclusion, as the CHA sought to attract and retain tenants who were low-income — but not too low-income.” In a letter to federal housing officials in 1945, Wood wrote that one-third of those being considered for admission to the Cabrini homes had incomes too low to be considered for public housing, since they would not make for responsible tenants (ibid). Whether for reasons of financial management or fears of concentrated poverty, the CHA began to shift away from housing the poorest of the (respectable) poor.

However, as Vale describes, tenant selection criteria were loosened for some time between the 1960s and 1990s. He writes,

Encouraged by federal policies, the Authority permitted public housing truly to become welfare housing—the last chance for the city’s poorest residents. . . . By the mid-1990s, however, the reform impulse kicked in again. In this most recent round of clearance and building, as was the case decades earlier, city leaders aimed to replace the existing
population with a less distressed and fragile community: in effect, to replace the poor with the less-poor—and to purge the very poorest. (Vale 2012, 2)

There could be many reasons for this shift in the mid-1990s: the cuts to social welfare programs set in motion in the 1980s by politicians like Ronald Reagan, the media-driven culture of fear about rising rates of crime and drug use, or the influence of New Urbanist beliefs about public housing alternatives such as mixed-income developments (see Loury 2008; Vale 2012).

Whatever the reason, in 2000, the CHA launched its “Plan for Transformation,” a grand slum-clearance scheme (aided by HUD’s HOPE VI redevelopment funding) that aims to shift public housing away from high-rise complexes and toward the development of mixed-income communities and that relies on extensive tenant screenings to do so (Vale 2012). Theoretically, under this plan, public housing residents from demolished complexes like Cabrini-Green are to be resettled in developments on site or nearby but must first pass a screening process that ensures adults are either working, attending a training program, seeking employment, or disabled and that the family does not owe back-rent or utility payments. Additionally, adults must undergo criminal background checks and drug testing. Due to these eligibility criteria, Larry Bennett (2010) concludes that CHA’s recent policies—particularly in the mixed-income developments—do not truly serve the public, nor do they even focus (as they did during the Wood years) on recruiting “good” tenants from a broader public but instead aim primarily to exclude “troublemakers likely to antagonize their neighbors or management” (160). Similarly, Catherine Fennell (2015, 19) argues that the work requirements at the mixed-income communities “distinguished between deserving and nondeserving citizens in terms of valorized forms of work,” thus creating another hierarchical measurement of worth that is often not in control of the individual but rather dependent on structural conditions of the labor market.
Additionally, once accepted, public housing residents in mixed-income communities may be subject to community rules that disproportionately affect and restrict them, compared to other residents. For example, at North Town Village, where the vast majority of children in the community come from public housing households, children are banned from playing in common areas (Bennett 2010, 170-171). Thus, while tenant eligibility requirements limit the public that public housing is supposed to serve, such special rules restrict tenants’ rights to urban space compared to other citizens of the city and serve as a means for the government to discipline poor families. While public housing—as a social welfare program—purports to help lift Chicagoans out of poverty, it has often failed in this respect, by not serving the very poor, by privileging white over minority residents, or by subjecting public housing residents to disciplinary rules that do not apply to other community members.

Public Housing Where?

While debates over tenant selection have often focused on the applicants’ class status (as measured imperfectly by income level), race has also played a crucial role in the design and planning of Chicago’s public housing. In particular, the racial composition of CHA projects has been a key question for public housing planners since the Authority’s creation. While racial bias has no doubt always had an impact on the selection of individual tenants, it has played a perhaps a more salient role in the planning of whole neighborhoods.

Under Wood, the CHA adopted the “Neighborhood Composition Rule,” first created by Harold Ickes, who was then the housing division director of the Public Works Administration.

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15 It should go without saying that race and class are inextricably bound together in these discussions. As Catherine Fennell points out, even today, as the CHA transitions increasingly toward mixed-income communities, planners take racial desegregation as well as income mixing as their aim. She writes: “For many I met while conducting research on this [mixed-income] experiment, ‘mixed-income’ stood for something more. ‘Mixed-income is not exactly the right word,’ one middle-aged white planner observed in 2003. ‘This is about finally integrating this city, block by block.’ In Chicago, ‘class’ had become a metonym for ‘race’” (Fennell 2015, 1).
According to this rule, completed housing projects were to conform to the racial composition of the surrounding neighborhoods, prior to redevelopment (Hirsch 1998; Hunt 2009; Bennett 2010). The policy served several purposes: on the one hand, it aimed to make the presence of federal works projects less obtrusive or disruptive to American cities by ensuring that the government was not going to demand racial integration (Hirsch 1998, 14; Hunt 2009, 89). Because white aldermen were resistant to having new public housing developments built in their wards, the CHA began to propose development sites only in African-American or transitioning neighborhoods (Bennett 2010, 154). As a result, between 1950 and the mid-1960s, twenty-five of the CHA’s thirty-three proposed public housing projects were located in census tracts where the population was at least 75 percent black and six were located in areas of racial transition. When construction was completed, only one of these thirty-three developments was located in a neighborhood that was less than 84 percent black, and all but seven were in areas that were at least 95 percent black (Hirsch 1998, 242-243).

On the one hand, Hunt argues that the rule can be seen as defending black neighborhoods: it prevented the claiming of black neighborhoods for whites through discriminatory tenant selection practices that would have housed only white residents in formerly-black areas where slum clearance had occurred (Hunt 2009, 89). In effect, however, the rule served to reinforce Chicago’s deeply entrenched patterns of racial segregation, so most early housing projects were all-black, all-white, or majority-white mixed developments (Bennett 2010, 152). Even in the Jane Addams Homes, the city’s first racially mixed housing development,

16 Despite this historical development, Hunt cautions against Hirsch’s famous “second ghetto” thesis, which he critiques as an oversimplification. He writes, “[Robert] Taylor and [Elizabeth] Wood did not intend to ‘make the second ghetto’; they wanted housing rights for African Americans, racially integrated projects on vacant land, and a coherent plan for slum clearance that combined large urban redevelopment and public housing projects. Yet, given the progressive slum clearance agenda of the 1940s, the large-scale thinking of planners, and the challenge of sustaining racial integration, it is difficult to see how even an unencumbered CHA under liberal leadership could
spatial segregation was maintained within the community: black tenants were restricted to housing on one side of the building and black and white tenants used separate entrances (Hirsch 1998, 218). In 1942, the Neighborhood Composition Rule was invoked to create Cabrini-Green as an integrated housing community, with a prescribed quota of 20 percent black and 80 percent white residents to match the surrounding neighborhood (Hunt 2009, 151). Again, although the community was “integrated” in terms of overall composition, the CHA made sure to maintain some all-white housing sections in the hope of attracting more white residents and avoiding hostility on the part of the surrounding Italian neighborhood. The 4-to-1 ratio of whites to blacks ultimately had to be abandoned when the CHA, facing an overabundance of black applicants and a shortage of white residents, could no longer hold the white-designated units vacant in a time of great overall shortage. Thus, by 1949, blacks occupied 40 percent of Cabrini-Green (Hirsch 1998, 218-219). It should not be surprising then that by 1963, the year after the Robert Taylor Homes opened in Bronzeville on the city’s south side, The Chicago Daily News ran a lengthy series about the complex called “Chicago’s $70 million Ghetto” (Bennett 2010, 155). The extreme concentration of African-Americans in the projects was highly evident. Chicago is also exceptional in this: as Briggs, Popkin, and Goering (2010, 33) describe, by the time William Julius Wilson wrote The Truly Disadvantaged in 1987 to describe Chicago’s ghetto neighborhoods, “No city had concentrated as much public housing, and thus nearly as many chronically poor families, in racially-segregated areas as Chicago had.”

The CHA was formally challenged for its race-based project siting and tenant selection policies first in 1953, by the NAACP, and later in 1966, when a group of African-American residents sued the Authority in Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority. Led by lawyer
Alexander Polikoff, the plaintiffs used the logic of the Brown v. Board of Education ruling to argue that by limiting its projects sites to ghettoized areas, both HUD and CHA were in violation of the Civil Rights Act and the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protections clause (Hunt 2009). The group claimed that the agency had practiced purposeful discrimination, and in 1969, federal Judge Richard Austin ruled in favor of the plaintiffs (Bennett 2010, 157). The integration of formerly single-race projects that did occur in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in several outbreaks of violence, for example, at the Trumbull Park Homes after Betty Howard “passed” as a white resident in her application for residence. The resulting violence prompted the firing of Elizabeth Wood and forced the CHA to take a bolder non-segregationist stance—in words if not in immediate action (Hirsch 1998, 232). As in other civil rights battles, struggle has always had a place in shaping CHA policies. Indeed, public action has provoked changes in CHA policy over the years: as Hirsch writes, “For all its protestations, CHA policy was made in the streets” (1998, 232, emphasis in the original).

Overall, rather than encouraging group mixing, Chicago’s public housing projects have historically promoted racial segregation as well as cultural and economic exclusion, warehousing and concentrating the working poor while too-often failing to care for the unemployed or criminalized poor, who may end up homeless (Hunt 2009; Hirsch 1983; see also Ewing 2015). Thus, we can see that debates over whether to house ex-offenders (and how many of them to house) are just the latest struggle in the ongoing contestations over who is to be included as part of the public that Chicago public housing is meant to serve. However, public housing also has a role to play in the carceral continuum—a connection that scholars have only just begun to explore.
Public Housing As Prison?

In addition to the long-standing rules barring anyone with a criminal record (or, since 1996, their relatives) from living in Chicago’s public housing, the public housing and criminal justice systems have historically been linked in a number of other, less obvious ways. In particular, I here review recent scholarly literature that considers the ways in which Chicago’s public housing has historically resembled a prison in its design and management, serving as a way for the state to spatially confine, discipline, and even punish poor, largely black Chicagoans. As I do so, it is important to emphasize that just as public housing can serve as a carceral institution, it has also served as a restorative and resilient space for many over the years who have found shelter, domesticity, hope, and community within its walls (see for example Fennell 2015; Fuerst 2003). This is not to be overlooked. What matters, then, is not whether public housing serves as a carceral or a restorative space but how it can, paradoxically, be both.

Given this understanding, several scholars have noted how the design of Chicago’s public housing projects resembles prison architecture. Hunt points out that in 1957, The Chicago Defender labeled the city’s post-war public high rises as “prison-like” in their design (2009, 182). Rashad Shabazz (2009, 2015) also notes that the design of Chicago’s famous Robert Taylor homes was highly carceral: the high-rise apartments were surrounded with meshed wire “cages,” while the CHA’s autocratic management controlled every aspect of the living environment, including the heat. Perhaps even more striking, scholars have pointed to the use of punitive techniques in public housing as evidence of their carcerality. In particular, Shabazz (2015, 2) argues that practices like heavy policing and surveillance have effectively “prisonized the landscape” on Chicago’s South Side. For him, Chicago’s public housing projects can be read as “interstitial carceral spaces” between the prison and the home. He writes, “[C]arceral practices
in the projects such as security forces, police raids of homes, curfews, metal detectors, onsite courts, parameter patrols and video surveillance primed a generation of Black men for life behind bars by fusing the punitive elements of prison and the quotidian realities of home” (2015, 57). In this way, by pointing to public housing’s prison-like environment, Shabazz connects the two institutions, arguing that life in Chicago’s public housing conditions its inhabitants for life in prison. By merging home and prison, public housing can be thought of as a carceral space—a node on Wacquant’s continuum.

Similarly, Sudhir Venkatesh’s (2000) work supports the idea that the disciplinary—even punitive—management practices employed in Chicago’s public housing projects simultaneously make those spaces prison-like while also funneling residents into prison. For example, under certain administrations such as that of CHA Chairman Vincent Lane (1988-1995), public housing residents have been subject to curfews as well as to limits on how long visitors can stay. Lane implemented “Operation Clean Sweep” in the high-rises, a process based on mass arrest in which teams of police officers carried out regular sweeps, conducting surprise apartment searches, typically before dawn. During the searches, officers would enter a high-rise without warrants to try to locate gang members, unreported boarders, or illicit paraphernalia like drug equipment (Venkatesh 2000, 129). The CHA justified this Operation as an emergency response to the rise of gang violence in public housing projects in the 1980s and 1990s (ibid 130).

Procedures like Operation Clean Sweep position the role of the public housing authority as one of protecting good tenants from bad ones. However, we must ask: whom do these searches really serve? By employing such techniques of discipline, by which any member of the housing project can be searched at any time, even totally innocent residents are rendered suspect and subject to invasive searches. As Venkatesh describes:
The sweeps pitted resident demands for privacy and legal searches against their need for effective law enforcement and security against gang violence and drugs. Whereas [some residents] fought in court and participated in street demonstrations to eliminate the use of sweeps, other tenants voiced approval for sweeps and other “emergency procedures,” such as fingerprinting of children and CHA-imposed curfews, in an attempt to regain the public spaces of the housing development. (2000, 255)

Thus, Operation Clean Sweep provides one example of how Chicago’s public housing was rendered prison-like for residents. Because they often lacked security in their own homes, the same residents were in some cases willing to accept the presence of state violence in an attempt to reclaim their own living spaces. However, this state violence only perpetuated a culture of fear and resentment, as all residents were treated like criminals. Like the trespass-barment and banishment laws described by Mitchell (2005; 2010) and Beckett and Herbert (2010a and 2010b), in such a setting, everyone becomes a suspect.

Additionally, Goetz (2013) describes how the creation of federal drug free zones in public housing developments in the 1990s allowed law enforcement to apply stricter sentencing rules for drug crimes within these areas. In these zones, someone charged with a drug-related offense would be subject to a longer, harsher sentence than someone charged with the same crime across the street. As with Operation Clean Sweep, these zoning rules were met with mixed reactions from tenants: some welcomed the get-tough approach, despite the fact that such policies effectively ask residents to waive some of their civil rights in an attempt to stop crime that was beyond the capabilities of the CHA or local police.

Thus, as the narratives described by Shabazz, Venaktesh, and Goetz remind us, public space is never public unless practiced as such (see Mitchell 2003). Certainly, the militarized, policed, surveilled, and otherwise punitive spaces of Chicago public housing have not been practiced as open, public, and inclusive spaces for all city residents. Instead, these spaces can be highly prison-like, and indeed the operations of carceral power are evident there, with all
residents subject to arrest and imprisonment. As Catherine Fennell describes of the mixed-income Westhaven development, which replaced the Henry Horner Homes: “Almost everyone in Westhaven knew someone directly entangled in the criminal justice system. More often than not, these entanglements stretched over many years. Prison and jail were revolving doors. As local ex-offenders put it, the ex-offender was the next-offender” (Fennell 2015, 193).

CONCLUSION: SPACE, JUSTICE, AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

Geographer Edward Soja (2010, 1) argued that if justice is social, it is also always spatial: “[J]ustice has a consequential geography, a spatial description. . . . [T]he geography or ‘spatiality’ of justice is an integral and formative component of justice itself” (emphasis in the original). Thus, the persistent spatial continuum through which carceral power is enacted in the US begs the question: what would a more just spatiality look like? The carceral continuum operates—as we have seen—through space. Systematically disenfranchised and ghettoized, Chicago’s black urban poor are spatially concentrated in public housing projects, which often resemble prisons in their design and management strategies. The same structures can also, however, provide an important space of refuge and community, especially when compared to the mean streets and shelters where the city’s truly poor and disconnected make their lives. In housing projects and on the streets alike, however, city residents are subject to high levels of policing and arrest, often for crimes that have to do with how they are using space in the city: so-called “quality of life” crimes as well as banishment or trespass-barment orders that restrict who is supposed to be in otherwise “public” urban spaces and how they are meant to use it. Meanwhile, those released from prison are returned to the same urban neighborhoods but are
now barred from public housing and limited to sub-standard forms of employment and private housing, if they are lucky enough to find these at all.

Implicit in all of these struggles is an ur-question: who has the right to the city in terms of both its spaces and its institutions? Drawing on Lefebvre’s concept of “the right to the city,” which Lefebvre describes as a “right to urban life,” Mitchell (2003) argues that as with other rights, the right to the city is never settled or guaranteed but always contested and won through struggle (Lefebvre 1996, 158; Mitchell 2003). Similarly, the definition of public space and its intended public can only be determined through practice (Mitchell 2003). As the CHA’s shifting tenant selection policies demonstrate, even public housing has not always served one clear public, and in this way, the more recent debate over whether to house ex-offenders is only the latest struggle in an ongoing contestation over who is worthy of this form of public assistance—that is, of who has the right to public housing in Chicago.
Chapter 3 Goals: Finding a Home in the Carceral City

St. Andrew’s Court of St. Leonard’s Ministries is a 42-occupant transitional housing facility on Chicago’s Near West Side. It is a humid July morning when I arrive to speak with Bobby Flowers, Jimmy Beaman, and John Stamps, three formerly incarcerated men who live at St. Andrew’s Court and are all on the CHA waitlist. When their numbers are called, they will be enrolled in the Reentry Pilot and given either a housing choice voucher (HCV) or placed in a public housing unit. None of the three have family in public housing to reunite with, so they must wait patiently until a voucher becomes available or a unit opens up. Meanwhile, as their website boasts, St. Andrew’s Court is meant to be transitional: “Since its opening in 1998, St. Andrew’s Court has provided a setting in which men who have successfully completed the St. Leonard’s House program can find continued support in their journeys toward independent, whole lives” (St. Leonard’s 2016). What this means in practice is that residents are given leases, which must be periodically renewed. Flowers has already lived at St. Andrew’s for four years, Beaman for nearly three, and Stamps for five. Each of their leases is up for renewal in the fall, so they are anxious to find permanent housing elsewhere.

Thus, for these men, the goals of the Reentry Pilot are tangible. As Jimmy Beaman describes, “Well, I need a place to stay. I’ve been staying here [at St. Andrew’s], but this is not gonna last forever. And then once I leave here, I’ll be homeless if I don’t participate in this program and get an apartment through this program.” Beaman’s words highlight the very immediate need for housing felt by ex-offenders in Chicago: for him, the program is not trivial—it means the difference between stable housing and a life on the streets. In this chapter, I explore the goals of the Reentry Pilot, as articulated by potential participants like Beaman, as well as the service providers, advocates, and policymakers responsible for the program’s creation. In
particular, I argue that, though they may not articulate it in these terms, interviewees all express hopes that the Pilot will intervene in the carceral continuum by stemming recidivism, generating new social opportunities for ex-offenders, and disrupting the homelessness-incarceration nexus.

*Facilitating Reentry: A “No-Brainer”*

Officially approved by the CHA’s Board of Commissioners in November 2014, the formal purpose of the Reentry Pilot, according to the CHA’s Demonstration Program and Special Initiatives Overview, is “To test the provision of stable housing against recidivism” (CHA 2014b, 1). As a demonstration program, the Reentry Pilot constitutes an official policy experiment and, to that end, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) has arranged for a formal program evaluation to eventually be conducted by their colleagues at Chicago State University (CCH 2013).

Bill Smith, a senior policy official at CHA, did not work for CHA when the Pilot was first created, but is supportive of the program, which he sees as a way to help ex-offenders successfully re-enter society. When asked about why the Pilot matters, Smith says, “It was a no-brainer. . . . Reentry is just not [sic] to the workforce, reentry is to the household.” As a housing policy official, it is significant that Smith acknowledges the links between housing and incarceration and the importance of safe, affordable, and stable housing in successful reentry. Indeed, the Pilot does seem like a “no-brainer”—after all, how could someone be expected to build a stable life without a stable form of shelter? However, it is important to remember that the Pilot is one of the first programs of its type around the country, comprising a quite radical break from the One Strike policies and other harsh screening and eviction procedures of the past, so

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17 Name has been changed to protect anonymity, per the interviewee’s request.
while it might be seen as a “no-brainer” now, this has not always been the case. The Pilot thus marks a significant ideological shift.

Additionally, by acknowledging housing’s role in reentry, Smith also implicitly acknowledges its role in reentry’s opposite: recidivism. Again, though subtle, even this small admission presents a major shift from past housing policy rhetoric, which emphasized the need to cleanse public housing and rid it of its criminal element: for example, President Clinton’s narrative of “Criminal gang members and drug dealers . . . destroying the lives of decent tenants” and the One Strike Policy’s description of “public housing communities . . . under siege by gangs, violent criminals and drug dealers who threaten the safety and welfare of decent, responsible tenants” (HUD 1996, 2, 4). In these statements, criminality was seen as a destructive force invading an otherwise pure space for “decent” citizens. Thus, Smith’s admission here represents a broader shift in thinking and evidences how policymakers are beginning to understand and admit public housing’s connections to the criminal justice system. The fact that Smith positions this admission as a “no-brainer” makes his words all the more impactful: not only were past policies wrong, they were obviously wrong.

The idea that the Pilot is a “no-brainer”—that it just makes sense—is echoed by multiple interviewees, though they express slightly different reasons for why it makes so much sense. Lynne Cunningham directs the education and employment training programs at St. Leonard’s and served on the CHA Reentry Pilot Committee, the group that collectively organized the Pilot after it was first proposed by CCH. Like Bill Smith, she rehearses several straightforward reasons for why the Pilot matters: first, housing is expensive in Chicago, and, as she puts it, “housing in . . . safe neighborhoods is also very expensive. And so this is one more way in which people with backgrounds will be able to access those things.” Thus, perhaps most simply, for
her, the Pilot is about increasing access to something that everyone needs: safe, affordable housing.

Next, like Smith, Cunningham acknowledges the role of housing in reentry, as well as the connections *between* the major barriers to reentry: housing and employment. As she describes,

[H]ousing is just an incredibly important piece of everything. If you don’t have stable housing, it’s really hard to find stable employment. It’s little things like: where can you have your mail delivered? And where’s your phone? Where are you going to sleep at night so that if someone wants to get ahold of you—[what if] you’ve got an employer wanting to get ahold of you? . . . So many things are built upon stable housing.

Speaking practically, Cunningham explains how different barriers to reentry interlock. Ex-offenders are already barred from many employment opportunities due to travel restrictions, employer-run criminal background checks, restrictions on types of employment, and so on. But how can you apply for a job without an address? Without a home, ex-offenders are left with little foundation upon which to build a stable life, so housing is important not just for housing’s sake, but as a piece in the larger puzzle of reentry. As Tony Lowery, Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Safer Foundation and who also served on the CHA Reentry Pilot Committee succinctly summarizes, “When a person is released into homelessness, their chances for successful reentry are low at best.”

For Sheryl Seiling, Director of the Housing Choice Voucher Program at the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC), where she helped implement HACC’s Reentry Pilot, the decision to support the Pilot was a personal, if somewhat fraught, one. As with others, her reasoning came down to what made the most sense practically. As she explains,

I think [about], you know . . . what’s the alternative, okay? Somebody not having a place to live, and then is that more detrimental to the community than housing somebody with a criminal background? Because like I think, I’m a single mom, my son is seventeen now. We don’t live in the greatest neighborhood. Do I want to live next door to people who have drug convictions? No, I don’t. But, I would rather them have a place to live than be homeless in the community where we live. Because while I don’t want them living next
to me, because I have a seventeen year old son, I don’t want them homeless. . . . I think a lot of people don’t think practically, and may think emotionally, and can’t get over the emotional part of it. You have to think about it practically.

On the one hand, despite her emphasis on practicality, Seiling’s words here belie a great deal of emotional investment in the question of ex-offender housing. For her, the issue is personal: it is her son, her home, her neighborhood at stake (at least in theory). However, as she articulates, she cannot justify rationally why having a criminal record should bar someone from housing. Plus, the alternative—having them live on the streets of her community—seems even less palatable, for ex-offenders and for herself. Again, the Pilot is justified because it just makes sense.

Implicit in all of these statements is a darker, yet not impractical, worry: that someone will reoffend. After all, this is what reentry really means: avoiding recidivism and staying out of prison or jail. Rachel Ramirez is a community organizer at Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and a lead organizer behind the Reentry Pilot. She explains that for a returning citizen, the Pilot could be “the difference between homelessness and . . . possibly reoffending because they’re so desperate. So it’s really—the stakes are high.” In other words, when Pilot organizers talk about reentry, they are not only talking about housing someone for the sake of giving them a house and keeping them off the streets. They are also talking about keeping them off the streets so they can avoid re-offending, and they are not wrong in doing so: it makes sense that someone without stable housing or employment—and therefore likely without steady nourishment, health care, etc—would be more likely to reoffend, perhaps out of desperation or necessity. In addition, as we saw in Chapter 2, homeless policing makes it more likely that someone living on the streets will be cited or arrested for some minor crime, like loitering, trespassing, public urination, and so on. Thus, the Pilot attempts to intervene in the homelessness-incarceration nexus whereby
homeless individuals, many of whom already have criminal records, are further criminalized and (re-)incarcerated (see Gowan 2002).

*Ripple Effects: “Build[ing] back on the neighborhood”*

In addition to helping the individual ex-offender, Smith also sees the Pilot as a way to improve urban neighborhoods. For example, when asked about the Pilot’s main goals, he says: “Bringing [ex-offenders] back into the household to be gainfully employed, providing a support for their families, their siblings, you know relatives and so forth. And to be positive in the neighborhood, to build back on the neighborhood.” Thus, Smith hopes that returning citizens will be able to contribute to their households either financially or as caretakers.

Though he does not use these terms explicitly, Smith’s statements here reflect an acknowledgment of the major disruptions to social reproduction that take place when large numbers of men are taken from urban neighborhoods. After all, incarceration removes not only a potential income earner from the household but also a son, father, or brother who could play an important role in the household as a caretaker.\(^{18}\) It is for this reason that legal scholar Donald Braman argues that the tough sentencing policies responsible for increased incarceration rates have missed their mark, “injuring the families of prisoners often as much as and sometimes more than criminal offenders themselves” (2002, 117). Similarly, sociologist Kristin Turney points out that “Even marginal men seemingly disconnected from families are embedded in kinship systems prior to incarceration, while behind bars, and after release. In addition to their roles as prisoners, incarcerated men are fathers, romantic partners, and sons, and their confinement is consequential.

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\(^{18}\) Research shows that incarceration is very expensive for families. About two-thirds of inmates are employed before their incarceration, so this source of income is lost when the person is locked up. In addition to lost income, legal fees, steep charges for phone calls to and from the prison, money sent to inmates for toiletries and services not covered by the state (such as, in some cases, doctor visits or winter clothes), and travel costs associated with visiting the inmate all place a high cost burden on relatives (Braman 2002; Braman 2007; Wagner 2014).
for them and those connected to them” (2014, 301). Thus, in the case that ex-offenders are reuniting with family in public housing, policymakers believe that the Pilot could fix this crisis of social reproduction, bringing additional income or a new caretaker into the household, who will contribute to its effective functioning. Similarly, Smith also believes that returning citizens could serve as mentors and role models to kids in the neighborhood, proving that through hard work, they have turned their lives around and that others can too. In this way, he posits that, rather than being a risk to the neighborhood, allowing formerly incarcerated individuals to move in could actually have positive spillover effects.

**Ending the Third Sentence**

At St. Leonard’s, Lynne Cunningham is used to justifying why programs like public housing should be available to ex-offenders. She explains,

> [W]hat I keep telling people is: Look, when people committed their crimes and they were found guilty, they were given a sentence: ‘X number of years incarcerated, X number of months on parole or probation.’ It did not say and ‘Oh, by the way you will be branded for life.’ That was not part of the sentence. Society has somewhat put on a third sentence that was never adjudicated. And to me, that’s my big issue about how we treat people with criminal backgrounds. . . . [P]eople should have the right to move on with their lives. . . . And, public housing, the whole subsidized housing industry has never really acknowledged that.

As policymakers, service providers, advocates, and participants involved in the Pilot will all readily explain, once people have been released from prison, they have already completed their punishment, have served their lawfully-adjudicated sentence. Once returned to society, their experience of the city should therefore not be one of extended incarceration or continued punishment (see Purser 2012), nor should they be marked for life as a result of their crimes. Thus, ending this “third sentence” is another of the Pilot’s main goals.
Like Bill Smith, Sarah Davis\(^{19}\) is another senior policy official at CHA, though she works even more closely than he does with the Reentry Pilot and its organizing committee. From a policy perspective, she explains how the Pilot attempts to reverse past mistakes by halting the practice of extended punishment:

\[\text{[P]ublic housing authorities by and large, you know, screen out versus screen in. And so this [Pilot] was a place . . . to reexamine some of those longer-term kind of policies or interpretation of policies to be able to say: Is there room to acknowledge that people have paid for their crime? Are we [at CHA] re-enforcing that notion of ‘It’s okay to continue to pay for your crime once you’re free?’}\]

For Davis, the Pilot provides an opportunity to correct past policy mistakes by not barring ex-offenders from additional employment and housing opportunities, which would constitute a form of extended punishment, of “pay[ing] for your crime once you’re free.” The fact that society has traditionally imposed so many restrictions upon the opportunities available to ex-offenders—barring them from public housing, welfare, food stamps, higher education, and (at times) voting, for example—speaks volumes about how little we trust our correctional departments to actually correct, let alone rehabilitate individuals. Thus, for Cunningham, Davis, and others involved with the Pilot who proffered similar arguments, one of the Pilot’s main goals is to ensure that returning citizens are not continually punished but instead treated as more equal members of society once they have completed their periods of incarceration and parole.

\textit{Second Chances}

In a similar vein, several individuals involved with the Pilot specifically emphasized that it aims to provide second chances for returning citizens. In other words, once someone’s sentence is completed, Pilot proponents argue that an ex-offender should be given a second chance to prove their ability to live as a law-abiding citizen and correct the error of their past ways. This rhetoric

\(^{19}\) Also a pseudonym, by request of the interviewee.
of second chances is compelling for a number of reasons, and those involved in the Pilot deploy it strategically.

First, the narrative of second chances is appealing: giving someone a second chance provides a compelling human interest story that emphasizes how individuals can be empowered to change their circumstances (irrespective of any structural constraints). Now the Executive Director of Local Initiatives Support Coalition (LISC) Chicago, Meghan Harte was Deputy Chief of Staff for Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel when the Pilot was being created. In this role, she oversaw the city’s sister agencies, including CHA, and advised on policy issues to support these agencies and ensure that their work aligned with Mayor Emanuel’s priorities. For this reason, when the CHA Reentry Pilot Committee came to the Mayor’s Office looking for support for their proposal, Harte was tasked with working with the committee and helping coordinate the different agencies at the table. Though she insists that he was immediately enthusiastic about the Pilot, Harte admits that there is some irony in this: during Emanuel’s time as a policy advisor in the Clinton administration, he was, as she puts it, responsible for “some of the harder government responses to violence, especially guns, but also access to public subsidy in the 90s.”

However, after hearing the testimony of advocates and would-be participants at a press conference held at St. Leonard’s, the Mayor was so moved that he cried publicly and declared his support for the Pilot. Harte explains that “It was hard [for the Mayor] to make that change, but the advocates gave some compelling reasons, especially anecdotal, about once people do their time, you know, that they have been rehabilitated and so they should get a second chance. And so, he believes in a second chance.” While the Mayor’s personal motivations are open to debate (see Chapter 5), there is no doubt that the public narrative of the generous state providing second

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20 The politics surrounding Mayor Emanuel’s involvement are discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5.
chances to worthy ex-offenders provides an appealing story.\textsuperscript{21} For example, while the Pilot has not received much media attention to date, this story puts a palatable spin on the Pilot for voters who may be less friendly to the idea of providing public assistance to people who have committed crimes. Thus, the Reentry Committee successfully deployed the narrative of “second chances” to sway the Mayor in their favor.

Additionally, as a policymaker, Harte emphasizes the experimental nature of the Pilot, explaining that it is meant to be a model program, potentially replicable in other areas of social policy. She says,

> The goals of the pilot program are to test the hypothesis that just because someone did something in their past doesn’t mean that they’re going to be a bad tenant going forward. Or, you know, a problem going forward. And if we can do it in housing, maybe we can expand that beyond public housing into broader housing and then even more specifically, change the whole idea around a job or whatever it is. Just because you did something a long time ago doesn’t mean you don’t get a second chance.

In this way, public housing becomes a grounds for testing a broad social hypothesis: that criminals may not be bad people just because they have done bad things. In this case, badness (or lack thereof) is measured indirectly by one’s ability to be a law-abiding, rent-paying tenant, which in turn demonstrates that an individual has reformed and is worthy of their second chance.

If it works in housing, Harte posits, it may work in other policy areas, but there is an element of doubt here: before even the public is brought on board, policymakers must be convinced through evidence that they can then use to either formalize and expand the housing pilot or mobilize this hypothesis to other policy arenas.

\textsuperscript{21} In the next chapter, I explore the logics of the Pilot in further detail, discussing how its implementation is geared around discriminating between ex-offenders to determine who is redeemed and therefore worthy of this form of public help.
Breaking the “Log Jam”

While advocates effectively deployed the narrative of second chances to garner political clout for the Pilot, positing the provision of second chances as a main goal of the Pilot ironically elicits some of its internal tensions. After all, stemming recidivism and providing second chances to help rehabilitate ex-offenders are not the express mission of public housing authorities: the mission statement of the CHA reads, “To leverage the power of affordable, decent, safe, and stable housing to help communities thrive and low-income families increase their potential for long-term economic success and a sustained high quality of life” (CHA 2016b). Of course, it can be argued that allowing ex-offenders to live in public housing is precisely one way to help low-income families—who are the most impacted by mass incarceration—to thrive. However, providing second chances as such is a problem that extends well beyond the housing authority’s scope.

Indeed, policymakers are well aware of this disjuncture. When asked about the goals of the Pilot, CHA’s Davis explains,

So the importance of [the Pilot] clearly has nothing to do with the housing authority, right? So, the main goal is that we have a really messed up criminal justice system, which, you know, has racial undergirds to it, and we can say that someone has, you know, done their time, paid for their crime, but people continue to pay for it when they re-integrate into society. And so the goal was to try to eliminate some of those barriers, housing and employment being probably the two biggest barriers. And so that was, I think, the overarching goal of why it’s important.

Davis’s explanation here is remarkable: for her, the housing pilot’s main goal is to reduce barriers for those impacted by a racist criminal justice system. On the one hand, the Pilot’s innovative nature stems from precisely the fact that policymakers like Davis are willing to test a solution to a problem that is outside their direct policy purview and which less generous or broad-thinking policy officials would likely have rejected. As an attempt to stem recidivism and
provide second chances, the Pilot actually aims to correct some of the criminal justice system’s injustices, which have not previously been conceived of in such a structural or holistic manner, despite the many institutional links between public housing and the prison system.

Smith likewise acknowledges these linkages. As he explains, “[Participants] may have been arrested for some petty crime . . . that denies them employment so then that denies them to get back into the household, to support their families, their kids and so forth. And it’s generations after generations so someone has to try to put their foot down and say ‘Well, what if we do something differently? Will the outcomes be differently? [sic]’” In this way, Smith recognizes that intergenerational incarceration creates structural disadvantage—what he calls a “log jam.” Again, rather than just providing housing, the Pilot aims to intervene in structural problems and work toward—in policy terms—new “outcomes.” In this way, while they do not adopt this academic language, policymakers hope that the Pilot will disrupt the carceral continuum.

Though Smith admits that he does not know how many Pilot participants will have lived in public housing previously (“Hopefully it’s not a big percentage,” he remarks), anecdotal evidence suggests that for at least some Pilot participants, this will not be their first stay in CHA housing. Doug McKinney is the Relapse Prevention and Housing Counselor at St. Leonard’s Ministries. An ex-offender himself, McKinney lived in St. Leonard’s transitional housing after his release. Once he moved into independent housing, St. Leonard’s hired him as a permanent staff member. Today, he screens St. Leonard’s residents for Pilot eligibility, helps them fill out their paperwork, and coaches them in advance of their CHA interviews. “[T]he majority of the people that we deal with,” he explains, “were born and raised in CHA. And so for someone that was raised, okay, on your property, and yet is not permitted to step on your property and if so, if found out, not only is he removed from the property but the very individuals [he] went to see is
evicted from the property, okay—and that could have been your grandmother!” Of the four Pilot participants interviewed for this project—Bobby Flowers, Jimmy Beaman, and John Stamps at St. Leonard’s as well as Darrell Horrace, who was screened by the Safer Foundation and has been successfully housed using a housing choice voucher—only one, Jimmy Beaman, has lived in CHA housing previously (for five years at Cabrini-Green, prior to his arrest and the demolition of that project, with his then-wife). Yet through conversations with McKinney and other service providers, it is clear that their clientele are no strangers to CHA. Further, the fact that the Reentry Pilot is also being marketed as a family reunification program signals that policymakers expect a good proportion of the participants to be returning to a CHA household.22

On the flip side, CHA residents are no strangers to the prison system. Francine Washington is the President of the Central Advisory Council (CAC)—CHA’s central resident leadership organization. A long-term public housing resident, she has served on resident councils for most of her time as a tenant, since the late 1970s.23 She is also the only CHA resident on CHA’s Board of Commissioners and has been employed by CHA at several points: first as a property manager at Stateway Gardens and then as a janitor there while she was going back to school. When asked about the creation of the Reentry Pilot, Washington comments,

We [the residents] didn’t really organize [the Pilot], but we’ve been talking about it for years. With CHA a lot of young men was . . . being taken off they parents’ lease. ‘Cause you know at that time, I’m just gonna tell it like it is: the police was—they were rogues. They would come in any time they needed to pay their condo . . . bill or their mortgage and they would find our young boys and . . . they would plant stuff on ‘em and take ‘em to jail and they’d wind up with a police and criminal record. I watched hundreds and hundreds of young men throughout the Authority got put off their lease with their mothers or got criminal records for something the police were doing.

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22 For example, on a CHA flyer advertising the Pilot to current tenants, the heading reads: “Reentry Pilot Program: Reuniting Families,” accompanied by two pictures of families with young children. See Appendix B.

23 The sixteen Local Advisory Council (LAC) presidents who serve on the CAC are unpaid for their work: they are expected to work twenty hours per month on a volunteer basis. However, as Washington describes, the job often entails significantly more time and effort: “You name it, we do it. Somebody got some shit on they shoes, we get it off. . . . We’re required to do 20 hours a month but, it seems like every day we’re on the job.” CHA pays the overhead costs of an office with an administrative assistant and provides each LAC president with a cell phone.
Washington’s recollections here are evidence of public housing’s role in the carceral continuum. Her institutional memory is deep: she tells stories of midday basketball games interrupted by police who body-searched tenants and jailed them for minor drug possessions, of police who parked next to neighborhood daycare centers and sold guns and drugs out of their patrol cars. Shaking her head, she sighs, “It was terrible, and I lived through it. My sons watched that. We used to step over dead bodies and so—” Uncharacteristically, the normally-talkative Washington stops mid-sentence.

If there is hope to be found in these bleak stories, it is that, according to Washington, she helped lead a group of residents in a lawsuit against the police department, which they won. Though she indicates that relations with the police have been better in recent years, for her, the Pilot’s major intervention is in allowing “nice, amenable” kids to move back in with their parents or grandparents. When she talks about crime, she refers mainly to minor drug possessions, describing “young kids . . . [who] probably had a bag, a nickel bag of four, five joints on them, and that’s a criminal record, okay?”

Many of these “kids” may not have ever left the property: particularly if they were imprisoned for only a short time or paroled straight from jail, Washington describes how parents may or may not have risked getting in trouble themselves by letting their children back into their homes to wash, eat, or sleep. Similarly, she says that young men may have had girlfriends on the property willing to take them in, but again, only at the girlfriends’ personal risk. Those with newly-minted criminal records would find other unofficial places to stay on the properties: as Washington describes, “sleeping in laundry rooms in the buildings, under the buildings, in the breezeways. Anywhere.” At St. Leonard’s, McKinney concurs, saying, “We’ve had quite a few individuals here sneak over into the projects.” Because CHA security did not know who they
were or that they had a criminal record, they could often get into the projects to visit friends or family or crash in someone’s apartment, but only at great risk to themselves and their hosts.

For Washington, the Pilot therefore also offers a direct benefit to current CHA residents. She describes how One Strike policies effectively punished innocent tenants, who had to choose whether to harbor convicted relatives who were already staying unofficially on the property:

“And you gonna pay your bill and see your child out there and you tellin’ me you ain’t gonna say ‘Come up here and lay in the bed and change your clothes and what have you’? Residents [are] being penalized for that?” She particularly bemoans cases in which ill or elderly residents in need of assistance with their healthcare could not have their younger family members move in to help care for them due to the criminal background restrictions. At the Safer Foundation, Tony Lowery provides similar anecdotal evidence, saying, “I just got a call from a 64-year old mom who’s trying to get her son to come be a caregiver for her. He’s somewhere else on monitor. Because she’s in CHA or in Section 8, he couldn’t parole to her.” Finally, at HACC, Sheryl Seiling explains that “[W]e want people who are on our program not to have to violate a program regulation in order to house a family member who’s made a mistake.” Thus, it is not only ex-offenders who need a new opportunity, but indeed, non-offender public housing residents who need something to change. Otherwise, policies like the One Strike Rule put undue pressure on families, who are forced to decide whether to violate a lease agreement to illegally harbor a formerly incarcerated relative. For Pilot supporters, such policies are counterproductive, hurting not only, as Washington puts it, the “kids [who] really had nowhere to go,” which in turn “made them turn to more crime,” but also the families who have been punished by extension.
Finding Home

At this point, the story becomes quite complicated. On the one hand, Washington’s testimony provides further evidence of how public housing has at times been a highly carceral space, where tenants have been systematically targeted by police and rightfully or wrongfully swept up into the carceral web. Due to the One Strike Rule, in such cases, both the tenants and their families have been penalized. How then could a program aimed at returning ex-offenders to the same public housing projects provide a way to intervene in the carceral continuum? The answer lies in the fact that, as discussed in Chapter 2, public housing is not just carceral or restorative, but can be experienced as both/and, depending on the context. While housing ex-offenders will not reform policing or criminal justice systems entirely nor provide the funding to rebuild projects and upgrade amenities there, the Pilot’s intervention comes in offering its participants some concrete resources to stem the homelessness-incarceration cycle. To explore this further, I now turn to testimony from interviewees that speaks to the profound need for these supportive resources for ex-offenders in Chicago to show how, short of reforming the entire criminal justice system or remaking public housing into a less-disciplinary space, Pilot creators hope it can create structural change by transforming how reentry is handled for returning citizens.

According to Rachel Ramirez of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, around half of the people in the homeless shelter system in Chicago have a criminal record. She references potential Pilot participants she has spoken with, including one woman who is currently living in her car while she waits for her CHA waitlist number to be called. Even for currently-housed ex-offenders like the men at St. Andrew’s Court, the Pilot offers a concrete path out of homelessness in the long-term. It offers shelter, an address (which in turn boosts chances to find
steady employment), and a refuge from mean streets. Whatever the flaws in public housing’s management, historically, these factors cannot be overlooked.

Of the three men living at St. Andrew’s Court, only Bobby Flowers has a place to go when his lease is up: his child’s mother has agreed to take him in temporarily, should it come to that. He calls this backup plan his “spare tire,” adding, “I don’t want to be in the streets. I refuse to be in the streets.” When pressed about where they would go should their leases run out before they are called off the CHA waitlist, Jimmy Beaman says, “I have no idea,” while John Stamps responds, “I’ll be living in my car.”

Furthermore, Stamps, who has a disability, directly likens the experience of homelessness to the experience of incarceration: “By being disabled, I feel as though—I mean really, I just ain’t got nowhere to go. I need a place to stay. . . . [L]iving on the street, it’s about the same as being incarcerated.” When pressed to elaborate on this, he continues, “Because the people on the street gonna treat you just as worse [sic] as the people when you incarcerated. They look down on the homeless. And when you incarcerated, they look down on you.” For Stamps, the street and the prison are thus experientially equivalent, marked by prejudice and poor treatment. While on the one hand, the Pilot attempts to stem the homelessness-incarceration nexus, his words testify to how the prison and the street are linked by more than just the cycling of bodies between those two spaces. Being homeless, for him, is a form of incarceration, whereby he is mistreated and demeaned. In his eyes, the Pilot will not only provide him with a home but, through the esteem and social opportunity that comes with that home, will also prevent him from being secondarily incarcerated on the streets of Chicago.

Additionally, while the Pilot deals with individuals, and a small number of individuals at that, Bobby Flowers identifies one way in which the Pilot will likely have positive spillover
effects that reach beyond those directly involved in the program. “It’s just not me moving and waiting on a place,” he says, continuing, “I think about other guys: they’re waiting to come over here, you know, independent living to get themselves together. So I look at it sometimes like this: I’m holding another guy up from coming in here [to St. Andrew’s Court] and getting their life together.” Jimmy Beaman nods, adding, “I agree with Bobby a hundred percent. Exactly the way I feel.” Thus, participants hope that as they are moved into CHA housing, new men in need of transitional assistance will be able to fill their spots at St. Andrew’s Court. In this way, moving ex-offenders into CHA properties not only helps those individuals and their families but could also free up space in shelters and halfway houses throughout the city—providing another way of clearing Bill Smith’s “log jam” by indirectly housing other ex-offenders.

Finally, Darrell Horrace, a Safer Foundation client and one of the first people to be housed through the Pilot, was homeless both prior to and following his incarceration. About his homelessness, Horrace explains that before being incarcerated, “I’d been homeless for a while, you know what I’m sayin’? Like I said, drug abuse and criminality that leads to homelessness. And suicide. But I haven’t gotten there yet.” While he initially stayed with his mother, who lives in private housing, upon his release from prison in 2010, he explains that due to her advanced age and the nature of their relationship, the arrangement did not last long and he moved out to a shelter. Now 61 years old, Horrace does not know how many years he has spent in prison, because, as he puts it, “I haven’t done the math on that and I really don’t want to, ‘cause uh—if it might mess with my psyche, you know?” Horrace moved into his new apartment in Rogers Park on the North Side in March 2016 and reports that so far, he likes it there. He has also found part-time employment with a trucking company outside O’Hare Airport, where he drives local routes.
Again, the Pilot’s goals exceed mere housing provision. While it may deal with one individual at a time, Horrace’s success story demonstrates the Pilot’s potential for deeper change by creating new social opportunities for returning citizens that disrupt the carceral continuum; by interrupting the homelessness-incarceration nexus of which Horrace was once a part; and (policymakers hope) by inducing positive ripple effects in receiving communities.

Conclusion: Building Hope

In addition to the very tangible benefits that the Pilot program offers, Tony Lowery at the Safer Foundation sees the Pilot as offering another, more ethereal but no less important benefit: restoring hope to communities. He explains that “[T]hese are communities that, because of mass incarceration, all hope has been stolen out of their community. . . . Because when you have a hopeless people, all bets are off, and that’s what mass incarceration and the new Jim Crow has done.” Systematic disempowerment is also part of the carceral continuum, and while many ex-offenders still were not aware of the Pilot at the time of this research, those I spoke with expressed great enthusiasm over its creation. Darrell Horrace describes the Pilot’s transformative effect on his own life, saying, “[The Pilot is] a resource you can use to get into housing and improve on yourself and your life, you know, overall. . . . It’s a wonderful resource.” Unlike other variables like recidivism, employment, income, or number of rent payments missed vs. made on time, hope cannot be quantified. However, just because it cannot be run through a regression model as part of a formal program evaluation does not diminish the importance of providing hope for this particular policy experiment. Indeed, as participants testify, restoring hope is an important policy goal in its own right (J. Beaman, B. Flowers, and J. Stamps interviews, 2016).
Overall, because the Pilot is in such early stages and because it has limited reach due to the fifty-participant cap and the many restrictions on eligibility, its effects remain to be seen. Nevertheless, the ways that policymakers, service providers, advocates, and participants conceptualize and articulate the goals for the program reveal that these stakeholders envision the Pilot as a sensible and practical solution that will correct the counterproductive One Strike policies of the past. In doing so, they hope that it will stem recidivism, restore neighborhoods, end the practice of continued punishment for ex-offenders and their relatives who are punished by extension, and provide second chances. Different stakeholders also deploy different explanations for the Pilot strategically: for example, advocates used the narrative of second chances to justify the need for the Pilot to the Mayor and his advisors. Meanwhile, for participants, the tangible need for housing is the Pilot’s foremost goal, but it is also one that they and policymakers hope will have positive ripple effects; for example, by opening up rooms in transitional housing for other ex-offenders in need. Various stakeholders also hope that the Pilot will provide evidence to support the theory that ex-offenders can be good tenants, such that the program can be expanded and shopped out around the country. Overall, though they do not use these academic terms, they envision the Pilot as a way of disrupting the carceral continuum, one person at a time. In the next chapter, I turn to the details of the Pilot’s implementation to critically analyze its logics and in doing so, consider whether it is positioned to meet these lofty goals.
Chapter 4 Logics: Governing Poverty, Governing Space

Located just a few blocks west of Union Station in an unassuming brick building, the Safer Foundation offices are quiet on the morning when I arrive to speak with Tony Lowery, Safer’s Director of Policy and Advocacy. Plastic chairs fill the lobby from end-to-end, yet there is only one other person waiting. A sign on the main desk reads, “Welcome! You are on the path back.” After a few minutes, Lowery appears and ushers me into a conference room where we discuss the Pilot. He explains that he is uniquely positioned to understand the Pilot and the issues it raises, saying, “I think I brought a different perspective to [the Pilot negotiations] because I’m a Section 8 landlord. I’m also a person with a record, so I kind of understood the process that CHA looks at—I understood the process from a landlord’s perspective as far as doing background checks and things like that.” Lowery has also worked for CHA, running drug prevention and treatment programs. “Having that understanding of the Authority,” he continues, “and understanding the importance of programming [for ex-offenders]—the biggest thing is showing that ‘rehabilitation’ is not a made-up word. Here I am a person with a criminal record, and I’m sitting right here at the table with you guys. So, showing that the image of a person with a criminal record is not the mug shot that we see on the news at night.”

This narrative—of the individual ex-offender who has turned his or her life around, who is “on the path back”—is nearly omnipresent in reentry policy and services. Indeed, Lowery is a compelling figure: engaging and talkative, he vacillates quickly between sweeping, big-picture statements and minute details of on-the-ground program work or personal recollections. As discussed in Chapter 3, the CHA Reentry Pilot’s official goal is to test the theory that stable, affordable housing will provide the necessary pre-conditions for successful reentry and thus prevent recidivism. In this chapter, I analyze the Pilot’s eligibility criteria and other details of its
implementation to reveal how it relies upon exactly the types of logics of individual self-
 improvement that Lowery embodies. However compelling, this ideological framework may
 ultimately limit the Pilot’s ability to meet its goals, since narratives like Lowery’s, which hinge
 upon individual outcomes, often obscure structural explanations for crime and poverty—two
 issues the Pilot purports to address.

_Fifty-Person Cap_
To understand the logics guiding the Reentry Pilot, we must first understand its logistics. First, in
discussions to create the Pilot program, organizers agreed to limit the number of participants to
fifty within a two-year period. But why fifty? As the CHA’s Sarah Davis explains, while this
number is somewhat arbitrary, the fact that a cap exists at all is evidence of the CHA’s initial
wariness to take on the project. While she supports the Pilot, she says that policy officials who
preceded her involvement in the Pilot negotiations were more reticent and pushed for the cap as a
kind of compromise. She says, “[W]hat I hope that fifty does is have us change our policies such
that we don’t need a special program for [ex-offenders].” Meanwhile, Lowery explains that Pilot
organizers initially asked for a two-hundred-person-limit but lowered the number for practical
reasons (and by CHA request) when there were only three people initially signed up. However,
he expresses a similar logic for the cap, saying, “[Once we get to fifty people], we’re gonna open
the door, we’re gonna be able to provide additional opportunities.”

For a housing authority accustomed to barring anyone with a record, the fifty-person cap
thus provides a limited way to test whether ex-offenders are capable of being good tenants and
whether they will experience improved outcomes compared to ex-offenders not included in the
Pilot. What this means in practice is that the fifty individuals involved in the program will face
quite a bit of pressure and scrutiny as the program’s test subjects: if they do not succeed according to policymakers’ criteria, the program may not provide sufficient evidence for the CHA to change its policies. CHA’s Bill Smith says that the Pilot is “probably not a numbers game,” and that it will be judged instead by “the aftermath”: “Where are [participants] at in the next five to ten years? Are they still gainfully employed? Did they buy a house? Did they get out of public housing [or] assisted housing? Are their kids going to college?” Of course, the same questions could be asked of non-offender public housing residents, and public housing’s record on these scores is mixed at best.24 The official program evaluation that will be performed by researchers at Chicago State University will likely attempt to consider social outcomes, yet it is unlikely that the study will cover a long enough period of time to answer the questions Smith is asking. In this sense, the questions he is interested in represent lofty goals for the program, which can only be judged in the long term—likely by a future generation of policymakers. Nevertheless, what happens with these first fifty participants means everything for whether this Pilot will succeed and be institutionalized in Chicago or perhaps even be replicated in other cities.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

In addition to the fifty-person cap, a set of specific eligibility criteria determine who may or may not participate in the Pilot. For example, ex-offenders must have completed a minimum of one year in a reentry program with the Safer Foundation or St. Leonard’s Ministries prior to joining

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24 As Susan Popkin writes, “For decades, high-rise public housing developments like Cabrini-Green and the Robert Taylor Homes dominated Chicago’s landscape and became shorthand for the failures of social welfare policy” (2013, 1). Indeed, widespread acknowledgement of public housing’s failure to be transitional housing served as the basis for launching the CHA’s Plan for Transformation in 2010, which marked Chicago’s turn toward mixed-income housing strategies. See also Hunt 2009 for a fuller explanation of how public housing projects in Chicago have failed to promote social mobility.
the Pilot (CHA 2014b, 1). In addition to proving that the ex-offender has received some supportive and transitional services, this also means that ex-offenders cannot be paroled to public housing or reunited with a family member while living with an ankle monitor, which is against CHA policy (F. Washington interview, July 20, 2016). Additionally, participants must be drug free, must be current on their rent (if applicable), and must meet CHA’s work requirement: 20 hours per week of paid work, attending school, volunteering, or a combination of the three (CCH; CHA 2014b, 1).

*Work Requirement*

Typically, CHA’s work requirement applies only to public housing residents and not to those using a housing choice voucher (HCV). However, Sarah Davis explains that CHA decided to extend the requirement to voucher-users in the Pilot because “We didn’t want there to be a difference [in] treatment if [participants] were in HCV or [public housing].” “Treatment” is significant here in two senses of the word: First, policymakers may not want pilot participants to be treated differently in an experiential sense, so they instead subject them to the exact same slate of requirements no matter what type of household they are moving into. Second, because this is an official policy experiment, Davis may mean that CHA does not want participants in different types of housing to receive a different treatment; in other words, policymakers may be trying to reduce variables so that when a formal program evaluation is completed, there will be fewer discrepancies to control for between different groups of participants. In this experimental design, the treatment being given is not only housing but also the set of rules and regulations attached to that housing.
In addition to maintaining equal treatment, however defined, Davis provides a second reason for extending the work requirement. She explains, “And the other thing is that the service providers really promote employment and jobs, and we didn’t want to do anything that reinforced anything different. Not to say that people in our housing choice voucher program don’t work, but we wanted to make sure that if someone was joining a household, it was expected for them to work, because we also really wanted to promote the idea [that] this really should be transitional.” Similarly, when asked about the work requirement, Bill Smith echoes Davis’s statements, saying that a Pilot participant “[has] got to be serious. . . . [We’re] trying to get people away from it being an entitlement. It’s not an entitlement, okay? Subsidy, public housing is not an entitlement program so what [we’re] trying to get to is, back in 1937 when the whole Housing Act was created, it [was] transitional housing.” For Smith, working demonstrates “serious[ness],” implying a character judgment about participants: Pilot participants are to be productive members of society, not freeloaders looking for a handout.

Davis and Smith’s emphasis that CHA housing is meant to be transitional is representative of prevailing attitudes today: that public housing should be a temporary, rather than a permanent form of assistance that is not guaranteed but earned. Yet this assumption overlooks structural barriers, as well as decades of evidence to the contrary. For example, as Skobba and Goetz (2013) show, mobility decisions for low-income urbanites cannot be understood as straightforward “choices” but rather are subject to a whole host of social and economic constraints. In particular, they stress the importance of informal social networks that often tie families to certain community areas within the city. Davis and Smith’s arguments also presume a ready supply of well-paying jobs for low-income Chicagoans that will help lift them out of poverty—an assumption that is far from guaranteed.
Furthermore, because the work requirement is more extensive for ex-offenders than the general population, this implies that working is seen as even more important for ex-offenders than for everyone else. Smith adds, “[We’ve] gotta have some type of requirement so they can have some fulfillment. If [we] don’t, it’s gonna be the same old thing: We’re gonna concentrate poverty, income levels are not gonna increase. . . . Everyone’s gonna be in the same boat: no one’s working, no one’s trying to advance, and no one’s trying to uplift and improve the community.” Work, according to Smith, brings “fulfillment,” yet the irony of this is that work is much harder to find for ex-offenders, who—as we saw in Chapter 2—are systematically discriminated against in the job market. Similarly, ex-offenders also face discrimination in the education system (see CCA 2015). For policy officials, working proves individual “serious[ness]” and promises large-scale change for communities. However, by placing the onus on the individual, officials like Davis and Smith overlook the many structural barriers that ex-offenders continue to face. In this way, they may be asking potential participants to meet an impossible standard.

What Kind of Criminal?

So far, to be eligible for the Reentry Pilot, ex-offenders must be drug free, current on their rent, and must prove that they will meet the CHA work requirement. In addition to these eligibility criteria, there are also a number of ineligibility criteria. In particular, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Pilot participants with the following convictions are ineligible for the Pilot: “murder, attempted murder, terrorism, or any of the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) mandatory criminal background exclusions including sex offenses and criminal drug activity resulting in eviction” (CHA 2014b, 1). While more narrow than HUD’s exclusion list, the Pilot
limits eligibility to non-violent (or at least not extremely violent) offenders and those who committed drug crimes not on federally subsidized property.

Defining Family

Potential Pilot participants are slated into one of two tracks: “Track 1” participants must have a CHA waitlist number and will move into their own public housing unit or will be given a housing choice voucher. If they meet the program requirements at the time that their waitlist number is called, they will be issued a certificate of completion of reentry services from a service provider, called for an intake interview, and then placed in a unit or given a voucher. “Track 2” participants, meanwhile, are those reuniting with family. These individuals do not have to be on the waitlist, though they must identify a family member whose household they can join, in addition to meeting the general eligibility requirements.

To qualify for the Pilot, Track 2 participants must identify a “spouse, parent, grandparent, sibling or adult child” currently living in CHA housing with whom they can reunite (CHA 2014b, 1). Indeed, these are the only familial relationships that CHA will recognize: a participant may not, for example, move in with someone they do not have a legal relationship with, such as a friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend. Nor may they move in with a more distant relative like a cousin, nephew, niece, or in-law. On the one hand, CHA’s Sarah Davis explains how this actually comprises a very flexible interpretation of “reunification”: “[T]he language of ‘reuniting’ . . . implies that someone used to live with someone and you know, they were in jail or prison and now they’re coming back to reunify or reunite. But it’s a more liberal interpretation of just joining a household. They may never have lived there [previously].” On the other hand,
the strict interpretation of “family” limits this flexibility: as Davis explains, “We wanted to have a familial relationship that was pretty contained.”

Though the Pilot was just beginning to be marketed seriously by the time this research was conducted, the limited definition of family was already significantly curtailing the numbers of potential participants. As Davis explains, “What I know anecdotally from talking to the Coalition [for the Homeless] . . . is it seems that a lot of the calls they’ve received [about the Pilot] have been from women inquiring about whether their boyfriends could join the house. And you know, without any type of legal relationship we would say ‘no.’ So, if they wanted to get married and join a house, then we would mitigate their background.” In this way, the CHA limits who counts as a family member and makes a prescriptive judgment that only those with a legal relationship are allowed to join or reunify a household, regardless of need. In doing so, they honor certain relationships with recognition, while implicitly devaluing others.

According to Davis, maintaining a narrow definition of “family” is not unique to the Pilot but rather is in line with other CHA programs. However, she admits that “[T]he counter-argument to that [narrowness] is really about housing,” explaining how a “six degrees of separation” approach might succeed in housing more ex-offenders more quickly. “But in our regular housing programs,” she says, “a boyfriend’s not allowed to live with somebody. There needs to be a status in that relationship of domestic partnership or marriage. We don’t allow adult children to move in with their family in the best of circumstances, right? So [during the Pilot negotiations] we felt like we were bending a lot based on our traditional program, but to the advocates [our definition of family] was still narrow.” In this sense, maintaining the limited definition of family for the Pilot ensures that participants are not being treated differently from

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25 According to the 2004 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities (most recent data available), just 26.3% of inmates in the US are married (NACJD 2004).
regular tenants, so there can be no accusation that ex-offenders are getting better treatment than non-offenders—an accusation that the CHA works hard to avoid.

When questioned about the logic of restricting “family” to a narrow set of legally-approved relationships, Davis admits some uncertainty. “My understanding,” she says, “is that this [definition of family] is HUD regulation in terms of, you know, way back when, we looked at some of the arguments about the decline of public housing [as happening] because they actually made all the unmarried men move out, who were actually working and bringing money in and so that has been linked to the decline of public housing in terms of being more like workforce housing.” In fact, HUD does not maintain a strict definition of “family,” instead leaving it up to local public housing authorities to determine the limits. According to the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, the HUD definition of family “includes, but is not limited to, the following, regardless of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status: a single person [or] . . . a group of persons residing together,” which may or may not include children (Government Publishing Office 2016). In fact, this is the definition cited by CHA in the eligibility requirements for their regular HCV and public housing programs. Davis is right that many CHA programs operate on a more restrictive basis, but there is no official policy guiding this narrowness. Legally speaking, such additional restrictions are unnecessary.

Finally, policy officials espouse moralistic beliefs about the importance of family unity, based around the Pilot’s narrow definition of family. As Meghan Harte, who represented the Mayor’s Office in the Pilot negotiations, describes,

The Pilot is focused on reunifying folks—families. So, that’s the thing. Trying to build back the family. In many cases, in public housing, it’s single women-led households with kids, and so—and, you know, as we all know, most of the folks with criminal backgrounds are men and so the real idea of trying to reunify a family was, that’s where we needed to get. So it wasn’t single individuals gaining access to housing, it was really supporting the families that live in public housing today and what would be best for them.
Though not one of the official goals as discussed in Chapter 3, one of the Pilot’s implicit goals, according to both Davis and Harte, is to reunify families—but only certain kinds of families. As Harte explains, policymakers view the Pilot as a way to reunite heterosexual couples with young children, to solve what is seen as the problem of “single women-led households with kids.” Here, Harte draws on popular stereotypes of who lives in public housing as well as who benefits from public assistance. Like most stereotypes, this one contains a grain of truth: research shows that in neighborhoods where many men are incarcerated, most women are on welfare (Wacquant 2001, 97; see also Desmond 2012). However, it is not policymakers’ job to judge families, nor to enforce marriage, but rather to provide housing to those in need. In this way, CHA’s narrow definition of family, based around value-laden assumptions about ideal household composition, may limit the Pilot’s success by eliminating a number of prospective participants who do not meet the specific familial relationship criteria.26

“It’s Not for Everyone”: Screening for Moral Worthiness

In addition to objective measures of eligibility—negative drug tests, completion of one year of reentry services, compliance with the CHA work requirement, and proven legal/family relationship (if reunifying)—Pilot participants are also judged along more subjective lines. For example, CHA’s program description for the Pilot reads, “CHA believes that the stable, affordable housing it offers can be a springboard for residents, including the ex-offenders in this demonstration, who are committed to improving their lives” (CHA 2014b, 1, emphasis added).

26 Indeed, Rachel Ramirez admits that these restrictions are problematic. In a November 2016 panel presentation about public housing and reentry, she called the family regulations “exclusive,” commenting that “There’s just realities of people’s lives that are not adequately addressed right now in public housing authority policies. . . . If you want to help families reunify, it’s not going to look necessarily like the traditional family unit, nor should it” (Trinity Church Wall Street, 2016, 2:49:30). The family policies were yet another concession to the status quo that Ramirez and other Pilot organizers had to make to get the Pilot approved.
Similarly on the “Service Provider Cheat Sheet” provided by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless to St. Leonard’s and the Safer Foundation, organizers specify that “The CHA Reentry Pilot is only for people who have turned their lives around” (CCH 1, emphasis in the original). In other words, Pilot organizers believe the program will only succeed if its participants are committed to self-improvement. But how can these traits be judged?

CHA has provided St. Leonard’s and the Safer Foundation with a required form for anyone applying to participate in the Pilot, entitled “Description of Reentry Applicant’s Efforts” (see CHAb/Appendix D). Open-ended questions on the form include:

Describe the applicant’s reentry efforts prior to the release from prison: Examples include, no history of discipline, having a prison work assignment, participating in an academic program, participating in vocational training, participating in treatment for mental health or addiction recovery. If the facility in which they were incarcerated had limited programs available, please make note of this.

Describe the applicant’s participation in aftercare services: Examples include continuation of services with service provider; making wise decisions about family and friend relationships; complying with community supervision requirements (if applicable); participating in community events and forums, including reentry and expungement summits.

Through these questions, CHA officials aim to judge the Pilot applicant’s record in terms of not only what they have done but how they have done it. By inquiring about the applicant’s participation in reentry efforts prior to release as well as aftercare services, CHA seeks evidence that the individual has sought out help, thus proving self-motivation and work ethic. However, CHA is equally interested in the person’s attitude in undertaking these activities, inquiring about whether the individual has a history of discipline, whether they “mak[e] wise decisions,” and whether they “comply” and “participat[e].”

Similarly, one of the last questions on the “Description of Reentry Applicant’s Efforts” form asks the service provider to “Describe the applicant’s support network: Examples include
close family and friend relationships, mentoring and sponsorship activities, volunteerism, and faith-based support, and any other relevant information.” As with all of these questions, this prompt appears reasonable on the surface: it seems a good idea to make sure that someone released from prison within the last few years has a support network. However, asking such questions has problematic implications for how an individual might be judged: What if the person is not religious or does not participate in volunteer activities? Similarly, what if the individual does not have close family relationships (making the need for housing assistance even greater)? Demonstrating close friend and family relationships or community engagement (however defined) are not requirements to live in CHA housing, so why judge an ex-offender according to these additional measures? Implied in such questions is the assumption, for example, that someone involved in a sponsorship program or church group is more worthy to participate in the Pilot than someone who is not. Ultimately, as will be discussed in more detail later on, such guidelines are meant as much to protect the housing authority and its partners from scandal, as they are to help the ex-offender.

Once Pilot participants have been identified, each person must also complete an interview with CHA staff. Doug McKinney of St. Leonard’s describes the interviews as consisting of “primarily questions that relate to [the individual’s] background, but it’s also to get a feel of [their] attitude.” Similarly, Bill Smith of CHA explains that “So-called criminals need . . . to have some type of positive awareness that they can be a part of the community in a positive way.” Thus, throughout the application and intake process, the CHA aims to discern not just objective measures of an individual’s progress but also subjective judgments about their attitude and outlook.
Presenting mitigating circumstances is another way ex-offenders can try to prove to housing authority staff that they have “turned their lives around,” not by arguing that their crime was justified but by being open about the circumstances around which they committed their crime. At the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC), Sheryl Seiling explains that when a potential Pilot participant presents their mitigating circumstances during their interview, they must also be vouched for by a third party: “Somebody ha[s] to step up and say something on their behalf. Because I [as a participant] couldn’t just come in to you and say ‘I swear I haven’t done any drugs since then and I’m not dealing drugs’—you know, you’ve gotta have something that’s gonna support that.” Seiling explains that the third party could be a service provider, but it could also be a priest, social worker, doctor, or similar representative. Ex-offenders being screened for Pilot eligibility have already been tried, punished, and paroled. Yet, in these intake interviews, they must prove yet again that they are no longer committing crimes and are therefore worthy of public assistance. Indeed, they are not to be trusted: a reputable source must verify their story.

Ultimately, making such subjective, value-laden, and character-based judgments functions as another way for policy officials to discipline the poor and continue to discipline ex-offenders who have already served their sentence. When a middle-class American applies for a home, they need not provide information about whether they “make wise decisions about family and friend relationships,” for example. Through intake forms and interviews, the CHA allows itself the flexibility to screen out any applicants deemed unworthy along a whole host of subjective measures, even if they otherwise meet the Pilot’s stated eligibility criteria.

So why are policymakers going to such lengths to judge individual character? In addition to protecting the CHA by choosing only participants who can compellingly demonstrate that they
have “turned their lives around” (and therefore are less likely to reoffend—or so we are to assume), organizers offer a few strategic justifications for including these types of evaluations in the Pilot. Tony Lowery at the Safer Foundation explains that implementing such screening procedures helped convince CHA officials to take on the project when the Pilot was first being negotiated. As he puts it, the Pilot is “not for everyone. It’s for people who have an exemplary record of accomplishment in programs with partner organizations. . . . It’s not for everyone.” By adopting this viewpoint, service providers primarily screen out rather than screen in. According to Lowery, adopting this stance was necessary in convincing CHA staff to support the Pilot.

Additionally, service providers want their clients to be housed, but they also have an incentive to be discriminating in selecting applicants for the Pilot: their organizational reputations are on the line. As Rachel Ramirez at Chicago Coalition for the Homeless explains, “The [service provider] agencies have a combined one hundred years of serving returning citizens, right? And so, if they recommend someone to you, and they say they are confident that this person has changed their life, [that] they’re going to be a good tenant, you can trust that.” Similarly, Lowery explains that as a service provider, his primary responsibility “is to help people facilitate that process [of reentry] but also make sure that organizationally we don’t get drawn into an embarrassing situation. . . . I can be a pretty good judge of character and commitment, so the biggest thing I think is to make sure that we can identify people who have turned their lives around, and can be model citizens and can be successful participants. Once you show success, it opens up the doors for additional success.” Ironically, while the application process screens for individual character, if a participant reoffends while living in CHA housing, this is seen as a black mark on the service provider who vouched for them, as well as the
individual. Thus, responsibility for the program’s success, which hinges on individual actions, is placed on the shoulders of participating agencies as well as of ex-offenders themselves.

While these screening procedures are certainly disciplinary, there is at least one argument for not dismissing them outright: part of what the Pilot intends to counter is the practice of judging ex-offenders according to blanket, objective criteria. Indeed, this is a practice that ex-offenders themselves resist. As Darrell Horrace, a Pilot participant, explains, public housing regimes could use “a little more flexibility. . . . Really each individual case should be judged on its own merits. I don’t really know why these policies exclude people with backgrounds [from public housing], because it’s like, yeah, I’ve got a background, but it’s all non-violent, you know? I’m no threat to anybody’s personage.” Thus, if the CHA screenings and evaluations remain paternalistic, it can at least be argued that this process allows for more flexibility than past policies. Like many aspects of the Pilot program, the victory here is small and tempered: potential candidates could be screened out based upon the whim of a particular interviewer, and they must conform to values-laden ideals of social respectability to qualify.

*Monitoring and Follow-Up*

As described in a Chicago Coalition for the Homeless “Service Provider Cheat Sheet,” to qualify for the Reentry Pilot, participants must also be willing to comply with “weekly contacts from the service provider for the first 90 days, monthly contacts after 90 days; monthly in-home visits from the service provider for the first 90 days, quarterly in-home visits after 90 days; monthly in-home visits from a CHA Family Works representative; any drug testing deemed clinically necessary by the service provider; any external services identified as required for continued engagement in the CHA Reentry Pilot Program” (CCH/Appendix C). In other words, Pilot
participants are subject to regular in-home and out-of-home check-ins with their service provider as well as other CHA agents and, depending on need, ongoing drug tests or other open-ended services. For policymakers, the intent behind this requirement may well be supportive, yet for ex-offenders who have already served their sentence, its effect may be disciplinary—another way to continually intervene in their lives and potentially, look for signs of rule-breaking or disorder that could result in their eviction.

Pilot organizers describe monitoring and follow-up services as a positive, flexible, and politically necessary tool. For example, Rachel Ramirez describes how despite the requirement of follow-up services for two full years, the services themselves are actually quite flexible and can be tailored to the individual. She says, “The service provider that recommends someone already has a good relationship with this person. They know them, that’s why they recommended them. And so [the idea is] for them to be able to continue to be a resource for the person.” Services consist of “whatever the person needs. It’s like a contact to say, ‘How are things going?’ If the person has a history of drug use, like, ‘How are you doing with that?’ You know, kind of keeping tabs on somebody’s recovery, continuing to offer them support.” In this way, the service providers not only vouch for someone upon admission but also provide a source of troubleshooting if an issue arises between the tenant and CHA down the road. Ramirez explains, “I think from CHA’s perspective . . . if they are the ones alerted to some issue, they could say to the property manager or [who]ever, ‘You need to get in touch with St. Leonard’s, or you need to get in touch with Safer because they can intervene and help out’.” By providing customized services on an individual basis, Pilot organizers believe the program will be successful. Again, because they are responsible for providing continued reentry services, the service providers are made partially responsible for this success and continue to vouch for the tenant as time goes on.
At HACC, where Reentry Pilot participants similarly require follow-up from service providers, Sheryl Seiling espouses a similar view, saying, “We felt like we needed to make sure that once somebody got stably housed, that they were on the right track. You know because the last thing you’d really want to do is house somebody and then forget about them. . . . Particularly if they had a background and were homeless [previously], that’s a huge adjustment for people, so there’s got to be somebody working with them and checking on their progress.” Like the CHA Pilot, HACC’s follow-up services are tailored to the individual, as determined by the service provider, though HACC requires only eighteen months of follow-up services, as compared to CHA’s two years. As Seiling describes, continuous follow-up with service providers is seen as a way to ease the ongoing transitions faced by ex-offenders, particularly if they have been homeless or living in transitional housing.

As President of the Central Advisory Council, Francine Washington not only supports the monitoring requirements but also views them as fundamental to the success of the Pilot itself. When asked about what factors might limit the Pilot’s success, Washington cites “the follow-up and the follow-through on the social services once they come back. Sometimes people in the beginning they start up okay and then they get real lax.” She explains that “[Participants] need somebody to monitor them, make sure they’re going to work, going to school. Because they got to be working or in school or doing something.” In this way, she says that Pilot participants are like every other CHA resident, subject to lease compliance procedures and work requirements. Like Seiling, Washington believes that it is only through continuous monitoring and support that ex-offenders will stay diligently on the path to self-improvement. Her words imply that if not kept busy through work or school and not regularly monitored, ex-offenders will regress into old
habits. As in many of these statements, Washington implies here that criminality is a personal and individual character trait, yet one that can be mitigated through diligent follow-up.

Indeed, for many men like Darrell Horrace, agreeing to ongoing monitoring is nothing new. One of the first Pilot participants, Horrace is a former alcoholic, so he is subject to regular sobriety checks (he has been sober since his most recent incarceration in 2005; he was released in 2010). “They’s [sic] constantly checkin’ to make sure guys [are] on the up and up,” he explains, adding that “[F]or a lot of us, you know, drugs, criminality—those kinds of things kind of run hand in hand. So sobriety is key to any situation, and they monitor that. They also monitor to make sure that you’re on top of yourself in reference to your rent, personal health issues, mental health issues, you know. They basically cover all the bases.” Someone from the Safer Foundation checks in with Horrace on a monthly basis, which he sees as useful: “It’s helpful to have somebody watchin’ out for you, regardless of what your age is or your experience. It helps to have a motivator, you know, kicking you in the butt and saying, ‘keep going,’ ‘keep going,’ you know?” Thus, Horrace does not find the check-ins overly onerous.

TENSIONS

Individual Living

However, not everyone feels so positively as Horrace about the Pilot’s more invasive program requirements. Indeed, some of these requirements signal tensions inherent in the Pilot design. For example, after years of incarceration and at least one year of reentry services, some potential participants have been swayed away from the Pilot, seeing its monitoring requirements as an extended form of discipline, if not punishment. At St. Leonard’s, Lynne Cunningham mentions one man who meets the eligibility criteria for the Pilot but has elected not to apply: “[H]e doesn’t
know whether or not he even wants it,” she explains. “[He’s a] very independent young man, really ready to move on to his own [place]. [The question is] whether or not he wants to continue to be identified [as part of a program].” For some men, even being tracked as part of a Pilot is a lot to ask, let alone continuous monitoring and participation in follow-up services.

Rachel Ramirez of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless reports similar concerns about the program requirements. As she explains,

I think possibly one significant thing [that could limit the Pilot’s success] could just be that . . . we’re asking too much of people. . . . [P]eople, you know, they’re like “What do you mean I have to do follow-up services for two years? Like, why can’t I be treated like a regular resident?” So it’s a tension for us on the [Reentry Pilot] Committee, because we also want people [in the Pilot] to be treated like normal people. That’s the whole point. Let people live in CHA like everyone else, right? Let ex-offenders live in CHA.

Indeed, Ramirez admits that there has already been some resistance to the program rules, adding, “I mean I think people are like, ‘well, I just want to live independently’.” Again, for individuals who have been in prison, and then on parole, and who have already completed at least one year of reentry services, some may feel understandably resistant to being tracked as part of another system for two more years, if not longer. As Ramirez indicates, this comprises a fundamental source of tension in a Pilot aimed at leveling the playing field for ex-offenders. If the goal is to treat ex-offenders the same as regular CHA residents, by extending them equal opportunities to access public housing, then these rules could present a limiting factor. Although not the only reason for the Pilot’s slow start, the fact that potential participants are opting out of the Pilot due to the program requirements may have exacerbated its low enrollment to date.

**Guinea Pigs**

To overcome this obstacle, Ramirez describes how she justifies the program requirements to potential participants:
[O]ne part of this [Pilot] that I’ve really enjoyed is talking to people about [the program requirements] because it’s like, “Well, if you don’t want to do that, you don’t have to do that. Like, you are not obligated to be part of the Pilot program. But the reason it’s a pilot program is because there are going to be thousands of people who come after you who need the same type of help that you need now. And this Pilot is not perfect. I hate that we have to ask you to fulfill more requirements than what you’ve already done, right? But, we are trying to open the door. And do you believe that that is a worthy cause?” And people generally respond very positively, you know, they’re like “You know what? I can see that.” They are well aware of the prejudices people have, right? And we’ll get to a point where people are like “Okay, I can see that.” If something happens, right, with any one of the Pilot program participants, the whole thing could be shut down. And kind of, I think appealing to people’s sense of the bigger picture like, “Okay I see what’s happening here.”

By recruiting participants as not just participants but test subjects who, along with the Pilot organizers, are at least partially responsible for the Pilot’s success, Ramirez says she has succeeded at convincing otherwise-reticent ex-offenders to join the program. She reports that educating ex-offenders about their responsibility as role models gives them a higher purpose, so they see themselves as “open[ing] the door” for a “worthy cause.” At St. Leonard’s, Doug McKinney uses a similar strategy: “We [sit] with the individuals and see who would be a good candidate because, like I explain to the guys, for you to be given the opportunity to possess housing with the CHA, you’re a guinea pig. And the reason for that is because only you can determine if the individual coming behind you can get in. So that covers everything from behavior, attitude, mannerisms, the works.”

Again, service providers select only the candidates deemed most worthy, who are then supposed to provide an example of individual success and in doing so, prove that ex-offenders should not be discriminated against as a class. By screening eligible participants, the CHA and service providers seemingly seek to weed out reformed, good participants from potentially bad ones. Their responsibility is then to ensure that these individuals stay on the straight-and-narrow through continuous monitoring. While there may be practical reasons for doing so, these logics
reinforce the idea that crime is an inherent trait, while obscuring larger, structural forces. Decisions of who to house are balanced with concerns from CHA and the service providers about their own reputations, should someone involved in the Pilot commit a crime.

Indeed, Tony Lowery of the Safer Foundation says that it would take only one mistake to derail the Pilot. He describes how “In the private conversation that we had with [Mayor Emanuel], he was saying, ‘You know, we’ve gotta be sure, we’ve gotta get good people, ‘cause one mistake, you know, they’ll eat us up’.” Thus, ensuring that residents will not reoffend matters not just to protect other public housing residents but also to protect the Pilot organizers—and particularly the CHA—from public scandal. Similarly, Lowery describes the fears of some policymakers at CHA during initial negotiations, explaining, “[One of the staff members at CHA] and I . . . were sitting at the table and her [question] was, ‘Well, what if we have someone who comes through your program and then they commit a double-murder?’ I said, ‘Oh wow, the old double-murder, huh?’ And so I said, ‘Well, that’s why we’re painstakingly identifying people without propensity to commit these crimes.’” While he explains that most crimes are committed by people who do not have a prior criminal record and that only four percent of crimes are violent in nature, Lowery does admit, however, that, “We can’t say [for sure] if [someone] might commit a double murder.” The service providers, he says, “are national experts in doing this and in identifying people who are ready for success.” Again, the onus is on the service provider to identify only the most worthy among eligible candidates and to help ensure, through follow-up and monitoring, that the individual will not commit another crime.
CONCLUSION: GOVERNING POVERTY, GOVERNING SPACE

The CHA’s Reentry Pilot is designed for fifty people who have completed one year of reentry services, are current on their rent, are drug free, have committed mainly non-violent crimes not on federally-subsidized property, can meet the CHA work requirement, have legally-defined family members they can move in with (if in Track 2), and are willing to comply with continuous monitoring and follow-up services for an additional two years. Beyond that, service providers are asked to vouch for the quality of Pilot participants’ character, despite the fact that they have long since been tried for their crimes and served their sentences, thus reinforcing the idea that there are “good people” and “bad people” (or in this case, “good criminals” and “bad criminals”). Through application forms and intake interviews, participants are screened along subjective, values-laden criteria meant to determine whether the person has a good attitude, has demonstrated good behavior in reentry programs, and has developed strong social networks—to name a few examples. These character judgments are highly moralistic and rely largely upon dominant ideals of social respectability, leaving much discretion to CHA staff to ultimately determine the individuals’ worthiness for public assistance. Criminality is seen as a personal trait, if not necessarily an intrinsic or immutable one: bad people can “turn their lives around,” but they must prove that they have done so.

Additionally, the work requirement and narrow definition of family both demonstrate how Pilot participants are asked to conform to dominant social norms: participants are to be upstanding citizens—workers, no less—who contribute to society and serve as role models for the neighborhood. They are imagined by policymakers primarily as young fathers who will reunite with their wives and children to form the perceived ideal of the nuclear family. By mandating work and restricting the definition of family, CHA screens out ex-offenders who may
not be able to find work—by virtue of the economy or due to the many barriers to employment faced by those with a criminal record—as well as those who do not have state-approved familial relationships with those in public housing but could nevertheless stand to benefit (perhaps especially so) from this form of public assistance.

Overall, by placing emphasis on individual character traits and actions, the logics and discourses behind the Pilot shift attention away from oppressive systems and structural constraints. In this way, the Pilot serves primarily as a way to continually govern the poor and their access to particular spaces. As George Lipsitz (2016, 129) writes, “Housing insecurity is a personal problem, but it has structural causes.” If policymakers continually fail to recognize this, they risk replicating those very structures. However well-meaning they may be, policymakers may hinder the program’s potential for success: the Pilot purports to create structural change for ex-offenders as a class, yet its organizers focus almost exclusively on individual traits and outcomes, where even one person’s mistake could jeopardize the entire program. By continuing to exclude wide swaths of the ex-offender population, as well as subjecting participants to continued discipline via monitoring, the Pilot risks undermining its own objectives of inclusion and equal opportunity for returning citizens—people who, according to the spatial metaphor in the Safer Foundation lobby, are “on the path back.”
Chapter 5 Challenges: Politics in the City

So far, this project has examined how policymakers, CHA residents, advocates, and service providers variously envision the goals of the CHA Reentry Pilot. It has also analyzed the logics behind the Pilot’s implementation. This chapter, then, examines some of the challenges facing the Pilot. First, throughout the process of getting the Pilot approved, organizers had to navigate a complex political landscape in Chicago. From the outset, organizers had to seek support from those in power, particularly the Mayor. Even today, with the Pilot in its early stages (and off to a very slow start), political debates continue to influence the Pilot and threaten its progress. To maintain the Pilot’s viability, organizers must carefully balance the interests of different stakeholders. At the same time, the Pilot’s political nature leaves it vulnerable to shifting political tides.

Second, this chapter examines some of the reasons for the Pilot’s slow start. Though in some ways the causes for delays are minor—logistical, even—they signal larger problems that could undermine the Pilot’s success, or the success of similar projects that bridge multiple policy arenas. For example, the Pilot suffers from some lack of communication and coordination between the groups responsible. By pointing this out, I do not mean to place blame on already-busy, hard-working, and well-intentioned staff at CHA and the other coordinating organizations but rather to point to larger, structural flaws in our urban policy systems. As an innovative Pilot that, as we have seen, acknowledges and seeks to transform the ways in which the spatial systems of public housing and criminal justice interlock, the Pilot suffers from a lack of concordant policy architecture. Ultimately, overcoming the carceral continuum will require more flexible policy continuums than our current institutions allow.
Proposing the Pilot

As discussed in previous chapters, the CHA Reentry Pilot is the result of an organized effort between a network of groups, most prominently: Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH), the CHA residents’ Central Advisory Council (CAC), St. Leonard’s Ministries, the Safer Foundation, and the Mayor’s Office. Additionally, in different years, the Reentry Committee also had representatives from Lutheran Social Services, the Illinois Department of Corrections, the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, the Legal Assistance Foundation, and a few other Chicago-area non-profit groups who helped draft and negotiate the Pilot proposal. By most accounts, CCH acted as the main coordinating agency for drafting the proposal and organizing the Pilot, though as CAC President Francine Washington insists, residents had been pushing CHA for such a program for years. As she describes, “[CCH] helped push the issue. [All of these groups will] say they took the lead, but we [residents] have been talking about this for years. . . . We would come to the commissioners’ meetings, the town halls . . . trying to get the One Strike [Rule] moved off the case.” Washington expresses some frustration with advocacy groups like CCH, saying, “A lot of organizations meet with you, they pick your brain, and they go back and use your stuff like it was their idea.” In this way, she sees advocacy groups as, at times, exploitive, and insists that the momentum for the Pilot originated with CHA residents.

At CHA, Sarah Davis says that the residents had not previously introduced a similar proposal but admits that tensions can emerge with residents when third party agencies come into the mix. In the case of this particular Pilot, she explains, “I think this became an example of . . . [how] some of [the residents] may have thought that they had voiced that [reentry] is an issue, but we didn’t do [anything], and then an advocacy group comes in and we listened. And I think it just fuels a very interesting issue anyway about advocacy groups and who they are speaking for.”
As Washington explains, it is not so much that residents disagree with the work that advocates do but that such situations elicit much deeper tensions, such as residents feeling continually overlooked or ignored by those in power. The fact that residents frequently feel that their requests are not heard by CHA or that CHA officials are not working in their interests undergirds and exacerbates such conflicts.

These dynamics also align with racial tensions in Chicago. For example, Washington describes how,

[CHA CEOs] change, administrations change, and although we’ve had some black people at the helm sometimes—you know, I ain’t prejudiced against the white folks that’s run it, but they know nothing about us, could care nothing about us or our plight. But then, when some of them say, “Okay, they’re talking about this program, we’re going to write something up and we’re going to get our agencies, the city agencies that we deal with, let them get the money.” Which is always the case.

Nearly 84 percent of CHA’s 62,357 households are headed by a person identified as African-American (CHA 2016a, 21). Although the current CEO, Eugene Jones Jr., is African American, Washington has learned through years of experience to be skeptical of white leadership at CHA and the ability of white leaders to make decisions on behalf of CHA residents. Rather than funneling money back into resident programs, she feels that all leaders, but perhaps white leaders in particular, are more willing to sign contracts with third party agencies—the same agencies that, according to her, tend to pass off residents’ ideas as their own. Overall, she expresses a sense of exploitation on the part of residents, who feel they are not listened to until their ideas are repackaged by third-party organizers. In the case of this Pilot at least, CCH and the service provider agencies are not being paid by CHA to help administer the program, but this does not fully diminish Washington’s sense of being disrespected.

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27 Data are not available on the tenant population as a whole—only heads of households. This figure includes both public housing tenants and housing choice voucher recipients.
Despite her suspicion of advocacy groups, Washington admits that “It was all of the groups coming together, pushing from different angles at different times” that made the Pilot possible. Additionally, according to Pilot organizers, it took some convincing to get CHA officials to back the Pilot at all. Rachel Ramirez describes that previous CEOs at CHA did not think they could receive support from local aldermen for the Reentry Pilot. In response, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless brought sixteen letters from local aldermen stating their support for the Pilot, in addition to a list of 125 endorsing organizations locally (Trinity Church Wall Street 2016, 2:31:25). Discussions were also slowed by rapid changes in leadership, since the CHA has had three different CEOs since 2011 (Charles Woodyard, Michael Merchant, and now Eugene Jones Jr.). Neither Sarah Davis nor Bill Smith worked for CHA when CCH first proposed the Pilot, which happened under Woodyard. However, groups had fought the One Strike Rule for years before CCH drafted the proposal for the Reentry Pilot. As Tony Lowery of the Safer Foundation explains,

The perception of what we’re trying to do is we’re trying to open the doors to prison and just kind of let all the people run out and come into CHA. [The CEOs] were the vanguard, they had to protect the institution and entity. . . . The history of violence in public housing is unprecedented, and no one wanted to tag their career, that they’re going to open the door and let people with criminal records back in public housing. . . . So that was the pushback through each administration. . . . And so that was the thing, over the years of discussions and negotiations, you had five or six executive directors.

At Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC), Sheryl Seiling explains that staff there had to overcome similar misconceptions: “The argument was that we worked so hard to clean up the public housing communities and now we’re going to allow criminals in. And that’s an oversimplification of what this is, and that’s not what we’re doing.”

Lowery explains that Charles Woodyard was the first CEO who was open to the Pilot. Woodyard came to CHA from North Carolina, where, Lowery explains, he had tried a similar
program. Once they had Woodyard’s support, Pilot organizers gained momentum. However, CHA leadership continued to change. Lowery says, “[D]uring the negotiations, you’d think you’d made some progress and bam! New CEO.” Because the Pilot comprises such a significant break from past policies, each new leader had to be brought up-to-date so organizers could ensure that they had the CEO’s full support.

At this point, organizers decided to go to the Mayor’s Office. Rachel Ramirez of CCH describes that even with the CEO’s support, “We knew that there would be nothing that happens, as nothing happens in Chicago without the blessing of the Mayor. And that’s just how power flows in Chicago.” Meghan Harte, who was Mayor Emanuel’s Deputy Chief of Staff when the Pilot was being organized, explains that she “came in at a point where the advocates were struggling to get CHA to move the Pilot forward, even though previous heads of agencies had been supportive.” As described in Chapter 3, the advocates were strategic about getting the Mayor’s support, inviting him to meet with formerly incarcerated individuals and Pilot organizers at St. Leonard’s, where they successfully deployed the narrative of “Second Chances” to earn his endorsement. Additionally, as Ramirez describes, “It was significant that at the time, Rahm Emanuel was in the process of closing public schools in Chicago, also located in black areas of the city, low-income areas of the city, so it was like an opportunity for us . . . to work with the fact that he was so precariously-placed among black voters, [since] this [Reentry Pilot] is an issue that affects black voters quite a lot.” As observers, it is impossible to discern the Mayor’s personal motivations around the Pilot. But as Ramirez points out, getting his support—itself a political move on the part of the Pilot organizers—was undoubtedly linked to Chicago’s broader political landscape.
By all accounts, having the Mayor publicly and emotionally declare his support was a major turning point for the Pilot. As Harte describes, “To be honest, I think the Mayor’s Office getting involved actually made it happen. In a way that didn’t force the advocates to start protesting and making a big deal to force it. And so, it was a significant shift in [CHA’s] philosophy to really try this out and it took a lot of political weight to make it happen.” It is interesting to note that the political weight needed to make the Pilot happen came not from the federal level via HUD, but from within Chicago via the Mayor. Indeed, Ramirez reports that HUD has played only a minimal role in the Pilot: first by creating an opening for policy change with Shaun Donovan’s letter to public housing authorities and later by providing oversight after the negotiations process was already fairly advanced. “There’s no point person [at HUD],” she says, adding, “HUD was not much of a player in getting this Pilot off the ground. The Mayor’s Office was way more of a player.”

Once they had the Mayor’s support to move forward, it took the Reentry Pilot Committee some time to agree on implementation details. Davis, who came on board at CHA during the negotiations, says that the final Pilot is a compromise and that advocates had to make a number of concessions with the understanding that it was better to have a limited version of the Pilot than no Pilot at all. In particular, she says that determining eligibility was a particularly difficult negotiating point in the discussions, both in terms of “who was eligible based on offenses that were acceptable to be part of this program, and then who they could reunite with. I think we were more narrow in that list of both things than [the advocates] probably had proposed or wanted.” Indeed, Rachel Ramirez describes that from the advocates’ point of view, compromising on eligibility requirements was a necessary concession. She says, “For us [at CCH], we have certain values as an organization. I mean, believing that everybody can change their life and is worthy of
this opportunity, right? However, we also wanted to win.” At St. Leonard’s, Doug McKinney says he understands why compromises were made: “A lot of people don’t realize CHA is under scrutiny and has been under scrutiny for a number of years,” he explains, adding, “The mere fact that they’re willing to work with us—that’s a blessing in and of itself.” McKinney’s sentiments are representative of the Committee’s general stance: better to have a Pilot, with concessions, than no Pilot at all. After years of One Strike, Pilot organizers were happy to be let in the room.

While CHA leaders may have initially resisted the Pilot for fear of controversy or out of reluctance to reverse two decades of enforcing One Strike policies, current staff also see the Pilot as an opportunity for prestige. For example, when asked about what will happen if the Pilot is deemed successful, Bill Smith says, “You do a best practice, and you shop it around the country. You go into the trade organizations, and you show them the reentry program works and this is how it works in this city and you don’t have to do it exactly like Chicago does but you can tweak it just so because of your own fabric of your neighborhood and your city and your state government.” For Smith, the Reentry Pilot provides an opportunity to showcase CHA’s work as a policy innovator, where a successful Pilot could provide a model for other cities to adopt and build upon. Similarly, Sarah Davis sees the Pilot as an opportunity to bring recognition to CHA. As she explains, “In a way, we want to say that we’re kind of leading change with other housing authorities that are testing things or that are opening up policies.” However, she tempers this vision with a caveat, saying, “On the flip side of it, though, we don’t necessarily want to call attention [to the Pilot], because then people will look for the problem and then that isn’t really solving stigma or anything like that.” For policymakers, the Pilot is two-faced: success could bring much-needed praise to the institution, but the fear of controversy is never far off.
Pushback

During Pilot negotiations, advocates experienced pushback from two main sources: other advocacy groups and resident leadership. Meghan Harte explains how competing interests from multiple advocacy groups compounded the concerns of already-cautious CHA leaders, saying,

> With any pilot or any sort of opening the door to something that’s in such high demand as public housing, it brings every other special interest groups to say, “Well, you did it for them, why don’t you do it for us? . . . Now help the homeless, the chronic homeless.” So, you know. The disability community, which has always been working with public housing. Everybody’s watching it, and everybody wants their own special pilot now, which is a challenge and was a concern of CHA’s, but the Mayor felt that this was important enough that he was going to push it to make it happen.

Although organizers have kept the Pilot relatively quiet, for fear of controversy, it is interesting to note that at least so far, pushback has come not from the public, but from other interest groups and advocates in the city. The narrative is one of a zero-sum competition over resources, in which giving special attention to one group implicitly devalues others.

Additionally, despite the fact that CHA residents had pushed for the One Strike Rule to be overturned for many years, resident leadership was at times at odds with advocates and service providers during the Pilot discussions. Francine Washington describes residents’ concerns that ex-offenders would be sent back to families who had not agreed to take them in. She describes how, during the negotiations, she and other residents argued that “No, you can’t just tell people, ‘Alright, go back to your unit.’ The head of the household has got to say it’s okay for them to come back. I don’t care about no program. You can’t put anybody on my lease.” In addition to guaranteeing resident consent, Washington also wanted to ensure that current tenants would not face penalty for taking in an ex-offender relative. She says, “If you get in trouble, we had to make sure the leaseholder won’t be evicted. . . . Nobody’s looking at: What about the leaseholder? If this person mess up, then the whole family [is] getting evicted. So we
had to argue, get the legal terminology to make sure that if I let my son in, [and] my son did
something wrong . . . I don’t want to be evicted. We had to make sure those safeguards [were] in
place for the residents.” For Washington, requiring follow-up services and monitoring of
participants in the terms of the Pilot provides one way of safeguarding current residents.

In addition to guaranteeing that residents were properly protected from coercion,
Washington wanted to ensure that the responsibility for managing Pilot participants did not fall
to the residents. As she explains,

Ain’t nobody monitoring [the participants] but the Authority and the agencies and they
shut down at five o’clock. They go home, they don’t know what’s happening after five
o’clock. [If] anything’s going on, they rely on us to tell them what went on and what
happened—what people [are] doing, what they ain’t doing. . . . If I let somebody in my
apartment with a background, and this person—imagine it’s shut down at five [o’clock],
the agencies they’re just constantly shut down—I don’t know if that person’s outside in
the evening dealing drugs out there, hanging with the wrong crowds or trying to bring
someone that’s not on the lease up into my house, or just having parties at my house.
Only residents know because they’re living next door.

Even the follow-up services and monitoring provisions established in the Pilot do not address the
problem Washington points to here: the fact that none of the monitoring parties are on the
premises after five o’clock to observe Pilot participants. Of course, should there be a major issue,
the agencies would be notified. And similarly, participants can always reach out to sponsors and
service providers should they desire help. But for Washington, the concern is not only participants
getting the help they need but also that CHA tenants will become responsible for de facto after-
hours monitoring and reporting on Pilot participants should they cause any trouble for neighbors.

Sarah Davis adds that during the negotiations, “There were some concerns [from resident
leadership] about people either returning to a place that was not good for them or, you know,
long-held grudges that may set off a community reaction.” Tony Lowery adds, “You have a lot
of people in public housing who have that gang involvement. And that’s a tremendous challenge,
as far as young people coming back into the community, and we don’t know what those relationships were, and just it’s critically important that we can get them to commit to programming, so that we can try and get a better gauge on what we think a successful transition would be for that person.” Thus, resident leaders like Washington pushed policymakers and service providers alike to make sure that CHA tenants were protected in the Pilot in ways that those groups may not have anticipated or considered otherwise. While it may seem surprising for organized residents to be at odds with a Pilot seemingly in the interest of their community—and which they, by their own admission, have pushed for over the decades—these debates illustrate how nuanced and complex such issues can be and the importance of engaging all stakeholders in policy reform efforts.

To be sure, Pilot organizers have feared public controversy from the beginning, but at least so far, they have encountered more pushback from within. As Rachel Ramirez describes, “We haven’t encountered pushback in the general public. The pushback that we’ve encountered is from the organized residents, who are very concerned that we would do anything most of all that would jeopardize existing leaseholders.” Asked if she was surprised to encounter pushback from residents, many of whom have incarcerated relatives and who, as we have seen, have been subject to highly aggressive and disciplinary policing regimes in their housing projects, Ramirez says no, because residents “have been screwed so many times by CHA. And then on the other hand, they have legitimate complaints about, you know, people who want to help. Because it’s like, you come to us with this idea, is it a good idea? Are you putting us in danger? [They’re] just very skeptical, because I think . . . they’re doing their job.” Similarly, Lowery comments that Washington “fights for her people. She fights for opportunity; she’s been a tremendous leader in that community for decades, you know? We worked very closely with [CAC], so the biggest
challenge that they had was thinking that we were coming in doing a program, trying to get money from CHA, and wouldn’t do anything.”

Lowery explains that he told resident leadership that Safer and the other groups were not being paid for their work with the Pilot but were just “trying to provide people with criminal records opportunities to get housing. That’s our payment. And that kind of tabled the conversation a little bit.” Lowery says he met with resident leaders one-on-one to explain what they were trying to do and get their support. “They understand the need,” he says, “but I think just to get the respect, because to them CHA was putting in a program and didn’t let them know about anything. So we had to just [get] that trust element. I had to explain to CCH and all them that there’s a trust thing: [residents] are fighting for justice, and they’ve been fighting for justice with CHA for over twenty years.” Lowery also says that once resident leaders were told that they would have the opportunity to personally refer and recommend candidates for the Pilot, they were more supportive. Thus, despite initial communication problems—and remaining wariness on the part of resident leadership about the role of advocacy groups—residents and Pilot organizers were able to come together to back the Pilot.

Slow Start

The Pilot was approved by the CHA Board of Commissioners at the November 2014 board meeting and by HUD in January 2015 (R. Ramirez interview, July 19, 2016). However, as of July 2016, the Pilot had only three participants, according to the Safer Foundation. At this time, CCH was unaware of any participants who had been housed—evidence of the communication gaps between coordinating agencies. In any case, the Pilot was off to a very slow start, for two main reasons: First, by the time of this research, the program had not yet been properly
marketed, so many CHA residents and ex-offenders alike did not know about it. After years of One Strike policies, many understandably continue to assume that they or their relatives are not welcome in CHA housing. Second, the city’s long waitlist for housing assistance means that Pilot participants have long waiting periods before their numbers are called, and the CHA has not yet agreed to implement a waitlist priority for them.

First, as a major policy reversal, the Reentry Pilot must overcome the fact that most people still assume that ex-offenders are not allowed in public housing. While the CHA had not, as of July 2016, seriously marketed the Pilot, Rachel Ramirez reports that other cities have similarly struggled to overcome One Strike legacies and convince potential participants that the change was indeed real. According to her, when the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) instituted a similar pilot, they sent a letter explaining the program to every household. However, after years of One Strike policies, this letter inadvertently intimidated some residents, who did not understand the letter’s purpose and thought HACLA was accusing them of harboring an ex-offender in their household (R. Ramirez interview, February 4, 2016). This anecdote illustrates the hurdle that policymakers face in overcoming decades of mistrust. The scope of the change is so large that many residents do not yet understand or believe it. HACC’s Sheryl Seiling agrees, saying, “People used to think if you have a background, don’t even bother to apply. And so that in itself is something huge to overcome.” She continues, “Tenants don’t trust. . . . It’s that fear of . . . ‘this could make me lose my housing, and I can’t lose my housing’.” Thus, tenants’ fears are tangible: after years of receiving lease violation letters, Seiling explains, tenants not only assume that their relative with a criminal background is not allowed to live with them, but they fear the consequences of any sort of association with criminal activity.
Similarly, applying to the Pilot, as discussed in Chapter 4, is a lengthy process. Lynne Cunningham of St. Leonard’s Ministries describes how “There’s probably a lot of sense from—and rightly so—from people with backgrounds that they didn’t qualify, so why bother going through the drill?” In this way, Cunningham explains, it is not a matter of miscommunication or lack of communication. “[These are] not communication glitches,” she says, continuing that when the housing lottery last opened in 2014, “there was enough word of mouth going around at the time that said, ‘Oh, you’re an ex-con, you won’t qualify.’ Why would I go stand in line? You know, so it’s not a communication glitch: it was a very intentional message.” In turn, she says, “People are pretty smart. There was a lot of word of mouth going around about how people get treated, how [ex-offenders] get treated. The same thing happens with employers: there are certain employers that everybody knows not to go near because of how they approach the issue.” Whether it is due to rumors of mistreatment or simply not wanting to bother with the paperwork without any hope of success, ex-offenders continue to stay away from public housing. Bobby Flowers, who is on the CHA waitlist and hoping to participate in the Pilot, confirms the importance of word-of-mouth in the ex-offender community. He explains, “Well, a lot of people don’t know even right now today that ex-felons . . . can move into CHA now. A lot of people don’t even know. Unless they hear it from us. And we’ll talk about it and [say], ‘Yeah you can apply!’” To market their pilots, HACC has distributed a flyer in the recertification packets they send to tenants, while CHA started marketing the program (via a flyer and mailing campaign) in earnest right around the time of these interviews.

In addition to communication and trust issues with residents, CHA intake staff also have to be trained to the new rules. As Tony Lowery explains, some ex-offenders have recently gone for interviews only to be turned away based on their background. In such a situation, he explains,
the Safer Foundation can step in and let CHA know about the problem and get what he calls a “special circumstance” for their client. However, this creates an additional administrative burden on both ends. As Lowery points out, it will take broader training for staffers and property managers to reduce these kinds of administrative errors and ensure the new rules have been properly communicated inside and outside of CHA.

A second reason for the Pilot’s slow start has to do with the city’s long waitlist for housing assistance. The housing lottery system, which provides applicants with waitlist numbers, last opened in November 2014. At that time, approximately 282,000 households registered for housing assistance. Due to the great need in the city compared to the amount of subsidized housing, people can wait years for a unit or voucher to become available. Similarly, Rachel Ramirez explains that in some cases, people have to wait so long that their criminal record is no longer a barrier, since they have out-waited the look-back period—i.e., how far back in an individual’s history the CHA will look for a criminal record. When the waitlist last opened in November 2014, CHA’s look-back period was 3 years for public housing and 5 years for the HCV program, though these windows are subject to change as well as much discretion on the part of the housing authority (CHA 2014b).

At the time of this research, Pilot organizers had been pushing policymakers at CHA to grant potential participants a waitlist priority to speed up the Pilot’s progress and house their clients more quickly. After a Reentry Pilot Committee meeting in February 2016, a misunderstanding resulted between CHA staff and the advocates/service providers. As Sarah Davis explains, “[The advocates and service providers] were requesting more of a set-aside of vouchers as opposed to just let[ting] it happen organically or whatnot.” The Board-approved Pilot, Davis explains, specified that CHA could not give preference to Pilot participants on the
waitlist. From her perspective, CHA agreed to do a data match with the service providers to assess whether it would be possible to institute a preference. However, the advocates and service providers understood that their clients would definitely receive the preference. For example, at the time of our interview, Ramirez thought Pilot participants would be receiving a waitlist priority and warned me that if resident leaders learned of this, they might stir up controversy: “You can see just how many players there are and [how] things in Chicago are so political.”

Indeed, if implemented, Davis says that a waitlist priority “will be very controversial.” Sheryl Seiling agrees, saying “[T]o implement a preference, or to allocate vouchers, I think that’s maybe a hard sell from society’s standpoint when right now only one in four people who need affordable housing get it, and to not be able to house somebody because somebody with a [criminal] background gets a preference is a hard sell for a lot of people.” The assumption here is that someone who committed a crime is not more deserving of public assistance than someone who has not. HACC’s voucher waitlist has not opened since 2001, while public housing waitlists open only periodically, as vacancies arise. Given this, Seiling continues, “When we’ve got people who have been waiting fourteen years for a voucher, and then to say that we’re going to . . . give a preference for somebody with a criminal background, it just doesn’t make any sense. And then we have people saying, ‘So, if I was a criminal, you would house me first?’ Like, how do you even defend that, you know?” As Tony Lowery explains, to be politically viable, “This [Pilot] couldn’t be a special program that denied opportunities for other people who were on the waitlist.”

Francine Washington also opposes the waitlist priority for Pilot participants. Asked about the issue, she shakes her head, explaining, “Why? Because you know what? You can’t just move into a unit because you’re a criminal. You’ve got to go through a program. . . . You’ve got to
show you got a job, you’re in the workforce, you’re educated, [you have] some opportunities. You can’t just be moving in to be moving in.” Of course, ex-offenders are not moving in just to move in, they are moving in because they, in many cases, are more in need of public housing assistance, precisely because they are ex-offenders. Discriminated against in the private housing market and barred from most forms of employment, ex-offenders have even fewer social supports than the regular low-income population.

Administrative Issues

Now officially approved, Pilot organizers identify administrative issues as an ongoing barrier to housing people. At St. Leonard’s, Doug McKinney explains how clients have to keep careful track of paperwork with their waitlist numbers, even over a course of years as they wait for their number to be called. “And so now I got individuals digging into their records just trying to see where they put that letter that had their number on it,” he says, adding, “And so, that took a while.” Once records have been located, McKinney says he’s watched as some of his clients are denied while others are accepted—seemingly arbitrarily. “And so then,” he says, “you wonder, ‘Okay, how did they discern one from the other?’ Both of them got the same background, both of them [are] in the same place, and yet one is accepted and the other isn’t. So then you’ve got to calm them and help them understand: ‘Don’t worry about it, okay? That’s just one option, okay?’” Because St. Leonard’s had not yet placed any clients in the Pilot as of this research, McKinney refers here to ex-offenders who are being accepted or denied based on CHA’s look-back period, which CHA has recently reduced. However, there is a sense among ex-offenders and service providers that CHA rules can be somewhat arbitrary or subject to the whim of the
interviewer. This can lead to frustration on the part of clients who have been waiting months or years for a spot in CHA housing, only to be denied with no clear explanation.

Similarly, McKinney says that even as a staff member at an organization participating in the Pilot, he often feels uninformed about the Pilot’s progress. “It would be nice if we were getting emails and kept up-to-date about the entire process, so it would be that much easier for us to relay information to those individuals that are waiting because we would kind of calm their fears,” he explains, adding, “We’re just as much in limbo as they are.” According to Sarah Davis, the lack of communication about the Pilot has to do with the simple fact that it is no one person’s responsibility. As she describes, although the Pilot does not cost CHA anything in terms of money, “When we talk about the delays and the early delays, you know, I think ‘the cost’ is just that this doesn’t fall in any one person’s lap, you know, to administer.” At CHA, the Pilot requires coordination between the Resident Services Program and the Housing Choice Voucher Program. “It’s not really a cost,” she adds, “but of course, there’s a cost to it because the cost is just time and making sure that this becomes something that people are paying attention to.” As with other demonstration programs, she says, “We don’t necessarily have right now the infrastructure to appropriately manage all of these different demonstration programs because each of them, while it’s not like a full-time job to manage what’s going on with this one, it does take some dedicated time to make sure that it keeps moving in the right direction.” The Reentry Pilot, she explains, is one of about ten demonstration programs that CHA is currently running. “And so,” she says with a shrug, “it’s kind of balancing all that plus, like, everything else.” Davis has become CHA’s point person for the Pilot in what she describes as “a default type of status,” but the ad-hoc nature of Pilot’s management is evident from her comments as well as the administrative and communication issues described by McKinney.
Additionally, coordinating a Reentry Pilot Committee with over a dozen members takes some work. At Safer Foundation, April Bernard is a recent hire who works as Safer’s Senior Director of Research and Analysis. Though Bernard was not involved with the Pilot’s creation, she explains that “Pilot programs are well known for not planning enough time for the implementation start-up. You know, making those relationships and how programs start if it hasn’t really been a collective group that’s . . . there at the table from the beginning. . . . [Y]ou’re educating people, you’re creating relationships where they didn’t really exist, and understanding how those relationships are going to function when it didn’t exist before. And that takes a lot of time.” Indeed, logistical and communication issues have slowed the Pilot’s progress. Just before our interview, CHA sent a mass announcement advertising the Pilot, which, Bernard says, exemplifies this kind of failure of working relationships. Though a well-intentioned effort to finally market the Pilot, the mass announcement created other problems. While service providers were not warned that the announcement was going out, Lowery reports that it resulted in a flood of calls to the Safer Foundation inquiring about eligibility requirements. Bernard explains, “The fact that a mass announcement was sent out . . . now has created an additional administrative burden, while relationships still need to be built.”

Fixing a Broken System

For both Bill Smith and Sarah Davis, the Pilot comprises just one step toward reversing One Strike policies, which they hope will help fuel other changes, such as reduced look-back periods and general loosening of criminal background restrictions. Smith says, “We’re putting the resources and the thought process behind [the Pilot] so that we can really show some type of positive results. I know we’re going to have some hiccups here and there because we have not
thought of everything, but I think generally we’re moving in the right direction.” Similarly, Davis says that for her, “success is mostly once we have participants in the program, and they’re doing well. Right? I mean like, that’s success.” At the same time, she says she hopes the Pilot creates what she calls a “synergistic effect.” Much in the way that changing HUD guidance and shifting CHA leadership have opened possibilities for overturning One Strike policies, Davis hopes that the Pilot will usher in a broader set of changes. In this sense, she explains, “whether or not we ever get any participants in the program, or regardless of how each of them do individually, I think we’re at a place where we are looking at our own policies anyway.”

For Doug McKinney, the Pilot is also a way to fight stigma for ex-offenders. “I don’t care what an individual’s position is against us, okay?” he says, adding, “The only thing we’ll ask them for, because it’s what we’ve fought for, is an opportunity to prove you wrong. Now if we are unsuccessful, okay, I’ll be the first to shake your hand. But I don’t think that’s going to happen.” Similarly, April Bernard hopes the Pilot will build trust between Chicago communities and CHA. “Has enough trust been built?” she asks. “We are definitely interested in individual outcomes, but we really want to kind of see: what is the outcome on the institution?”

**Conclusion: From Politics to Policies**

Getting the Pilot approved at CHA and by HUD took a network of actors working together, with the support of the Chicago Mayor’s Office. As we have seen, the deliberations were not always smooth, and organizers had to make major concessions for CHA to accept the Pilot. Meanwhile, they encountered pushback from organized residents who feel frustrated from years of being ignored by CHA and who wanted to ensure not only a place at the bargaining table but also that current tenants would be protected by the terms of the Pilot. Even as one of the groups with the
most to gain from the Pilot, resident leadership adopted an initially wary stance toward Pilot organizers, a move that reflects years of mistrust between residents, advocacy groups, and CHA leadership. Among the most contentious of the debates elicited by the Pilot has been the discussion over whether to implement a waitlist priority for Pilot participants. Opposed by resident leadership, this option is, at least for now, also opposed by policymakers, who believe it to be politically unviable. Without the priority, however, it will likely take a long time for potential participants to be called organically from the city’s waitlist—months, certainly, if not years.

And there are other factors slowing the Pilot’s progress. Like other housing authorities around the country, CHA must overcome legacies of mistrust from residents and find ways to effectively market the Pilot to households who only know years of One Strike policies. Similarly, because the Pilot is coordinated by a network of actors, there are administrative gaps that have led to miscommunication or a lack of communication between organizations. What the Pilot lacks, perhaps most of all, is one strong leader whose sole responsibility is overseeing the Pilot and coordinating between the different agencies, yet this policy architecture does not exist. While advocates, service providers, and CHA staff all undoubtedly do their best to balance Pilot work with their already-busy schedules, there is no one person working at the nexus of incarceration and housing policy at a higher level. Thus, the Pilot nobly attempts to combat isolationist policymaking but can only do so on an ad-hoc basis, with CHA staff agreeing to take on the additional workload. This is a major institutional barrier that disincentivizes collaborative, holistic problem-solving and relies instead on the willingness of individual staff members to take on such projects, putting the Pilot in an all-too-precarious position. For example, should new
staff come on board who are less amenable to such projects, there is no guarantee that someone
else will capably and reliably take on the work of running the Pilot, if at all.

Similarly, we have seen how it took a coordinated—if not always cohesive—network of
actors to push for the Pilot in the first place. In a city as political as Chicago, this too leaves the
Pilot vulnerable to changing political tides: for example, different CHA leadership and perhaps
most of all, a differently-inclined Mayor. As Rachel Ramirez explains, even with the victories
they have won for ex-offenders in public housing, Pilot organizers cannot feel complacent: “The
climate is changing around the issue, but it’s still very controversial, and essentially we’re trying
to house as many people as possible, as quickly as possible knowing how fast things change and
that the door could be shut tomorrow.” Overall, due to public housing’s key role in the carceral
continuum, programs like the Reentry Pilot are essential if we are to begin to think about
structural change. Spatial problems demand spatial solutions, so spatial continuums will require
concordant policy continuums. To be sure, much depends on the success of this Pilot based on
the limited framework for success that its creators have established: up to fifty participants, none
of whom recidivate or cause problems for the housing authority. If it succeeds as such, it may
provide the evidence that policymakers need to usher in broader changes around how ex-
offenders are treated in public housing. It may also encourage the establishment of more
integrative and flexible public agencies. In the meantime, however, the lack of such policy
architecture will continue to threaten the Pilot’s success and the success of other programs that
similarly whittle away at multifaceted social problems.
Chapter 6 Spaces of Reform and Spatial Re-formations

Studying the Chicago Housing Authority’s Reentry Pilot in depth provides one lens through which we can examine how social changes occur: slowly or quickly, piecemeal or whole-cloth, locally or at a larger scale? As a Pilot, is this program positioned to make structural change, or are its impacts limited to those enrolled? The answer to this question relies in part upon how we conceptualize structural change. Writing in 1967, social theorist André Gorz explores such questions in *A Strategy for Labor: A Radical Proposal*. Gorz sees such revolution—specifically, anti-capitalist revolution—as necessary but asks how society might achieve such a large-scale system change? Unlike other theorists, Gorz rejects the binary between revolution and reform, writing,

> All struggle for reform is not necessarily reformist. The not always very clear dividing line between reformist reforms and non-reformist reforms can be defined as follows: A reformist reform is one which subordinates its objectives to the criteria of rationality and practicability of a given system and policy. Reformism rejects those objectives and demands—however deep the need for them—which are incompatible with the preservation of the system. On the other hand, a not necessarily reformist reform is one which is conceived not in terms of what is possible within the framework of a given system and administration, but in view of what should be made possible in terms of human needs and demands. . . . A non-reformist reform is determined not in terms of what can be, but what should be. (Gorz 1967, 7)

In this way, Gorz sees non-reformist reforms as one component of the larger project of anti-capitalist revolution. He continues, “These changes can be sudden, just as they can be gradual. But in any case they assume a modification of the relations of power . . . They assume structural reforms” (Gorz 1967, 8).

As we have seen, the Chicago Housing Authority Reentry Pilot is not a silver bullet; riddled with internal tensions, it does not change the fact that in Chicago, as elsewhere, there are not enough jobs and not enough public or affordable housing. It will not erase the stigma faced by ex-offenders, nor will it start a political-economic revolution. However, in this chapter, I
argue that the Pilot is a non-reformist reform. To do so, I first explore more carefully what comprises a non-reformist reform, before drawing some conclusions about what type of changes the Pilot is and is not poised to make. In particular, I consider how the Pilot is part of an ongoing struggle to make public housing into a more “public” space.

Non-Reformist Reforms

Drawing on Gorz, Peter Marcuse usefully adopts the idea of non-reformist reforms as an analytical lens. Writing about the subprime mortgage crisis in the U.S., Marcuse writes, “Commodification of housing is the underlying problem. Commodification is the handling of housing not as one of life’s necessities, something that provides shelter, protection, privacy, space for personal activities, but rather as something that is bought and sold and used to make money. Commodification is handling something that is a necessity of life and needed for its use value as something that is acquired” (2012, 223). If commodification was the underlying problem of the mortgage crisis, because it prioritizes housing’s exchange value over its use value, Marcuse admits, “No immediate step is likely to bring about decommodification as such. However, we may evaluate alternate proposed steps by the extent to which they tend in this direction and support the ultimate removal of housing from the profit-oriented sector” (ibid). Such steps, Marcuse writes, would constitute non-reformist reforms. Thus, assuming total decommodification cannot be immediately achieved, Marcuse, like Gorz, offers non-reformist reforms as an alternative way of achieving system change, not by changing the system in one fell swoop but rather by modifying and pressuring it from within.

So how will the CHA Reentry Pilot pressure the status quo in the mode of a non-reformist reform? As we have seen, organizers certainly do not conceive of the Pilot explicitly as
an anti-capitalist project, nor do they envision the Pilot as a way to singlehandedly end mass incarceration or housing insecurity (both deep, systemic issues that arguably symptomatize capitalist injustices). However, by remaking public housing into a more inclusive space—and thus, widening the definition of the urban public—I believe that this Pilot could indeed effect structural change in these issue areas, albeit incremental change.

As we have seen, different stakeholders involved in the Pilot maintain different visions for its “success.” First, on a concrete level, some organizers hope the Pilot “succeeds” by expanding to allow even more qualified ex-offenders into CHA housing. Further, others hope that starting with a Pilot will open a space for additional policy reforms at CHA regarding tenants with criminal records. Some of this work has already begun. For example, launching the Reentry Pilot has offered CHA an opportunity to rethink and loosen their policies toward ex-offenders more generally. Spurred by Shaun Donovan’s 2011 letter as well as pressure from local advocates, policymakers are considering reducing look-back windows (S. Davis interview, July 28, 2016). The fact that this Pilot comprises and has also helped fuel a rising tide of policy shifts around these issues signals hopeful possibilities for future changes. In other words, this Pilot does not exist in a vacuum: it emerges from a larger rethinking of housing policies for ex-offenders at the federal level, while the work that has gone into its organization and implementation has already provided evidence of the need for ex-offender housing at the local level. Policymakers in Chicago are aware of this issue in a way that they were not just a few years ago. Meanwhile, grassroots organizations, social service providers, and other public housing authorities are watching this Pilot and its sister pilots in cities like New York City and Los Angeles. Hopefully, by laying the groundwork and building support at the local level, the

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28 See for example Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s analysis of the California prison system in *Golden Gulag*, as described in Chapter 2.
Pilot will continue to push stakeholders to support ex-offender public housing, even as political tides shift once again at HUD.

Second, and on a more abstract level, the Pilot is also an experiment in changing the public’s mindset around criminal offenses and the people who commit them. In this realm, I believe that the success of the Pilot hinges on its ability to spread awareness of the need for ex-offender housing, the social value of providing that housing, and of the need for eliminating barriers and reducing stigma for ex-offenders more generally. Seen in this light, the Pilot stakes a broad claim for ex-offenders’ right to public housing, thus pressuring the forces that seek to commodify and marketize public housing rather than guarantee it as a social good and a public space for all.

As we have seen, this is not always an easy sell. Given the enormous need for affordable housing in Chicago, I asked Darrell Horrace, the first of the Pilot’s participants, how he explains why someone with a criminal record deserves subsidized housing. He thought for a moment, reflecting, “At some point in time, someone with a criminal record or criminal history . . . will be released to society. So, you either assist that person to get on their feet, and/or that person will go back and revert to their old habits and ways. You know? So it’s really for the betterment of society to assist that person and help them get some stability in their life.” While it may seem simple, convincing the public that it is “for the betterment of society” to help ex-offenders find stability is an incredibly important goal that could have broad impacts for how ex-offenders are treated in an array of social policy arenas. While this Pilot will not accomplish this alone, it comprises one important step toward changing public attitudes. After all, demonstrating the need and worthiness of public assistance for ex-offenders is a crucial first step toward crafting policies that are more just and that may begin to dismantle the carceral continuum.
Finally, the Pilot also provides a model for how public agencies might begin to address social problems in a more holistic, structural way. After all, this Pilot is multifaceted: by reforming housing policy, it aims to not only prevent homelessness but also interrupt the carceral continuum and end the practice of continued punishment for ex-offenders upon release. Rather than rejecting the Pilot as being beyond the housing authority’s reach, CHA officials have taken a broader approach to policymaking than we often see. However, the constraints and difficulties they have faced—for example, not having a dedicated administrative staff to work on the Pilot—point to the limitations of our public organizations for addressing such broad-reaching social problems, which tend to remain siloed in individual agencies, each with limited reach. At a November 2016 conference about public housing and reentry, CHA’s Chief Resident Services Officer Mary Howard commented that “We at public housing authorities are not experts on reentry. . . . One of the things over the past year with our reentry program is we are learning—are becoming educated about the issues, the barriers—in a way that we haven’t perhaps been exposed to [previously]” (Trinity Church Wall Street 2016, 2:27:00). For housing policymakers not trained to handle reentry, nor necessarily aware of the panoply of issues facing ex-offenders, the Reentry Pilot asks them to quickly retrain and refocus their work towards tackling a whole set of complex, though not unrelated, policy problems. It is important work, but it places a large burden on individual policymakers and relies on their ongoing willingness, collaboration, and effort.

At the federal level, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) could potentially provide one model of more integrative policymaking. Made up of leadership from nineteen federal agencies, the council meets four times a year to “advance federal collaboration and coordination” toward ending homelessness (USICH 2016). However, while
collaborative, the Council bridges organizations without fully uniting their disparate missions or staffs. Similarly, while the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) did at one point participate on the Reentry Pilot Committee, this collaboration was ad hoc. As Rachel Ramirez describes, the Director of Housing for IDOC contributed to the Pilot and our other efforts especially through her expertise on pre-release programming. When we were designing the Pilot, we were able to say with a lot of authority what kinds of opportunities people would have while they were incarcerated. . . and that we wanted to see that people took advantage of what opportunities were there when considering them for the Pilot. Also, she was helpful in the advocacy work with CHA, because having someone from IDOC signaled our credibility and that interagency partnerships might be a possibility. (R. Ramirez, personal correspondence with author, January 9, 2016)

The IDOC representative’s role was largely an advisory one, though Ramirez highlights the symbolic importance of the partnership, which ended when this individual retired. Again, this collaboration is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough. In this way, the Reentry Pilot points to the need for more flexible institutions (and more at the local level), which would be more adept at dealing with social problems holistically. In other words, American cities require a new urban policy continuum to match the spatial, carceral continuum.

Overall, by pushing Chicago policymakers to rethink their policies around ex-offender public housing more generally; by reducing stigma for ex-offenders and raising awareness about the need for ex-offender public housing; and by demonstrating the need for integrative policymaking, the Pilot has the potential to be a non-reformist reform, which modifies power relations and brings us one step closer to system change.

Public Housing as Public Space

But what about the limitations—such as disciplinary logics and political challenges—that threaten to undermine the Pilot? As we saw in Chapter 2, public housing—in Chicago as
elsewhere in the United States—has never been truly “public,” or at the very least, has not ever served one clear public. Thus, the debates over whether and how to implement the Reentry Pilot are only the latest in an ongoing set of conversations about who does and does not deserve access to the living spaces of public housing. These debates matter: as Mitchell (2005, 85) describes, “The nature of public space in part defines the nature of citizenship. . . . It provides a material basis for the public sphere.” Further, Mitchell and Staeheli (2009, 511) argue that public space is best conceived of not as public property but as “that space where ‘the public’ is formed.” Thus, while on a concrete level the Pilot uses public housing to provide shelter and the material conditions for successful entry into the workforce, it also shapes the limits of urban citizenship and the formation of urban publics. In this way, debates around whether ex-offenders deserve admission to public housing are also debates about whether these individuals can be considered full urban citizens, with all the rights and responsibilities that entails. In this way, we can read the Pilot as one way for ex-offenders to claim their right to the city in a way that is, if not revolutionary, at least non-reformist. As Harvey (2012, 73) reminds us, “There is always a struggle over how the production of and access to public space and public goods is to be regulated, by whom, and in whose interests,” while Mitchell and Staeheli (2009, 512) argue that “As a space of struggle, public space is unavoidably a political space.” In the case of the Pilot, the social, political, and spatial struggle has likely only begun.

Part of this struggle comes from formalizing once-informal practices. As we have seen, ex-offenders will live in public housing one way or another: if not formally on a lease, folks with criminal records have been known to sleep in the liminal spaces of public housing or secretly, with a friend or relative. The work of the Pilot, then, is to bring these practices out of the
shadows and into the light, to give ex-offenders a state-approved living space in public housing and thus, to formally endorse their right to that space.

By making public housing more public, this Pilot reshapes public housing into a more hopeful, transformative space. On a material level, as Matthew Desmond (2016, 295) writes, “[A] good home can serve as the sturdiest of footholds. When people have a place to live, they become better parents, workers, and citizens.” Having a home is now, as ever, a key component in helping poor Americans overcome poverty. On a more abstract level, if, as Harvey (1989, 190) says, “Control over spatial organization and authority over the use of space become crucial means for the reproduction of power relations,” then so too can changing our use of urban space—and of who can use that space—change power relations and disrupt the status quo. Again, the Pilot can thus be read as a non-reformist reform, one that can alter the relations of power, if subtly, by extending to the individuals involved a more full form of urban citizenship.

**Conclusion**

During my time in Chicago conducting research for this thesis, my project seemed to be everywhere, all around me: Even as I spent most of my time in some of the city’s posh-est neighborhoods—Printer’s Row, the Loop, River North, the Gold Coast—homeless bodies seemed everywhere to be found. Walking up Michigan Avenue one Sunday morning, I witnessed something both extraordinary and, sadly, quotidian for that city. At the corner of Michigan and Upper Wacker, in the shadow of Trump Tower, an ambulance screamed around the corner through an intersection bustling with tourists. As I drew closer, I quickly identified its target: a bone-thin woman lay draped across one of the city’s ornamental flower planters, repeatedly wheezing, “I can’t breathe! I can’t breathe!” Clearly homeless, the woman was unable to find
refuge from the city’s oppressive, buzzing summer humidity. Her cries, of course, were eerily reminiscent of Eric Garner’s dying words as he was strangled to death by police in New York City almost exactly two years prior.

What this study shows—I hope—is that these two events are not disconnected. Eric Garner’s unjust and untimely death in New York City at the hands of brutal police officers and the suffering and destitution of this woman in Chicago two summers later are both symptoms of America’s carceral continuum: a fundamentally spatial continuum that regulates poor, racialized bodies rendered surplus under capitalism and that links prisons to housing projects and mean streets where urban subjects are continually disciplined. By attempting to intervene in this system, the Chicago Housing Authority Reentry Pilot can be read as a non-reformist reform, but it remains limited—most of all, by the lack of an overarching policy continuum to mirror the spatial, carceral continuum.

Given the Pilot’s political nature, which is now being launched at a moment of extreme political uncertainty in our country—during the presidential transition between the Obama and Trump administrations—programs like the CHA Reentry Pilot are more vital and more vulnerable than ever. At St. Leonard’s, Doug McKinney emphasized to me that—however imperfect we may judge it to be—this Pilot is not trivial, but potentially life-saving, not only for the fifty individuals they hope to enroll, but by paving the way for housing access for countless other ex-offenders. As we wrapped up our interview, McKinney cautioned me: “Whenever you begin the work that you’re going to do,” he said, “just remember one thing for me: lives are at stake. And you don’t get to play with other people’s lives.”
APPENDICES


Appendix B: CHA Flyer: “Reentry Pilot Program: Reunifying Families.”

Appendix C: Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. “CHA Reentry Pilot: Service Provider Cheat Sheet.”

Appendix D: Chicago Housing Authority (CHAb). “Description of Reentry Applicant’s Efforts.”
Appendix A

Chicago Housing Authority Demonstration Program and Special Initiatives Overview

Reentry Pilot (Approved November 2014)

Overview

Individuals who have been convicted of crimes that would otherwise make them ineligible for CHA housing may qualify for housing under the Reentry Pilot program. Those currently on a CHA wait list may qualify for subsidy, and those whose family lives in traditional public housing may be qualified to reunite with their family.

Purpose  Why was this program created?

To test the provision of stable housing against recidivism.

Many individuals leaving incarceration are committed to getting their life back on track but struggle to find adequate, affordable housing. This demonstration will allow ex-offenders who are participating in re-entry services to continue their positive re-integration into society. CHA believes that the stable, affordable housing if offered can be a springboard for residents, including the ex-offenders in this demonstration, who are committed to improving their lives.

Eligibility  Who can participate?

- Ex-offenders who have completed a minimum of one year in a re-entry program with one of the following Reentry Pilot service providers:
  - Safer Foundation
  - St. Leonard’s Ministries
- Participants must be currently on a CHA wait list or reuniting with spouse, parent, grandparent, sibling or adult child currently in CHA’s Public Housing or HCV program.
- Participants with the following convictions are not eligible: murder, attempted murder, terrorism, and any of the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) mandatory criminal background exclusions including sex offenses and criminal drug activity resulting in eviction (see CHA’s Administrative Plan and Admission and Continued Occupant Policies for detailed information).
- A maximum of 50 families may participate in the pilot over the two-year enrollment period.

Selection  How are potential participants selected?

Track 1: From the wait list

- If a Reentry Pilot candidate is on a Public Housing or HCV wait list and is called for an intake interview, the Reentry Pilot service provider with which they are working will issue them a Reentry Pilot Certificate and application, provided that the individual has completed at least one year of services, is drug free, is current on their rent (if applicable) and compliant with CHA’s work requirement.
- The Reentry Pilot candidate can present the Reentry Pilot Certificate as well as the signed Consent to Participate in the Re-entry Pilot during the screening process. Provided the...
candidate does not have a conviction listed above in the Eligibility section, CHA will consider the Reentry Pilot Certificate and the signed consent to participate form as proof of mitigation of the individual’s criminal record. The candidate will be admitted into the housing program, barring extreme circumstances in which CHA determines the individual would not be an acceptable tenant.

- Reentry Pilot candidates receive no preference for housing over others on the wait list.

**Selection**  How are potential participants selected? (continued)

**Track 2:** As family members of current residents

- The re-entry service providers listed in the eligibility section will identify potential participants who have completed at least one year of reentry services, are drug free, are current on their rent (if applicable), are compliant with CHA’s work requirement and who have a spouse, parent, grandparent, sibling or adult child currently in CHA’s Public Housing or HCV program.
- The re-entry service provider will provide a detailed plan signed by the provider and participant to document how the potential participant will be a good candidate for the demonstration program.
- The identified receiving household must participate in an intake interview. During the interview, CHA will determine the receiving household’s willingness to participate and they will receive information about the pilot as well as the responsibilities involved if they agree to participate.
- The receiving household must sign an agreement accepting the terms of the Pilot (see responsibilities below).
- CHA has the discretion to exclude any potential participant.
- No more than one Reentry Pilot participant may reside in a receiving household at any time.
- The landlord (or Property Manager) must approve their participation in the Reentry Pilot. For HCV, if the landlord does not approve, a new landlord must be identified (after the family’s existing lease expires, in the case of Track 2 participants).

**Housing**  Where and how will CHA house participants?

- Participants will be housed in traditional Public Housing or in the private market using a Housing Choice Voucher. Participants will not be housed in mixed-income housing. CHA may consider a transfer to traditional public housing if a unit is available (equal bedroom size), with the transfer considered as final.
- CHA will not increase a family’s unit size (in Public Housing) or subsidy (for HCV families) to accommodate the pilot participant. In accordance with CHA policy, HCV families may move to a larger unit, provided they do not pay more than 40% of their income in rent.

**Responsibilities**  What do participants have to do?

Of participants:

- Track 1 participants will be considered as a regular leaseholder, but must agree to continue to participate in services under this demonstration program as specified on the Consent to Participate in the Re-Entry Pilot form.
Chicago Housing Authority Demonstration Program and Special Initiatives Overview

- Track 2 participants will sign a conditional tenancy agreement for a period of two years with the option to extend for an additional two years. The option period will be extended with mutual agreement of CHA, and in cases of HCV the landlord.
- Participants must engage in supportive services with one of the re-entry providers listed above, including weekly contacts with the provider for the first 90 days and monthly contacts thereafter, monthly in-home visits with the provider for the first 90 days and quarterly in-home visits thereafter, monthly visits from a CHA FamilyWorks representative and any additional meetings, contacts or home visits that the provider deems clinically necessary.
- Participants must show that they are drug-free by passing regular and/or random drug testing, as determined clinically necessary by the Reentry Pilot service provider. CHA and its property manager’s experience with the participant will be considered in determining if a random drug test is warranted.
- Participants must meet the public housing work requirement.
- The Participant must exit the household if found to be in violation of CHA policies.

Of receiving families (in the case of Track 2):
- Receiving households must participate in an intake interview as described in the Selection section.
- Receiving households must continue to be compliant with their lease and other CHA policies.
- Any violations on the part of the pilot participant could impact the receiving family if the family does not take appropriate actions, which may include baring the participant from the unit.
- After the successful completion of the four-year term (initial 2-year term plus a 2-year extension), the family can request that the pilot participant be added to their lease.
- There will be no increase in the number of bedrooms of the unit for the family as a result of the reentry participant joining the family.

**Timeline**   When will the program take place?

- The program will be presented to the CHA Board of Commissioners for approval in November 2014.
- CHA submitted a request to HUD’s MTW office to approve certain parameters of this proposed demonstration.
- Program implementation will begin after approval from CHA Board and HUD.
- CHA and the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, a partner in the Reentry Pilot, will hold quarterly meetings to discuss the pilot.
- The program will be evaluated for four years after it begins, following approval from HUD through Chicago State University.
Appendix B

Do you have a family member who would like to rejoin your household? The CHA Reentry Pilot Program allows formerly incarcerated individuals to obtain housing despite a previous conviction.

ELIGIBILITY

You may be eligible to participate in the CHA Reentry Pilot Program if you have been formerly incarcerated and you:

• Are at least 18 years old

• Want to live with family members who agree to participate and who currently live in a CHA apartment or are participants in the Housing Choice Voucher program

• Have participated or would be willing to participate in services at one of the following agencies and have been highly recommended for success by service provider staff:
  o Safer Foundation
  o St. Leonard’s Ministries

• Agree to sign a consent form to be willing to participate in services for a two year commitment as needed

• Are compliant with CHA’s work requirement

GETTING STARTED

• If you and your family are interested in learning more about this program, requirements and additional eligibility criteria, please contact:
  Safer Foundation: (312) 922-2200
  St. Leonard’s Ministries: (312) 738-1414

• Other reentry service providers may refer to the Safer Foundation and St. Leonard’s Ministries

• For more information about the reentry pilot program, contact the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless: (312) 641-4140

*Certain family members qualify, please inquire for more information
Appendix C

CHA Reentry Pilot

Service Provider Cheat Sheet

The CHA Reentry Pilot began in August, 2015 and opens new opportunities for people with criminal records to live in housing provided by the Chicago Housing Authority (including: public housing, senior housing, HCV/Section 8). The goal of the Pilot is to house at least 50 individuals who would otherwise be denied CHA housing due to criminal record.

Designated staff at each CHA Reentry Pilot provider agency

The role of the designated staff person is to identify and refer individuals from their agency to the CHA Reentry Pilot. The designated staff person must only refer those people who have turned their lives around for the CHA Pilot and who have been assessed along a number of specific points, including completion of reentry programming and employment or enrollment in school.

Designated CHA Reentry Pilot Referral staff:

1. St. Leonard’s Ministries: Douglas McKinney
2. Safer Foundation: Tony Lowery

2nd tier of Pilot referring agencies

Other reentry service agencies are able to refer clients to Safer Foundation for final evaluation for the Pilot. The individuals must have completed at least 6 months of services between the two agencies.

How to identify a candidate for the CHA Reentry Pilot

The CHA Reentry Pilot is only for people who have turned their lives around AND have completed six months of reentry services with St. Leonard’s Ministries or Safer Foundation, or with another service provider in conjunction with St. Leonard’s or Safer.

Please see the CHA Reentry Pilot proposal at http://chicagohomeless.issuelab.org/resource/chicago_housing_authority_reentry_pilot for more information on evaluating clients for suitability for the CHA Reentry Pilot.

Here is a series of basic questions that can be used to determine if someone is the right fit for the CHA Reentry Pilot:

1. Does the individual have a CHA waitlist number? OR Does the individual have a parent, sibling, child or grandparent living in CHA that they would want to live with?
   IF NO: The individual is not eligible for the CHA Reentry Pilot at this time.

   IF YES:

2. Does the individual NOT have ANY of these offenses in their background: murder, attempted murder, arson, sex offense, meth manufacture? Or drugs or violent crime on federally subsidized property within past 3 years?
IF NO: The individual is not eligible for the CHA Reentry Pilot at this time.

IF YES:

3. Does the individual satisfy CHA’s work requirements? Working, going to school, volunteering, or a combination of the three for at least 20 hours per week unless circumstances can be demonstrated that are preventing the individual’s participation in one of these three activities.

IF NO: The individual is not eligible for the CHA Reentry Pilot at this time, but can be referred to Safer Foundation for job readiness training and employment opportunities.

IF YES:

4. Is the individual willing to complete the following services with you once they are housed in CHA housing?: Weekly contacts from the service provider for the first 90 days, monthly contacts after 90 days; monthly in-home visits from service provider for the first 90 days, quarterly in-home visits after 90 days; monthly in home visits from a CHA FamilyWorks representative; any drug testing deemed clinically necessary by the service provider; any additional contacts of in-home visits deemed necessary by the service provider; any external services identified as required for continued engagement in the CHA Re-entry Pilot Program.

An individual must satisfy the above four criteria in order to be referred to the CHA Reentry Pilot.

With any questions please contact Rachel Ramirez, (312) 641-4140.
Appendix D

Description of Reentry Applicant's Efforts

Applicant Name: ____________________________

1. List the applicant’s intake date with your agency:
   a. Individual intake date: ____________________________

2. Is the applicant drug-free?
   □ Yes □ No

   Describe the individual's recovery process including dates and results of drug testing you have used to verify that the individual is drug-free at the time of this application:

   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

   Most Recent Drug Test:
   Date: _______ Positive: _______ Negative: _______

3. Is the applicant current on their rent?
   □ Yes □ No □ N/A

4. Has the applicant been evicted from the CHA or other subsidized housing program within the last two years?
   □ Yes □ No

5. Describe the applicant’s current housing situation and the status of their rental agreement:

   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

For Reentry Service Provider/CHA Reentry Program Administrator Use Only
Not for CHA Tenant File
6. Describe the applicant's reentry efforts prior to the release from prison:
Examples include, no history of discipline, having a prison work assignment, participating in an academic program, participating in vocational training, participating in treatment for mental health or addiction recovery. If the facility in which they were incarcerated had limited programs available, please make note of this.

Facility name(s) (if applicable):

7. Describe how the applicant has shown a commitment to the CHA Reentry Pilot Program: Include information about the development of job skills, life skills, support groups they may have participated in, mentoring programs, volunteer programs, and any other relevant information.

8. Describe the applicant's participation in aftercare services: Examples include continuation of services with service provider; making wise decisions about family and friend relationships; complying with community supervision requirements (if applicable); participating in community events and forums, including reentry and expungement summits.
9. Describe the applicant’s support network: Examples include close family and friend relationships, mentoring and sponsorship activities, volunteerism, and faith-based support, and any other relevant information:

__________________________________________________________________________

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10. Describe any other information you believe is relevant to the applicant’s entry to the CHA Reentry Pilot Program:

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REFERENCES


Bernard, April. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Chicago, July 26, 2016.


Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. “CHA Reentry Pilot: Service Provider Cheat Sheet.” See Appendix C.


—. “Description of Reentry Applicant’s Efforts.” See Appendix D.


Cunningham, Lynne. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Chicago, July 18, 2016.


Horrace, Darrell. Interview with the author. Phone interview. August 2, 2016.


—. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Chicago, July 19, 2016.


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EDUCATION

Syracuse University, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs 2014 - 2017

Master’s of Arts in Geography
Thesis title: “Chicago’s Carceral Geographies: Public Housing and Prisoner Reentry in the City”
Advisor: Don Mitchell

Master’s of Public Administration
MPA Capstone Project: “Exploring Streetlight Tariff Alternatives for the City of Syracuse”
Advisor: Peter Wilcoxen

University of California, Berkeley 2007 - 2011

Bachelor of Arts in English and Peace & Conflict Studies
Summa Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa, Dean’s Honors List

SKILLS
ArcGIS, SPSS, STATA, Qualtrics, Microsoft Office, InDesign, research, writing, editing, speak intermediate Spanish and beginner French

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Syracuse University (Syracuse, NY)

Teaching Assistant for Geography 103, Environment and Society Spring 2017
Teach three weekly recitation sections on topics including environmental justice, climate change, and the climate movement. Responsible for grading course papers and exams.

Teaching Assistant for Geography 105 World Urban Geography Spring 2015 and Fall 2016
Teach weekly recitation sections, reviewing topics related to urban geography, politics, and planning around the globe. Responsible for lesson planning for sections and facilitating discussions as well as grading weekly assignments, map tests, two exams, and final projects. Lesson topics include: public space, gentrification/urban revitalization, housing and homelessness, and urban social movements.

Research Assistant for Professor Jesse Lecy Summer 2016
Interview stakeholders involved in downtown and waterfront redevelopment in Buffalo, NY, with an eye towards identifying what financial and policy mechanisms have made these projects possible. Responsible for synthesizing interview data and writing a coherent policy case study for submission to a policy case portal.

Graduate Assistant at Maxwell School Center for Career Development August 2015 – May 2016
Planned and implemented a career talk on non-profit management and prison policy from a local prison alternatives advocate. Edited and laid out a comprehensive Professional Development Guide for graduate students using InDesign. Created and distributed two professional employment surveys to Maxwell School alumni using Qualtrics. Compiled survey data for dissemination.

Research Assistant for Professor Leonard Lopoo August 2015 – May 2016
Conducted background literature research related to a health insurance choice study. Wrote research summaries of recent publications by Center for Policy Research scholars, for distribution in a new online newsletter. Provided administrative assistance for the Center, including organizing application materials for a confidential faculty search.

Grader for Geography 171 Human Geographies and 372 Political Geography Fall 2014
Responsible for grading papers and assignments.
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*Routledge (New York, NY)*  
**Associate Editor, Psychology**  
*January 2014 – July 2014*  

*Editorial Assistant, Education*  
*April 2012 – December 2013*  
Provided administrative and editorial support to a team of editors, working on over one hundred titles at every phase of the publication process.

*W.W. Norton (New York, NY)*  
**Trade Editorial Intern**  
*January 2012 – March 2012*  
Read submissions and prepared cover sheets for team of trade editors. Drafted back cover copy and managed gratis orders for reviewers. Provided administrative support as needed.

*Education Justice Project, University of Illinois (Urbana, IL)*  
**Freelance Writer and Guest Instructor**  
*October 2011 – December 2012*  
Employed in freelance capacity to write newsletter articles featuring formerly incarcerated men. Compiled the organization’s operations manual and taught a writing workshop in medium-security prison.

**PRESENTATIONS**  

“Geographies of Mobility in James Joyce’s *Dubliners.*” Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, April 2015. (presenter)


**PUBLICATIONS**  

**GRANTS AND AWARDS**  
$250, Cultural Geography Specialty Group Master’s-Level Research Award, 2015  
$750, Roscoe-Martin Fund for Research, Syracuse University, 2014

**SERVICE**  
Maxwell School Dean’s Search Committee  
*December 2015 – May 2016*  

Chair, Supporting Women in Geography (SWIG)  
*October 2015 - March 2016*  

Reviewer, *Journal of Urbanism*  
*December 2015*