

Restoring Housing Choice Vouchers Lost Due to Sequestration

Summary:

About 70,000 fewer low-income families were using Housing Choice Vouchers at the end of 2013, compared to a year earlier, due to the sequestration cuts implemented on March 1, 2013. The FY 2014 omnibus provides enough funding to allow state and local public housing agencies (PHAs) to restore fewer than half of the vouchers cut. To fully restore the vouchers lost due to sequestration, **Congress should provide sufficient funding to renew vouchers in use in 2014 and include in the FY2015 appropriation \$320 million for 40,000 targeted vouchers.**

These 40,000 vouchers should be targeted towards vulnerable households for whom Housing Choice Vouchers are essential to maintain safe, decent, and stable housing:

- \$240 million for 30,000 vouchers to house homeless or at-risk individuals or families with children, or, as part of the Family Unification Program, to enable children to live with their families rather than in foster care.
- \$40 million for 5,000 vouchers to help reduce unnecessary institutionalization of people with disabilities (*Olmstead* compliance).
- \$40 million for 5,000 “tenant protection” vouchers to enable victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence who live in public housing or federally subsidized privately-owned housing to relocate quickly and safely, as Congress directed in last year’s Violence Against Women Act.

Key Information:

- Housing Choice Vouchers are the largest federal rental assistance program, assisting 5 million people in 2.1 million families nationwide.
- On any given day across America, some 585,000 people are homeless, including 138,000 children and 56,000 veterans. Another 6.7 million poor households are on the verge of homelessness (a number that has increased by 28 percent since the beginning of the Great Recession). Steep housing costs are placing a significant burden on families trying to make ends meet. Yet, only 1 in 4 households eligible for rental assistance receives it.
- If the remaining vouchers lost due to sequestration are not restored in 2015, sequestration’s reduction in the number of families served by the voucher program could be locked in, permanently reducing the amount of affordable housing available to low-income families.
- Housing Choice Vouchers already do much to help vulnerable populations:
 - Through local preferences and existing HUD-VASH vouchers, the HCV program helps thousands of homeless or at-risk families and individuals afford stable housing, including those fleeing domestic violence.
 - About 30 percent of households using HCVs nationally are headed by people with disabilities. Some of these households use targeted Non-Elderly Disabled vouchers which Congress appropriated specifically for people with disabilities under the age of 62.
 - Many vulnerable families are able to afford housing using HCVs, including those participating in the Family Unification Program. About half of the households receiving vouchers have children.

Other supporting data:

Vouchers reduce poverty and homelessness

- Vouchers and other rental assistance lifted 2.8 million people — including 1 million children — above the poverty line in 2012. Vouchers alone likely produced at least half of that effect.
- Vouchers sharply reduce homelessness. A rigorous evaluation examined the effect of vouchers on low-income families with children. Compared to a control group who did not receive vouchers, HCVs reduced the share of families living in shelters or on the streets by three-fourths.
- Numerous studies have shown that housing vouchers combined with supportive services can significantly reduce the use of costly emergency services such as health care, corrections, child welfare, and emergency shelter among households that are frequent users of these systems.

Vouchers help working families make ends meet

- Housing vouchers can give families and children access to better opportunities by enabling them to move from high-crime areas with few jobs and failing schools to areas with more job opportunities, better schools, and less crime.
- The large majority of voucher households that can reasonably be expected to work, *do* work.
 - Two-thirds of non-elderly, non-disabled households using vouchers are either working or worked in the past year.
- Work-promoting initiatives are more effective for families with affordable housing.

Vouchers help low-income and homeless veterans

- Nearly 300,000 veterans receive rental assistance through “mainstream” programs not specifically targeted on veterans. Most of these veterans likely participate in the three main assistance programs: Housing Choice Vouchers, the largest, Public Housing, and Section 8 Project Based Rental Assistance.
 - About 52 percent of veterans with rental assistance are elderly. 21 percent are non-elderly veterans with disabilities.
 - 117,000 children live in assisted families that included a veteran. Eleven percent of veterans with rental assistance are female.