

The Shriver Center on Poverty Law's Partnership for Just Housing

Everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to live. Stable housing helps lay the foundation not only for successful individuals, but also healthy families and communities. Involvement with the criminal justice system should not limit someone's ability to access safe and affordable housing from which they can build their future. In searching for a place to call home, everyone deserves a fair chance to show that they will be a good tenant and that they are more than any past involvement with the criminal justice system.

Today, however, justice involvement can often pose a significant obstacle to affordable housing, with the burden falling most inequitably on people of color, who are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Housing providers often screen for criminal records using overbroad criteria that sweep in individuals whose records are too old, too minor, or just plain irrelevant. Meanwhile, through the use of crime-free and nuisance ordinances, a growing number of municipalities deploy their law enforcement not simply to fight crime, but also to harass, destabilize, and drive out Black and brown families from their city limits. The time is now to end to the discriminatory impact of the criminal justice system on housing.

Convened by the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, the Partnership for Just Housing is a multi-state collaborative of advocates working to end this discrimination and to advance economic and race equity at the intersection of housing and criminal justice. Specifically, the Partnership for Just Housing works to reduce the discriminatory impact of the criminal justice system on housing by: (1) breaking down unfair housing barriers for people with criminal records; and (2) ending the use of crime-free and nuisance ordinances as a tool for segregation.

The Partnership for Just Housing builds from the strength, knowledge, and impact of the Shriver Center's housing justice advocates in advancing fair housing for justice-involved individuals. We leverage our research, including the pivotal studies [When Discretion Means Denial](#) and [The Cost of Going Crime Free](#), both of which inspired similar research in other states and helped paved the way for groundbreaking federal guidance from HUD. We also bring a keen eye toward pragmatic policy solutions in light of our legislative advocacy and litigation, most notably [HOPE Fair Housing Center v. City of Peoria](#), an important federal case challenging a city's reliance on a crime-free ordinance to segregate its residents. Finally, the Partnership benefits from the Shriver Center's existing multi-state networks, the [Legal Impact Network](#) and the [Racial Justice Institute Network](#), whose members understand and advocate for systems change at the state and local level and whose practices prioritize community-driven advocacy with a racial justice lens.

Members of the Partnership address the discriminatory use of criminal records screening and crime free/nuisance ordinances at the state and local level. These efforts consist primarily of litigation, legislation, and policy advocacy. Members come from a variety of backgrounds: legal services, policy advocacy, fair housing, and civil rights. Members also include national partners tackling these issues at the federal level or across multiple jurisdictions.

In pursuit of its goals, the Partnership engages in the following activities:

1. **Strengthening the capacity of and building a community among legal, advocacy, and grassroots organizations** – The Partnership creates opportunities for advocates to share expertise and best practices, and to workshop campaign challenges with one another, all with the goal of creating community and movement toward the Partnership’s goals. Members connect with one another through a listserv, conference calls, online trainings, and a members-only website for sharing documents, such as research, case filings, and campaign materials.
2. **Supporting strategic litigation** – The Partnership will support members challenging unfair screening policies and burdensome crime-free/nuisance ordinances in federal court. Litigation support will include training members (e.g., on how to access and analyze data to substantiate legal claims), connecting members to key resources (e.g., potential experts), and providing limited opportunities for co-counseling and amicus briefs.
3. **Developing model policy and messaging** – Although some details will differ by jurisdiction, effective policies and messaging on criminal records and housing share many common features. The Partnership will develop model policies and messaging tools that advocates can adjust to suit the political realities of their own jurisdictions. In addition, to ensure that changes in policy are carried out in a way that tangibly helps people with criminal records on the ground, the Partnership will connect advocates who have successfully advocated for policy change through legislative or administrative advocacy and are in the implementation stage of their campaigns.
4. **Strategically investing time to support initiatives at the local and state level** – There will be times when members need help beyond the resources provided by the Partnership. In those instances, members may also call upon the Shriver Center to provide more substantial back- up support for specific initiatives that will further the goals of the Partnership. Support may come in the form of co-counseling, specific communications guidance, or more hands-on assistance with research, legislative, or administrative advocacy. In Seattle, for example, the Shriver Center and its partner, the National Housing Law Project, worked with Columbia Legal Services to draft amicus briefs in support of the Seattle Fair Chance Housing Ordinance, which is currently being challenged in federal court.

Through these activities, the Partnership for Just Housing strives to create a community of practice among advocates across the country who work collaboratively to end the discriminatory impact of the criminal justice system on affordable housing. These activities are made possible by the generous support of the Open Society Foundations.

For more information on the Partnership for Just Housing and how to get involved, please contact:

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