



BLOG

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Ex-offenders generally pose no greater threat to landlords than overall affordable-housing renters

By Neal St. Anthony | FEBRUARY 27, 2019 — 9:30AM

Most renters with criminal backgrounds do not pose a more-significant threat of problems to landlords than the general population of affordable-housing renters, according to a Wilder Foundation study.

The conclusion of the study, commissioned two years ago by four large developers and managers of affordable housing, generally supports the contention of those who maintain that former criminals face unfair discrimination in securing housing and employment after they've completed their punishment.

"It's egregious that we condemn people beyond their formal prison sentence, that we also as a society condemn them to make it more difficult to find a home and a job," said Alan Arthur, the veteran CEO of Aeon, one of the Twin Cities largest developer-operators of housing for low-income renters.

"Most people believe if you have a criminal history your path to housing and a job is very difficult because you are a greater risk. This study provides significant evidence that in at least 11 out of 15 categories of crime there is virtually no difference in housing-success outcome. It also, most importantly, shows that [from] as time passes after the crime.... It's less likely that housing success will be negatively impacted."

The study should also buttress the arguments of criminal-justice reform advocates and those who work with ex-offenders, such as CEO Dan Pfarr of 180 Degrees, who contend that the best guaranty against prison recidivism is purpose, familial or other support, a safe residence, training and a job.

A disproportionately high percentage of convicts are minorities, hail from low-income backgrounds, and have educational deficiencies. They are also more likely to become homeless or reoffend and end up back in prison at public expense that can range to \$40,000 a year.

Wilder researchers studied 10,500 households who resided in rental units operated by Aeon, Beacon Interfaith Housing, CommonBond Communities and Project for Pride in Living (PPL) between 2010 and 2017. Nearly three-in-ten of the households contained at least one adult with a prior criminal conviction. Those households tended to be younger and among the lowest-income in their buildings.

Those households that contained someone with a recent conviction for major drug-related crimes, burglary, assault and fraud led to problems that could lead to damage or evictions at a higher rate than the general population studied.

"The increased probability of negative housing outcomes for those with criminal convictions fades over time," the study found. "Rates of negative housing outcomes are significantly higher among households with one or more felony or (non-traffic) misdemeanor conviction prior to move-in, compared to those with no criminal convictions during that time period."

The Wilder study's "conclusive findings show that most types of criminal backgrounds do not significantly increase a tenant's risk of experiencing a negative housing outcome. These results illustrate that a wide variety of factors contribute to housing outcomes, and challenge some common misperceptions about the importance of criminal background in determining the probability of a negative housing outcome."

The four nonprofit businesses own and manage nearly 25,000 affordable rental units, mostly in the Twin Cities area.

"Our job is to make 'home' possible for more people who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity," Arthur said.