An Opportunity Agenda for Renters
The Case for Simultaneous Investments in Residential Mobility and Low-income Communities

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Introduction and summary

Too often, where people live determines what opportunities they have in life. …
In this country, of all countries, a person’s zip code shouldn’t decide their destiny.
We don’t guarantee equal outcomes, but we do strive to guarantee an equal shot at opportunity—in every neighborhood, for every American.
— President Barack Obama

As the nation grapples with severe and worsening inequality, ensuring that opportunity is not limited by where a person lives is of utmost importance. A lack of available affordable housing and deeply rooted patterns of residential segregation have created a situation in which where people live depends in large part on their income, race, and ethnicity. For this reason, it is imperative to pursue policies that help all households find decent and affordable housing in neighborhoods that offer safety, stability, and opportunity.

To achieve this goal, we urge a two-pronged approach. Policies need to both promote residential mobility and a deconcentration of poverty while also supporting reinvestment in racially segregated and economically impoverished neighborhoods. Doing so will help transform these neighborhoods into healthy communities where residents have access to the basic building blocks of opportunity: high-quality housing, jobs, good schools, transportation, and health care.

This report provides an overview of the latest research that demonstrates how people’s address affects their life outcomes. The report also outlines several policies to promote economic opportunity for America’s low-income renters. Specifically, the following recommendations support affordable housing and economic opportunity:

• Use tax policy to increase the supply of affordable rental housing
• Eliminate restrictive and exclusionary zoning that keeps households out of high-opportunity neighborhoods
• Fund the federal housing voucher program in order to better equip it with tools to help households access high-opportunity neighborhoods
• Take a comprehensive approach to revitalizing high-poverty communities
• Preserve affordable rental housing more effectively
• Ensure that the secondary market continues to support affordable rental housing
• Maintain single-family rentals as a source of affordable housing

While the policy changes that are detailed in this report relate to housing, their effects reach far beyond physical buildings. Rather, by connecting more households with the supports and institutions that enable them to succeed, these policies will promote economic opportunity for millions of low-income households that rent.
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The Center for American Progress is an independent, nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans, through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.

Our Values

As progressives, we believe America should be a land of boundless opportunity, where people can climb the ladder of economic mobility. We believe we owe it to future generations to protect the planet and promote peace and shared global prosperity.

And we believe an effective government can earn the trust of the American people, champion the common good over narrow self-interest, and harness the strength of our diversity.

Our Approach

We develop new policy ideas, challenge the media to cover the issues that truly matter, and shape the national debate. With policy teams in major issue areas, American Progress can think creatively at the cross-section of traditional boundaries to develop ideas for policymakers that lead to real change. By employing an extensive communications and outreach effort that we adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape, we move our ideas aggressively in the national policy debate.