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HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF MILWAUKEE COMMENTS TO PROPOSED CCAP LEGISLATION

The Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee has been utilizing the CCAP court system since its inception. Access to this valuable, FREE, database is invaluable to our organization, as well as to private-sector landlords in the community. As a government funded agency facing federal budget cuts, we cannot afford to lose this FREE resource.

Under federal housing regulations issued by the U. S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), housing authorities are required to screen all applicants for suitability. Public housing and Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Programs ARE NOT entitlement programs. Applicants must meet specific screening criteria.

The CCAP system is used by HACM in a variety of ways:

Landlord/tenant civil judgments: oftentimes the CCAP system contains enough information so that valuable staff time, resources and funds do not have to be utilized accessing physical court records. Landlord tenant judgments that occur outside Milwaukee County often cannot be obtained due to time, distance or other factors. It can be very costly under open records to obtain these documents via an open records request. In addition, there is a time delay that effects application processing time. When the application processing time slows down, vacancy rates can climb which also results in a potential loss of revenue to the agency. CCAP records in general are often a tool we use to verify prior or undisclosed addresses a potential applicant lived at. This is essential for good screening. Oftentimes rental property has changed hands and we no longer can contact the former owner for a reference check. CCAP provides valuable information if a property has changed ownership.

Criminal history: CCAP provides comprehensive information about an individual's involvement with a county's court system statewide. The notes within the CCAP record let us know about sentencing requirements, if an individual has had probation violations, had his/her probation revoked or has been discharged from probation. Again, this can save valuable time and reduce the number of calls to already busy probation/parole agents. Our Public Safety staff also frequently uses the CCAP system when investigating complaints of unauthorized live-ins, accusations that a criminal may be living in public housing, etc. **[You may want to ask Al Schoessow for his input. You also know how you may have used CCAP yourself.]**

Harassment/restraining orders: CCAP also provides valuable information about harassment/restraining orders. Under the federal government's Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) we have a legal obligation to assist legitimate victims of domestic violence in a variety of ways within our assisted housing programs. With easy access to CCAP records, HACM is able to quickly and sensitively verify and substantiate a victim's claim that he/she is or has been the victim of domestic violence if the court system has been utilized.

Other investigations: HACM frequently receives requests from residents already living in public housing to add new adults to their households. Criminal checks are done on the potential new adult household members. CCAP has been invaluable for documenting previous cases of domestic violence between these individuals. When domestic violence occurs within our housing developments, the neighbors (including young children) are frequently disturbed and the police are called to the property. Such disturbances contribute to the community's perception that public housing is crime-ridden and unsafe. Good residents/families may become so tired of their neighbors' disturbances that they move-out in frustration rather than stay while we attempt to build a successful eviction case against the family who is disturbing their neighbors.

Private-sector landlords: Good, reputable private-sector landlords also benefit from access to the CCAP system. They also can use CCAP as a tool when screening their own tenants. HACM has difficulties finding enough landlords to participate in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. When a landlord does agree to participate, the program notifies the landlord that they (the landlord) are responsible for screening their potential tenants. If the CCAP system is taken away from private-sector landlords, they may be unwilling to consider Section 8 voucher holders. This would dramatically impact low income persons looking for a decent apartment in the private market.

Other social services agencies/shelters etc. In HACM's many relationships and partnerships with various agencies in the greater Milwaukee community, the vast majority of these agencies also rely on CCAP. They also use it as a screening tool to determine if they should admit or allow individuals to stay/participate at their shelters. They have great concerns about housing, even temporarily, violent criminals, those who've engaged in drug-related activities or who've had other significant, repeated law enforcement contacts. Oftentimes it is the shelters who are housing families with children, victims of domestic violence, etc. who have already been through significant trauma. These agencies are trying to keep these families safe and secure.

Across the country, public housing programs have a reputation for housing criminals. **In Milwaukee, this is not the case.** We take our screening responsibilities very seriously.

Good tenants start with strong, effective screening. We believe firmly that we should never admit those individuals to our public or assisted housing communities who have a past record, whether eviction or criminal related, of damaging property, disturbing neighbors or engaging in violent or drug related activities, to name just a few.

We have consistently been rated a high-performing housing authority by HUD. The quality of our programs, services and buildings have been recognized on numerous occasions, including being the past recipient of a World Leadership Award in the housing industry. If access to the CCAP system is denied, our ability to adequately screen applicants for housing would be severely compromised. Elected officials from the state to the local level do contact our office on behalf of residents of our assisted housing programs or residents who are neighbors of the public housing communities when there are problems—whether real or perceived. These elected officials, on behalf of the constituents they serve, should expect that HACM will investigate these complaints and allegations. One of HACM's continuing goals is to CONTINUE to be a good neighbor and partner in Milwaukee neighborhoods. CCAP is essential to keeping our assisted housing communities safe, crime and disturbance free.

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