



**Date:** May 29, 2015  
**To:** Council Member John Okamoto, Chair, Housing Affordability, Human Services and Economic Resiliency Committee  
**From:** Steve Walker, Director, Office of Housing  
**Subject:** Director's Report: Guideline for Property Management in Affordable Housing

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Dear Councilmember Okamoto:

For this month's report, I would like to feature work that OH is doing to reduce barriers to housing for people with criminal records. This ongoing work reached a milestone this week with the release of a new OH guideline to assist affordable housing owners when they contract for, and use, criminal records screening reports.

An estimated one in every three or four adults in the US has a criminal record. They face significant, and often lifelong, barriers to employment and housing. Studies show that people with stable housing are less likely to reoffend. Stable housing gives people a chance to gain and maintain employment, reunite with families, and comply with terms of release. It improves public safety for the entire community and provides cost-saving and humane options for people whose record is related to behavioral health issues. Reducing barriers for people with criminal records is a priority for our community's efforts to end homelessness.

Over the past two years OH has convened housing owners, tenant advocates, other City department staff to explore ways to increase access to housing so people with criminal records have a second chance. OH and partners have presented learning sessions the legacy of mass incarceration in our country, the disproportionate impact on people of color, and the challenges of using criminal records reports when assessing suitability for housing. With the Seattle Office for Civil Rights we presented a fair housing training on admissions practices. Housing owners should establish criminal records screening that is related to legitimate business needs, and housing applicants should be allowed to provide additional information about their record and their conduct since release.

This week OH released a guideline for property managers of affordable housing: *Selecting a Tenant Screening Agency*, which is attached. Its purpose is to assist housing owners to contract for criminal records screening reports that are accurate, up-to-date, understandable, and consistent with state and federal law and best practices. The guideline was developed with the assistance of affordable housing providers and tenant advocates. I look forward to describing this work at next week's CHASER meeting.