



**Public Housing Policies Affecting Individuals
with Criminal Records in Ohio:
Richland County
February 2001**

I. Introduction

The following memorandum summarizes the housing policies that affect individuals with criminal records in Richland County, Ohio. The federal housing laws give local housing authorities some discretion to establish local policies regarding the admission and eviction of people with histories of criminal activity. For a summary of the federal housing laws affecting individuals with criminal records, please refer to the Legal Action Center's summary entitled "Housing Laws Affecting Individuals with Criminal Convictions."

II. Statutory Authority

The relevant statutes conferring authority upon the Mansfield Metropolitan Housing Authority are contained in OHIO REV. CODE ANN. §3735, et seq.

III. Housing Authority Policy – Application for and Eviction from Public Housing

The Mansfield Metropolitan Housing Authority (HA) is the only housing authority that serves Richland County. A representative from the HA stated that public housing assistance in Richland County is offered exclusively through Section 8 units. The HA does not own the property that is leased to low-income tenants.¹ The HA does not conduct any criminal background checks on applicants for Section 8 housing, but it does encourage individual landlords to conduct these investigations.² The HA maintains a list of Section 8 landlords, but it does not assist tenants with the housing search and does not engage in ongoing relationships with landlords.

¹ Interview with William Gandert, Executive Director, Mansfield Metropolitan Housing Authority on October 12, 2000.

² Missy Pugh, a receptionist at the HA, stated that the screening process does not even include a verbal inquiry about the criminal histories of its applicants.

IV. Opinions of Local Organizations/Advocacy Groups

A representative from Community Connections for Ohio Offenders, Inc., a non-profit organization that provides services to former offenders, stated that although he has never been told by a Section 8 landlord that s/he denies housing based on an applicant's criminal history, he believes that this occurs frequently.³ The influx of returning offenders to the community has contributed to housing shortages in Ohio. Because the HA does not create or enforce leases, housing cases brought by the Legal Aid Society would be against private, Section 8 landlords. A representative from Legal Aid said she cannot recall ever handling a complaint against the Mansfield Metropolitan Housing Authority or a Section 8 landlord.⁴

³ Interview with Mark Paulus, Community Connections for Ohio Offenders, Inc., on October 12, 2000.

⁴ Interview with Lori Caskey, Mansfield Legal Aid Society, on October 12, 2000.