

PREAMBLE

In mid-December 2012, columnist Michael Gerson of the Washington Post wrote about the ignored plight of black males in America. Among many social and economic issues that could fill a list of critical priorities, he wrote, “One issue in particular cries out for attention while receiving almost none. Our politics moves from budget showdown to cultural conflict to trivial controversy while carefully avoiding the greatest single threat to the unity of America: the vast increasing segregation of young, African American men and boys from the promise of their country.”

Citing the increasing rates at which young inner city black males drop out of school (now more than 50%) and the disproportionately high rates of incarceration and disproportionately low rates of participation in the workforce, Gerson writes, “The problem has gotten worse for decades, in good economic times and bad. Others benefitted from the tight labor markets of the 1990s. African American men did not. By 2004, more than half of all black men in their 20s were unemployed. And the size of this problem gets consistently underestimated, since unemployment figures exclude the incarcerated. A problem that seems insoluble is thus rendered invisible.”

The societal problems attendant to this phenomenon are obvious. What is also quite evident is that once black males enter the criminal justice system for whatever reason, they begin a journey on a treadmill that, for many, lasts a lifetime. Lacking the skills and education that are prerequisites for employment, they are now saddled for life with a label “felon”—an almost automatic bar to gainful work. In addition, their criminal history is also a likely bar to admission to most affordable housing opportunities, making post-incarceration reunification of families a near impossible dream.

The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) recognizes that, whether explicit or implicit, its practices have served to perpetuate the problem. As the city’s major provider of affordable housing and of safe and healthy communities, HANO accepts that it has a responsibility to give men and women with criminal histories the opportunity to rejoin their families and communities and to rejoin them as productive members.

POLICY STATEMENT

It shall therefore be the policy of HANO that all individuals, regardless of their criminal history, shall have equal access to employment and housing opportunities at HANO. No potential employee or applicant will be automatically barred from employment or housing at HANO unless it is determined that: 1) they pose a clear and present danger to the workplace or the community in which they might live, 2) the criminal history includes acts of child abuse or sexual predation, or 3) there is a history of domestic violence. If, upon initial examination of an application for employment or admission, a reviewer determines that further investigation is required for Category 1 applicants, a panel will evaluate all factors presented to determine that individual's suitability for employment or housing. All potential employees or residents shall have the opportunity to provide any information that they wish to the panel to demonstrate that they will be productive members of the workplace or the community. Decisions will be based on the panel's determination of whether or not that individual has a propensity for continued disruptive or criminal behavior that will be detrimental to the work place or to the residential community in which they seek to live, or whether factors indicate a reasonable probability of favorable future conduct. Applicants with Category 2 and Category 3 histories will not be considered.

Further, HANO will require that anyone who wants to do business with HANO, whether as a contractor, consultant, or landlord, shall also adopt this policy.