

Challenged Elements

Increase assisted housing choices by expanding the range and quality of housing choices available to participants in the JURHA's tenant-based assistance program.

The City of Jonesboro, located in the Northeast corner of Arkansas in Craighead County, is one of the state's fastest growing cities, the fifth largest city in Arkansas (with 74,889 people), and the second largest city in land mass. Located between Little Rock, St. Louis, and Memphis, Jonesboro stands out as the largest metropolitan city in Northeast Arkansas within a 17,000 square -mile radius area. Jonesboro is the county seat for Craighead County, also the home to Arkansas State University, and considered a regional center for manufacturing, agriculture, medicine, education, and trade.

According to the data tables below, in 2010 Jonesboro had a population of 67,263 with 26,111 households and a median income of \$37,368. However, if we move forward to 2015, the American Community Survey data shows the population increased to 71,576 (6.03%). Number of households has increased to 27,335 (4.48%), and the median income has increased from \$37,368 to \$41,688 (10.37%). According to the CHAS data, Jonesboro has housing problems in each of the four housing areas: Housing lacking complete plumbing or kitchen facilities; Overcrowded; Severely Overcrowded and Housing Cost Burden. There is a great discrepancy in renter-occupied housing vs. owner-occupied housing.

The vast majority of rental property is located in R/ECAP (low-income) areas of Jonesboro. While the national standard for housing cost burden says that not more than 30% of income should be paid in housing cost, the 2010 American Fact Finder results show a direct correlation between income and percent of income paid in housing cost. For the 26.5% of Jonesboro families living on less than \$20,000 per year, 21.1% of them pay 38.6% of their income in housing costs. While 18.2% of our families earn between \$20,000 to \$34,999 annually, 8.5% of them pay more than 30% of their income in housing costs. According to the 2008-2012 CHAS data below, 5,602 renters pay more than 30% of their income in housing cost, compared to 1,450 homeowners who pay more than 30% in housing cost. Additionally, 3,348 renter-households vs. 745-homeowners pay 50% or more of their income in housing cost. The total of 8950 renter-occupied households and 2,195 owner-occupied homes are living with a housing cost burden.

Although we have seen an increase in housing costs especially since 2016 the HUD 2018 FMR were reduced across the board by 6% to 11%. JURHA requested a reevaluation of our FMRs and had to cover cost of a survey to dispute low 2018 FMR. As a result of the survey our 2018 FMR were increased for all bedroom sizes except the 2 bedroom which was only lowered a few dollars. It was very difficult to find a third-party willing to conduct the survey within the 120-day window it was due. It also demonstrates that the current method for setting the FMR is out of touch with the actual cost of housing.

These factors combine to make it extremely difficult for low-income families to find decent, safe and affordable housing.

To maintain a high performing agency with the funding received from our administrative fees.

It is very difficult to develop our yearly budgets since the proration factor varies from year to year and changes during the funding year. There also continues to be a gap in funding to adequately implement the Housing Choice Voucher program. These funding levels make it very difficult to keep qualified staff and to make entry level salaries competitive. Low administrative fees also restrict outside training for new employees and continuing training for staff. General we must rely on in-house training which increases the burden on existing staff and management.

Also, since HUD has instituted monthly reporting requirements (VMS) and has given us additional tools (EIV) that assist the Housing Authority to find unreported income and fraud it has increased our administrative burden. These are both great tools that are needed and greatly benefit the Housing Authority but they do increase our administrative burden as the Housing Authority is challenged to keep up with the changes to these systems, maintain qualified staff, and incorporate the review of information from these reports by caseworkers and management to ensure compliance with HUD regulations.

JURHA was among the first group which was required to submit the AFFH along with the City of Jonesboro as HUD strongly suggested that you collaborate with local government. The original notice indicated that HUD believed that a consultant will not be necessary to complete an AFH. However, this was an extremely burdensome process which took several months to complete and did require technical assistant in order for City of Jonesboro and JURHA obtain receive an approval from HUD for our AFFH Plan.

These requirements that have been added in the last six years have added more review time with clients and require additional administrative checks to ensure compliance and are required even though we are not adequately funded. If our Administration fees continue to be below 80% as they were this year it will be very difficult to implement upcoming changes as a result of PIC-NG, UPCS-V, and the remainder of HOTMA once HUD gives us more guidance.

Reduce Public Housing vacancies (turn-over)

Our agency has both Public Housing and HCV program and applicants are placed on a jurisdiction-wide waiting list. Many applicants are housed in Public Housing initially while their application for HCV remains intact. Due to the additional tenancy requirement for Public Housing residents, namely Community Service, many tenants decide to move to the HCV program when offered a voucher since there is not regulatory requirement that we can house families without federal assistance before families already receiving federal assistance. This causes a tremendous turn-over in our Public Housing program.

Monitor & Track Public Housing Community Service

Community Service is simply an unfunded mandate for Public Housing Agencies. It is also discriminatory. Section 8 HCV offers rental assistance for low income families, yet HCV voucher holders receive the benefit of rental assistance without the requirement of performing Community Service. Public Housing staff must monitor and ensure that public housing residents do comply with the requirement to perform 8 hours of community service work per month in order to receive the same rental assistance that Section 8, HCV recipients receive for nothing. Since we are not being funded at 100%, we have lost a valuable position due to these cuts, the position that helped monitor and “chase” community service residents. It is very difficult for our staff to continue working at the high pace required to keep occupancy up, account receivables down, and comply with all the EIV requirements.