

Statewide Family Reentry Pilot Program Launched

DOVER – Delaware’s five public housing authorities (PHAs), the Delaware Department of Correction (DOC) and the Delaware Center for Justice (DCJ) today launched the *Delaware Family Reentry Pilot (FRP)* Program, a statewide initiative to give individuals recently released from incarceration the opportunity to access safe and stable housing by reuniting with their families who live in public housing. It represents the latest statewide initiative to advance Governor John Carney’s effort to support reentry success and reduce Delaware’s recidivism rate through [Executive Order 27](#).

“Giving individuals who are returning to their community the opportunity to live with family members can provide the strong support they need in the right environment to chart a new positive path,” said **Department of Correction Commissioner Claire DeMatteis**. “Delaware’s Family Reentry Pilot Program applies best practices from New York and other places which have demonstrated that programs like this can work effectively while supporting community safety.”

The Family Reentry Pilot represents a year-long collaboration between DOC, DCJ, and Delaware’s five PHAs – which include the Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA), Dover Housing Authority, Wilmington Housing Authority, New Castle County Housing Authority, and Newark Housing Authority – to consider and implement a recommendation by the Vera Institute of Justice. The Institute worked with Delaware’s PHAs in 2018 and 2019 to identify opportunities to increase access to public housing for people with conviction histories. Delaware’s five PHAs applied together for its assistance through a competitive nationwide process and were one of only four groups selected by the Institute and the only statewide group to be selected.

“This program would not have been possible without the support of the Vera Institute, and we are grateful for the assistance they provided,” **said DSHA Director Anas Ben Addi**. “Finding safe, affordable housing can be a challenge for individuals involved in the criminal justice system, and we know many of them are struggling even more during the COVID-19 crisis. This program is a collaborative effort to help those individuals succeed in their communities.”

Individuals who are eligible for the FRP program must:

- have been released from incarceration within the past three years or have been living in the community for up to three years after being convicted of an offense which would ordinarily prohibit them from residing in public housing;
- be currently under DOC community supervision;
- have a close family member who currently lives in public housing through one of the five Delaware PHAs. Close family members include a parent, sibling, child, grandparent, grandchild, spouse or domestic partner.

“Wilmington Housing Authority is honored to be part of this initiative with the other public housing authorities, DOC and DCJ,” **said Executive Director John Hill**. “Without safe housing and the support of close family, we know many of the individuals in our city who are returning to the community after incarceration are more likely to reoffend and recidivate. The Family Reentry Pilot program gives those individuals an opportunity to live with family members who will support them and provide the safe shelter they need to be productive returning citizens.”

“This is an excellent example of how state, county, and local organizations can collaborate on an important issue. New Castle County, including our New Castle County Police Department, has supported this initiative from the start, and we are proud to see it coming to fruition,” **said County**

Executive Matt Meyer. “This program will provide residents in our county with safe housing in a supportive environment – something that is as crucial as ever with the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. We want all of our residents to succeed and this is a step in the right direction to give those who have been involved in the criminal justice system an opportunity to thrive.”

The application and review process consists of three steps:

- DOC staff, including Correctional Counselors, Probation Officers and In-reach Coordinators, identify eligible applicants and assist them with completing a program application.
- Applications are submitted to the DCJ for referral to the appropriate PHA.
- The PHA carefully reviews each application, conducts a standard assessment of the applicant’s conviction history, and interviews the family residing in PHA-assisted housing to assess the family’s readiness to welcome the FRP applicant into their household.

Approved participants will be permitted to live as temporary guests in the designated household for a period of one or two years, depending on their conviction history. Participants who successfully complete the temporary period while remaining in compliance with program guidelines may be officially added to the household’s PHA lease.

All FRP program participants and their host family members will be required to sign a contract binding them to strict guidelines at all times. If a guideline is violated, or if the participant commits a new offense during their participation in the program, he or she will be expelled from the FRP and be required to vacate the residence.

DCJ will oversee FRP referrals and make services available to qualified FRP participants to support their reentry success.

These services will help minimize barriers by connecting participants to resources in order to address their immediate needs, foster self-sufficiency, and meet their goals. Qualifying participants who are actively under community supervision may engage in comprehensive intensive case management to assist with transportation, educational goals, securing permanent housing, obtaining employment, accessing basic needs (food, clothing, identification, etc.), building job readiness skills, accessing behavioral health services, and other services as needed.

“DCJ is excited to be a part of the Family Reentry Pilot Program with the housing authorities and our long-term partner, DOC,” **said Executive Director David Bever.** “We understand that family support and stable housing is a crucial component of successful reentry that promotes stability and increased connections to supportive networks to aid in assisting individuals from re-offending. Individuals being released from prison deserve to have the support they need to become empowered and reach their goals. We look forward to this collaboration as this program is assisting in breaking down barriers and allowing individuals to be reunited with their family members and recreate those bonds needed for prosocial, healthy relationships.”

Initially, the pilot is being offered in properties that are owned and operated by public housing authorities. Early next year, the pilot will expand to Housing Choice Voucher holders. PHAs will begin outreach to landlords who accept Housing Choice Vouchers in the coming months and participation in the FRP program will be voluntary for Housing Choicer Voucher landlords.