

MOVING TO WORK

In April of 1996, Congress authorized HUD to select 30 high-performing* housing authorities (HAs) from across the country to participate in a demonstration program called Moving to Work (MTW). The purpose of MTW was to encourage HAs to test different approaches to providing housing assistance. Under MTW, HAs have freedom from most of the federal rules for the public housing and Section 8 voucher programs.

Goals: Reduce costs, encourage work, and increase housing choices.

Congress intended that HAs would use this freedom from federal rules and regulations to try to achieve the following goals: reduce the government's costs; give incentives to families with children whose head of household is working, seeking a job, or participating in a program to prepare for work; increase low-income families' housing choices.

Flexibility

MTW gives HAs the flexibility to combine federal funds from the public housing operating and modernization programs and voucher funds into a block grant.

Requirements

MTW does not mean that HAs have the power to deviate from all federal rules. HUD set certain requirements that HAs have to follow, which include: The HA has to continue assisting substantially the same total number of families and mix of household sizes. At least 75% of the families served have to be very low-income. The HA is required to adopt a "reasonable rent policy" that is designed to encourage work and self-sufficiency. MTW doesn't exempt HAs from complying with federal laws such as the Civil Rights Act, the Fair Housing Act and the American with Disabilities Act. The HA has to meet HUD's housing quality standards, and abide by labor standards and environmental rules.

CHA's goals:

The CHA articulated four basic goals in its MTW application:

- Preserve the current housing stock.
- Secure permanently affordable housing in Cambridge.
- Help tenants on welfare move to work and aid tenants to move to "better" work.
- To better address local housing needs in locally determined ways.

* Only HAs with a Public Housing Management Assessment Program score of 80% or above could apply for MTW. CHA's score was 100%. Out of 43 applicants, 24 high-performing HAs were chosen to participate in MTW in October 1997. Congress subsequently authorized the inclusion of troubled or once-troubled HAs.

What else did Congress do in 1996? End welfare as we knew it! President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (PRWORA), or "welfare reform," into law on August 22, 1996. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was replaced by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program.