No Simple Solutions: Lessons from Chicago’s Public Housing Transformation

Speaker Biographies

Ron Ashford is director of supportive services for the Office of Public and Indian Housing at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). His office was responsible for the community and supportive services component of the HOPE VI program and now administers all grant programs related to public housing resident self-sufficiency. He and his staff work with other federal agencies to coordinate employment, reentry, education, health, and youth programs that enhance the lives of public housing residents. Before joining HUD, Ashford worked at the New York City Housing Authority, where he developed innovative supportive service programs.

Mary Brown is executive director of the DC Promise Neighborhood Initiative, one of 12 demonstration sites that build viable cradle-to-career pipelines for children and youth living in challenged communities. Previously, Brown was director of Life Pieces to Masterpieces, an arts-based youth development organization that she founded and grew into a leading, sustainable model for creating transformative change in the lives of young black boys and men. In addition to her work as a pioneer of youth development, Brown has served on the faculty of NeighborWorks America, where she provides routine training and workshops nationally.

Rolf Pendall is codirector of the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute. He leads a team of over 40 experts on housing, community development, and economic development topics, consistent with Urban’s nonpartisan, evidence-based approach to economic and social policy. Pendall’s research expertise includes metropolitan growth trends; land-use planning and regulation; federal, state, and local affordable housing policy and programs; and racial residential segregation and the concentration of poverty. He directs the Urban Institute’s Mapping America’s Futures project, a platform for exploring implications of future demographic change at the local level. Other recent projects include Urban’s evaluation of HUD’s Choice Neighborhoods demonstration; a HUD-funded research study on the importance of cars to housing choice voucher users; and long-standing membership in the MacArthur Foundation’s Research Network on Building Resilient Regions. Between 1998 and 2010, Pendall was a professor in the Department of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University, where he taught courses and conducted research on land-use planning, growth management, and affordable housing.
Susan Popkin is a senior fellow and director of the Neighborhoods and Youth Development initiative in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center. A nationally recognized expert on public and assisted housing, Popkin directs a research program that focuses on the ways neighborhood environments affect outcomes for youth and on assessing comprehensive community-based interventions. A particular focus is gender differences in neighborhood effects and improving outcomes for marginalized girls. Popkin’s current projects include the multisite Housing Opportunities and Services Together demonstration, which is testing two-generation service models for vulnerable families in public and assisted housing while creating a network of housing providers seeking to use housing as a platform for services; Promoting Adolescent Sexual Health and Safety, a community-based participatory research effort to develop strategies to promote sexual health and safety for adolescents and reduce coercive and risky behavior; the evaluation of the DC Promise Neighborhood Initiative; and the evaluation of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Family-Centered Community Change Initiative. Popkin is coauthor of the award-winning Moving to Opportunity: The Story of an American Experiment to Fight Ghetto Poverty, lead author of The Hidden War: Crime and the Tragedy of Public Housing in Chicago, and coauthor of Public Housing Transformation: The Legacy of Segregation.

Erika C. Poethig is an Institute fellow and director of urban policy initiatives at the Urban Institute. She assembles in-house experts to help local leaders draw insights from research and navigate policy challenges facing urban America in the 21st century. She also leads partnerships to develop new programs and strategies, translate research into policy and practice, and align philanthropic investments and federal policy. Before joining Urban, Poethig was acting assistant secretary for policy, development, and research at HUD, where she was responsible for research, policy, and market analysis, as well as program development assistance. During her tenure in the Obama administration, she was deputy assistant secretary for policy development and was a leading architect of the White House Council for Strong Cities and Strong Communities. At the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, she was associate director for housing. She also was assistant commissioner for policy, resource, and program development at the City of Chicago’s Department of Housing.