Porting to Opportunity: An Analysis of Portability in the Housing Choice Voucher Program

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Abstract

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has been interested in improving the housing choice and outcomes of housing choice voucher (HCV) tenants, with a focus on getting tenants into neighborhoods of higher opportunity. The HCV program is HUD's largest rental assistance program, serving more than 2 million families annually across the United States. Tenants are not confined to living within the jurisdiction of their public housing agency (PHA) and can move anywhere in the country through a process called porting. Little is known about the characteristics and neighborhood outcomes of portability moves. This article tracks porting moves using HUD's internal administrative data and finds that 9.9 percent of HCV tenants will port, one-third of portability moves are greater than 250 miles, and 63 percent of porting moves are to different metropolitan areas. By matching tenant moves with tract-level data from the 2015–2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, this article identifies changes in neighborhood characteristics for porting households. Porting, on average, results in a move to a neighborhood of higher opportunity as measured through education rates, income inequality, median household income, and poverty rates. Even when compared with HCV families that move but remain within their PHA's jurisdiction, porting moves tend to be to neighborhoods of higher opportunity.

Introduction

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program is HUD's largest rental assistance program, serving more than 2 million families annually throughout the United States. HCVs reduce tenant payments to an affordable standard in private-market rentals, with tenants finding units to live in on their own. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has been interested in improving housing choice and outcomes for HCV tenants. This interest started with the Gautreaux litigation of 1966 (Polikoff, 2007) and has increased recently with new studies demonstrating the success of the Moving to Opportunity demonstration, which empirically confirmed the benefits of

living in high-opportunity areas, including increased income, better education for children, and improved safety and mental and physical health for parents (Chetty, Hendren, and Katz, 2015; Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010). HUD has several policy interventions to further enhance housing choices for voucher holders and promote access to high-opportunity neighborhoods, such as Small Area Fair Market Rents (HUD, 2023b), the Community Choice Demonstration (HUD, n.d.), and, recently, Housing Mobility-Related Services funding (HUD, 2023a).

Mobility is central to the design of the HCV program. As opposed to public housing, HCVs enable greater flexibility when housing needs change, create opportunities for households to follow jobs, and allow families to locate near high-performing schools. The mobility of HCVs exists both within and across jurisdictions. Tenants can move their subsidy anywhere in the United States, even if the move requires switching which PHA administers the voucher, a process known as porting. All tenants are eligible to port, but non-resident HCV applicants—tenants who did not live within the PHA bounds at the time of applying—cannot port for 12 months unless approved by the PHA. Portability is explicitly allowed by federal statute. Section 8(r) of the United States Housing Act of 1937 provides that HCV participants may choose a unit that meets program requirements anywhere in the United States, as long as a PHA administering the tenant-based program has jurisdiction over the area in which the unit is located.

Porting tenants leave their current PHA ("sending PHA" or "initial PHA") to another PHA ("receiving PHA") as part of a move-in location. When a tenant ports, the receiving PHA can choose to "bill" or "absorb" the tenant's payments. If the PHA bills, then the sending PHA will be responsible for paying the PHA portion of the tenant's rent, even though the tenant no longer resides within the PHA's bounds. The receiving PHA will receive a portion of the administrative fee because it will still be responsible for administering the voucher within its jurisdiction. If the receiving PHA chooses to absorb, it will be responsible for the monthly housing assistance payment and administration; the voucher then counts toward its utilization, a metric used by HUD to determine PHA funding. McCabe and Moore (2021) conducted a series of interviews with PHAs and found that receiving PHAs make the discretionary decision about whether to bill or absorb on the basis of pragmatic analysis, weighing the gains in funding from increased utilization rates to the increased cost from the voucher.

A sending PHA is required to permit an eligible porting tenant except for two rare exceptions. First, a PHA may deny the tenant due to insufficient funding, which occurs when (1) the receiving PHA does not absorb the voucher, (2) the move is to a higher-cost area, and (3) the PHA is unable to avoid termination of current participants during the calendar year to remain within its budgetary allocation. Second, a PHA participating in the initial set of MTW demonstrations can use its discretionary authority granted through the demonstration to deny porting tenants if approved through its MTW plan.

Tenants may be facing administrative barriers preventing them from porting. Receiving PHAs may also require porting tenants to undergo screening, so tenants are not guaranteed to be allowed to port and may not want to undergo the paperwork burden. Also, although porting information is given in a packet of information on move-in, tenants may not be fully aware of their ability to port.

A better understanding of portability use may help HUD and PHAs establish better policies and procedures, opening more opportunities for families.

This article fills a gap in the literature on the portability decisions of tenants. Climaco et al. (2008) is the only known analysis to extract tenant-level porting moves and analyze porting through an empirical lens using HUD administrative data. Their research provides a method to extract portability moves and finds that between 1998 and 2005, 8.9 percent of households with a voucher ported from one jurisdiction to another over the 7 years. The analysis finds higher rates of porting for Black households and households with children, and it finds that porting moves, on average, were to tracts with lower poverty rates.

This article focuses on the cohort of HCV tenants who entered the program in 2012 to analyze their movement and portability decisions over the past decade. By focusing on that cohort, one can track moves across the lifetime of the voucher and compare portability moves with moves within PHAs to help analyze whether portability moves are distinct moves to areas of opportunity.

Tracking Tenant Movement

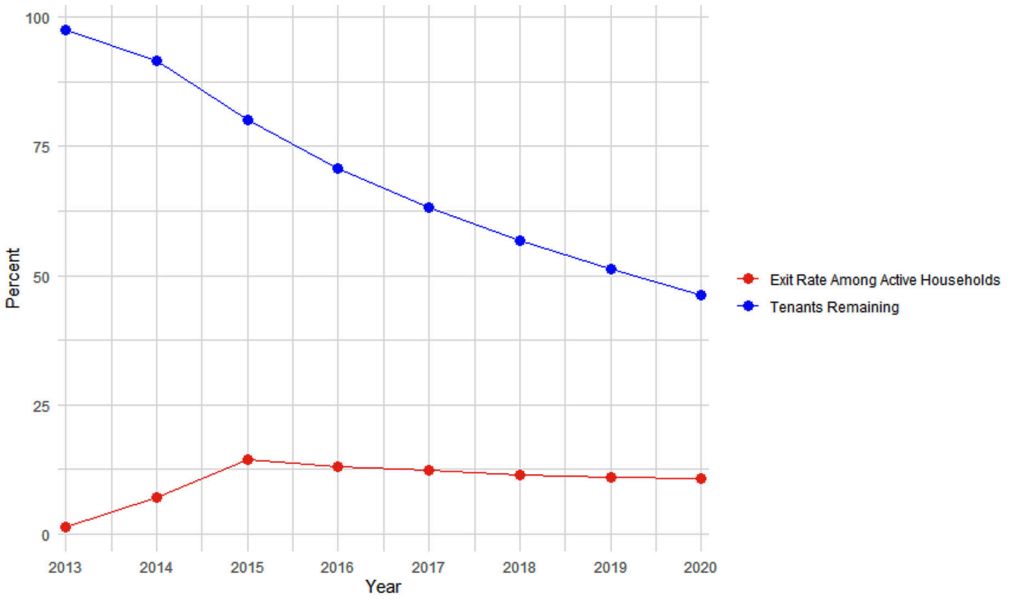
To track tenants who entered the HCV program in 2012, the author formed a database of households newly admitted in 2012, pulled data for each following year, and merged with household IDs from the 153,363 new admissions in 2012. Households will not always have entries for each year following 2012 either because the household exited the program or because of gaps in the administrative data. Appendix exhibit A-1 reports the demographics of the 2012 cohort.

Cleaning the data began with tracking exits. Although HUD administrative data contain an action flag for exits from the program, the flag may be unreliable. For instance, a tenant who ports may have an exit flag from the sending PHA when, in fact, they are receiving continued assistance from the receiving PHA. To get around that circumstance, this article defines an exit as a tenant with 3 consecutive years of missing data. The tenant is presumed to have left during the first year of missing data. This presumption is conservative because many tenants exiting assistance likely have entries indicating their exit from the program, and therefore they actually left the year before the presumed year; but for this article, such intricacies are tangential to the analysis of porting. Once an exit is recorded, the author ensures that all entries for that household are missing in all the years following to avoid capturing tenants who leave and then reenter the program.

Mobility of vouchers is most prominent in the first couple of years and then decreases over the lifetime of the voucher. Exhibit 1 reports the percentage of remaining tenants and the rate of exits among active households every year. More than one-half of the cohort had exited the program by 2020, which indicates a median tenure between 6 years (for a voucher recipient who joined in late 2012 and exited in early 2020) and 8 years (for a recipient who joined in early 2012 and exited in late 2020) for the 2012 cohort. This finding matches past findings that the average lifetime of a voucher is approximately 6 years (McClure, 2018). Meanwhile, the exit rate among active vouchers increases over the first 3 years and then remains relatively steady, although slowly declining, to about 12 percent of active households in the following 5 years.

Exhibit 1

Voucher Exit Rate by Year



Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

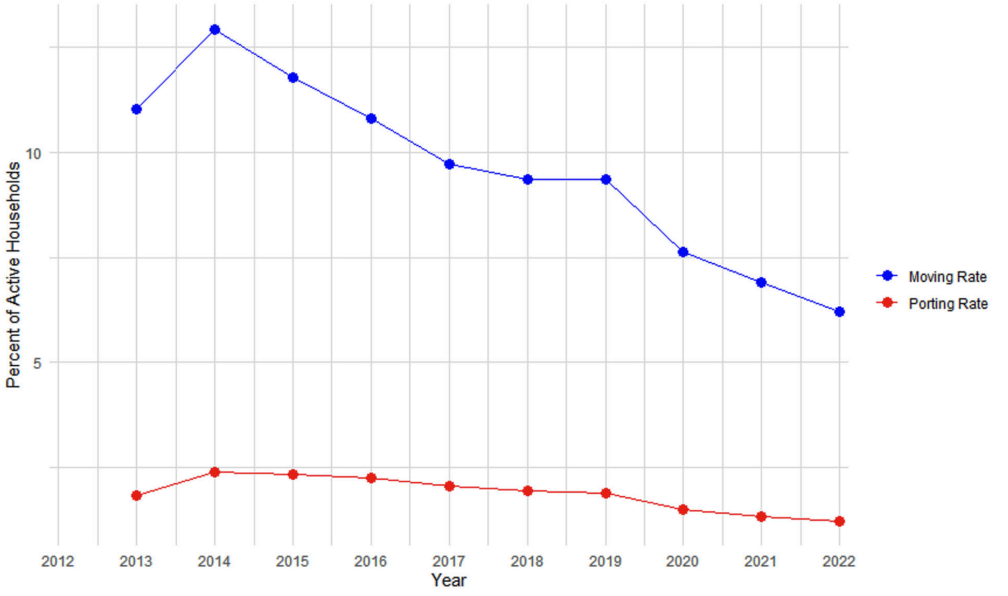
Once exited households are flagged and removed from the database for subsequent years, missing data between years of activity are filled by assuming the later year's data. For instance, a household missing data in 2014 but with data in 2013 and 2015 would be filled with geographic information from 2015. Flags are created to track moves by changes in census tracts for each year. In this instance of missing data, if 2013 and 2015 data indicated different census tracts, the move would be flagged as occurring in 2014 (which assumes the 2015 census tract).

HUD's administrative data contain a portability flag, but the flag is unreliable. The flag typically only signals for ported vouchers that are billed and do not capture absorbed vouchers. To get around this shortcoming, ports are flagged as tenants who report in one PHA one year and a different PHA the next year while also reporting a change in census tract. A few tenants switched PHAs but remained within the same tract, which may be because of administrative shuffling between PHAs and not an active porting decision from the tenant; 3,614 vouchers appear to undergo this type of shuffling. For instance, the Puerto Rico Department of Housing transferred 273 vouchers to the Puerto Rico Public Housing Administration as the housing administration was reorganized.

Exhibit 2 shows the rate of moves and ports among active households by year. Moves include all ports. Moves and porting peak in 2014, which is 1 to 2 years after receiving a voucher (in 2012). The rate of moves continues to decline the longer a household receives assistance, and portability begins to flatten at less than 1 percent of active households a decade into receiving assistance. Over the course of a decade, 38 percent of tenants move to different census tracts, and 9.9 percent of tenants port.

Exhibit 2

Rates of Moves and Ports Among Active Households, by Year



Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

The Landscape of Porting Moves

Portability moves occur across the country and across PHAs, although some PHAs experience more porting than others. Appendix exhibit A-2 shows the sending PHAs that had the greatest number of outgoing ports among the 2012 cohort. The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles had the most sent vouchers, with 466. The Housing Authority of New Orleans and the Chicago Housing Authority follow, with 294 and 238, respectively. Appendix exhibit A-3 lists the receiving PHAs with the most incoming ports. Southern Nevada Regional Housing Authority tops the list, with 308 received vouchers; the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles, the Chicago Housing Authority, and the Housing Authority of Cook County are also on the list. In Chicago and Los Angeles, both the county and city PHAs have high counts of porting, which indicates that networks of portability may exist, with common sending and receiving PHA pairs.

Exhibit 3 shows the top 10 PHA porting networks. County and city pairs are prominent among the highest counts of porting between PHAs. Porting from the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles to the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles is the most prominent porting network, with 148 ports over the observed period. Porting in the opposite direction also appears frequently, with 62 observed ports from the county to the city over the observed period.

Exhibit 3

Top 10 PHA Porting Networks

Sending PHA	Receiving PHA	Vouchers Sent by the Sending PHA to the Receiving PHA
Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles	Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles	148
Housing Authority of New Orleans	Housing Authority of Jefferson Parish	95
Chicago Housing Authority	Housing Authority of Cook County	81
Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles	Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles	62
Allegheny County Housing Authority	Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh	61
Pinellas County Housing Authority	Housing Authority of the City of St. Petersburg	53
Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles	Southern Nevada Regional Housing Authority	50
PHA in and for the City of Minneapolis	Metropolitan Council (Minneapolis area)	50
Housing Authority of the City of Tulsa	Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency	47
Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles	Housing Authority of the City of Glendale	46

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

Porting moves vary in distance. Exhibit 4 shows categorical breakdowns of distance of porting moves calculated by the distance between the center of the census tract before and after porting. Less than 10 percent of porting moves are moves within 5 miles, and 45.4 percent are moves less than 50 miles. Almost one-third of porting moves are long-distance moves greater than 250 miles.

Exhibit 4

Distances of Porting Moves

Distance Moved	Percent of Ports (%)
<5 miles	9.6
5–25 miles	25.7
25–50 miles	10.1
50–250 miles	22.5
>250 miles	32.2

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

Ports occur within and across metropolitan areas: 63 percent of porting moves are to different Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), and the other 37 percent remain within the metropolitan area. The Atlanta MSA tops the list of top (net) incoming ports (exhibit 5), with the Houston and Las Vegas MSAs following. The Orlando and Dallas MSAs also appear on the list. Many of those MSAs are fast-growing metropolitan areas, which may indicate that HUD-assisted tenants are using the mobility provided by vouchers to move to areas of economic activity.

Exhibit 5

MSAs With the Most Net Incoming Ports

Metropolitan Statistical Area	Net Receiving
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA MSA	218
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX MSA	131
Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV MSA	127
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI MSA	98
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX MSA	94
Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL MSA	85
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI MSA	78
Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA MSA	49
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV MSA	45
Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson, IN MSA	38

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

Porting Demographics

The author established a logistic regression model to test the likelihood of porting on the basis of household characteristics; exhibit 6 reports the results. Households with children are 12.5 percent more likely to port, and households with a disabled member are 22 percent more likely to port. Black and Hispanic households are more likely to port, as are lower-income, younger, and larger households. Black households are 12.6 percent more likely to port compared with 7.1 percent of White households. The average age of the 2012 cohort is 34 years old, and the average age of those porting is 38.

Exhibit 6

Probability of Porting

Variable	Coefficient	P-Value
Age	– 0.0094	1.54e-36***
Child	0.1256	4.07e-05***
Black	0.5681	2.55e-29***
White	0.0268	0.5987
Hispanic	0.25	4.15e-21***
Female	0.2469	1.04e-26***
Number of Household Members	0.063	8.19e-14***
Member with Disability	0.2213	1.37e-26***
Income	– 3.00E-04	8.17e-73***

P-values: *<0.001. **<0.01. *<0.05.*

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

Porting to Opportunity

Tenants may move for a variety of reasons, and to this point, HUD has not done a comprehensive survey or analysis to understand the causes of porting. The porting data can be linked to 5-year 2015–2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data to identify changes in neighborhood characteristics for porting households. To analyze neighborhood characteristics of porting moves, this article first reports changes in the characteristics of a porting household's census tract pre- and post-porting. Those results are then compared with the corresponding data for HUD-assisted tenants who move to a different census tract but remain within their current PHA's jurisdiction. In treating within-PHA moves as a comparison group, one can calculate differences between the neighborhood change between porting vouchers and the comparison group with tract- and year-level fixed effects. The data analysis in this article is not concerned with causal questions and is purely descriptive. This article measures areas of opportunity on a continuous scale as areas with less poverty, higher median family income, higher education rates, and less income inequality. The report introduces two distinct threshold calculations to determine the presence of high poverty and low poverty in census tracts. High-poverty census tracts are defined as those with a poverty rate exceeding 20 percent,[1] whereas low-poverty tracts are characterized by a poverty rate below 10 percent. This analysis uses the following as opportunity variables—median household income, poverty rate, high school completion, college education, income inequality (according to the Gini index[2]), and high/low poverty tracts. However, *opportunity* is not strictly defined, and future research may identify better determinants of economic opportunity.

Portability Moves to Neighborhoods of Higher Opportunity

Porting moves tend to be to census tracts of higher opportunity. Exhibit 7 reports the pre- and post-porting tract differences for porting households. As shown, porting households, on average, port to areas with $3,174 greater median household income, 1.6 percentage points less poverty, 0.73 percentage point greater high school education rate, 0.75 percentage point greater college education rate, and a decreased Gini index of 0.0094. The share of households living in a low-poverty neighborhood, defined as a poverty rate below 10 percent, rose from 17.4 percent before households ported to 21.7 percent after. Likewise, the share of households living in a high-poverty neighborhood fell from 49.4 percent to 44.7 percent. On average, porting households moved into census tracts with a 4.7-percentage-point decrease in households living in high poverty and a 4.4-percentage-point increase in households living in low poverty.

[1] This definition of *high-poverty census tracts* follows the calculations done in previous HUD reports, including *HUD Investments in Impoverished Areas for House Report 116-106* (2020). https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/HUD-Investments-in-Impoverished-Areas.pdf.

[2] The Gini index is a statistical measure used to gauge the distribution of income across a population, aiming to represent income or wealth inequality in a nation. The value of the Gini index ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 signifies perfect equality (every individual has the same income) and 1 indicates perfect inequality (a single individual holds all the income, and everyone else has none). A lower Gini coefficient suggests a more equal distribution of income, whereas a higher Gini coefficient points to greater inequality.

Exhibit 7

Porting Households Pre- and Post-Porting Neighborhood Characteristics

Neighborhood Characteristic	Post-Porting Tract	Pre-Porting Tract	Difference
Household Income	$51,141.01	$47,966.67	$3,174.34***
Poverty	20.3921%	21.9838%	– 1.5916%***
High School	84.2385%	83.5002%	0.7383%***
College	23.9481%	23.1937%	0.7544%***
Income Inequality (Gini)	0.4342	0.4436	– 0.0094***
High-Poverty Tract	44.6625%	49.359%	– 4.6965%***

P-values: *<0.001. **<0.01. *<0.05.*

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

Ports to Opportunity Are Relative to Originating Tract

Although, on average, ports occur to areas of higher opportunity, many porting moves occur to areas of lower opportunity. For example, porting moves that originate in high-opportunity neighborhoods mostly end up in lower-opportunity neighborhoods. Exhibit 8 provides an analysis of porting neighborhood outcomes based on the poverty-rate quartile of the originating census tract. The poverty rate is divided into quartiles, ranging from Q1 (lowest poverty rate) to Q4 (highest poverty rate). The exhibit shows the poverty rate in the originating census tract and in the census tract after the porting move for each quartile. For ports originating from Q1 neighborhoods (with the lowest poverty rates), the post-move poverty rate, on average, is almost 10 percentage points higher (17.96 percent in the post-move tract compared with 8.15 percent in the pre-move tract). Meanwhile, for those originating in Q4 neighborhoods, the post-move poverty rate is about 17 percentage points lower than the pre-move census tract poverty rate (22.79 versus 39.50 percent). On average, households living in tracts where the poverty rate is around 20 percent or higher tend to see improvements in neighborhood poverty when they port; those porting from lower-poverty tracts do not.

Exhibit 8

Porting Neighborhood Outcomes by Originating Tract Poverty Rate Quartile

Originating Census Tract Poverty Quartile	Quartile Originating Poverty Rate (%)	Quartile Post-Move Poverty Rate (%)
Q1 (lowest poverty)	8.15	17.96
Q2	16.05	19.58
Q3	24.25	21.24
Q4 (highest poverty)	39.50	22.79

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

Porting Households Move to Higher Opportunity Than Within-PHA Movers

Improved opportunity in neighborhood moves may be common to all HCV movers originating in higher-poverty tracts. To test that theory, the author created a comparison group with tenants that changed census tracts but remained within the same PHA, a nonportability move.

Exhibit 9 reports neighborhood characteristics of originating tracts for within-PHA movers and porters. As shown, porting households tend to originate from areas of higher opportunity with higher median household incomes, lower poverty rates, and higher education rates. Porting households are also less likely to be in high-poverty tracts and more likely to be in low-poverty tracts compared to within-PHA movers.

Exhibit 9

Originating Tracts for Porting and Within-PHA Moves

Variable	Porting Moves	Within-PHA Moves	Difference
Median Household Income	$47,964.64	$45,702.9	$2,252.241***
Poverty Rate	21.9883%	23.9638%	– 1.9806%***
High School Graduation	83.4995%	82.8974%	0.6125%***
College Graduation	23.1916%	22.6076%	0.5929%***
Income Inequality	0.4437	0.4479	– 0.0042***
High Poverty Tracts	49.3736%	55.3685%	– 6.0536%***
Low Poverty Tracts	17.3573%	15.3117%	2.0678%***

P-values: *<0.001. **<0.01. *<0.05.*

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

To control the imbalance in the originating census tract, the author employed tract-year fixed effects in regressions comparing changes in neighborhood characteristics. Exhibit 10 reports the change in neighborhood characteristics of households who moved between census tracts, divided into groups of those who ported PHAs and those who remained within their initial PHA. The first two columns show the difference in each neighborhood characteristic between the post-move and pre-move census tract. Porting and within-PHA moves are moves to higher opportunity by proxy of each opportunity variable.

The third column of exhibit 10 shows the difference in the changes in neighborhoods between within-PHA and porting moves. Porting moves are generally associated with moves to greater economic opportunity than within-PHA moves, when controlling for originating tract and year of move, with statistical significance on each opportunity variable.

Exhibit 10

Change in Neighborhood Characteristics Among Porting and Within-PHA Movers

Change in Neighborhood Characteristics	Porting Movers	Within-PHA Movers	Difference
Household Income	$3,174.336	$896.0935	$3,318.447***
Poverty	– 1.5964%	– 0.3961%	– 2.1285%***
High School	0.7407%	0.2554%	0.7306%***
College	0.7579%	0.1383%	0.7409%***
Income Inequality (Gini)	– 0.0095	– 0.0022	– 0.0089***
High-Poverty Tracts	– 4.712%	– 0.8145%	– 6.7556%***
Low-Poverty Tracts	4.3717%	0.9148%	3.9875%***

P-values: *<0.001. **<0.01. *<0.05.*

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

The households that port are statistically different in a couple of characteristics compared with households moving within PHAs, but none of the differences seem to be significant in scale. Exhibit 11 reports the demographics of porters and movers and their differences with tract-year fixed effects. Relative to households moving within PHAs, porting households are more likely to be Black and less likely to be White. Of less statistical significance, they are slightly younger and earn slightly less. Those imbalances are not strong enough to guide the porting to opportunity results.

Exhibit 11

Demographic Comparison of Porting and Within-PHA Movers

Demographic	Porting Mover	Within-PHA Mover	Difference
Age	37.8099	37.5599	0.3407*
Child	61.86%	61.74%	– 0.36%
Black	57.21%	55.00%	3.20%***
White	41.04%	42.93%	– 3.10%***
Hispanic	15.15%	17.48%	– 0.20%
Female	81.65%	80.58%	0.63%
Household Members	2.5328	2.5247	0.0102
Disability	29.37%	28.72%	0.01%
Household Income	$861.8099	$848.5297	– $15.7944*

*P-values: ***<0.001. **<0.01. *<0.05.*

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

Moving Comes With a Premium

Areas of higher opportunity may demand higher rents. Among all tenants who port, their contract rent increases an average of $112, or 17 percent, in the year after the porting move. That increase may be due to naturally rising rents over time as year-to-year increases are anticipated. To test that theory, the author compared rent increases for within-PHA movers with tract and year fixed effects.

Rent increases are also seen for tenants moving within PHAs. Those tenants see an $87.21 increase in rent, for an average increase of 10 percent. In the year before moving, the rents of tenants who port and tenants who move within PHAs are not statistically significantly different, with average gross rents of $956 and $944, respectively. Both see nominal rent increases, but porting vouchers see, on average, a $21.67 greater increase, as shown in exhibit 12. When looking at the average increase by rate, the contract rent for porting vouchers experiences an average 6.4-percent-greater increase compared with the contract rent for within-PHA movers. Increased rents translate to increased housing assistance payments. Porting moves increased monthly subsidy payments by $98, and within-PHA moves increased payments by $58. The average increase in assistance does not fully account for the average increase in contract rent. Therefore, on average, increased rents are absorbed by both the tenant and the government.

Exhibit 12

Rent Increases After Move

	Porting Move	Within-PHA Move	Difference
Rent Rate	17.03%	10.04%	6.4%***
Rent Difference	$112.07	$87.21	$21.67 ***
Assistance Difference	$98.15	$58.71	$36.07 ***

*P-values: ***<0.001. **<0.01. *<0.05.*

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

Discussion

The findings from the data analysis presented in this article shed light on the housing choices of HCV tenants and their use of portability to move to neighborhoods of higher opportunity. These insights provide valuable guidance for policymakers and housing practitioners in designing effective strategies to promote housing choice and mobility. Moving to opportunity has been a large focus in the housing policy sphere, with programs that must strike a balance between providing tenants with more neighborhood choice and allowing tenants to retain their preferences. This article finds that "porting to opportunity" is a trend already pursued by HUD tenants, with the greatest benefits accruing to those starting in higher-poverty areas. This section presents several policy implications that follow from this analysis that may improve outcomes for HCV tenants.

Preapproval for Porting

Policies regarding screening and admission of tenants may differ among PHAs, and receiving PHAs may conduct additional screenings (although they are not required to do so). If the receiving PHA screens, tenants cannot be certain that their porting requests will be approved, leading to limitations in their ability to search for and apply to jobs in areas beyond their PHA's jurisdiction for fear of being hired for a job but rejected by the potential receiving PHA. Encouraging PHAs to adopt policies that allow for streamlined screening—or no screening—of incoming porting households may be advantageous. HUD may consider department-wide action that allows for universal portability of vouchers through standardizing screening processes.

Authorizing Larger Public Housing Agencies

Larger PHAs may facilitate greater access to housing opportunities across a broader geographical area without the administrative hurdles associated with porting. States can be authorized to form larger PHAs, which may allow for the allocation of vouchers to be more effectively coordinated, enabling HCV tenants to explore a wider range of neighborhoods with higher levels of opportunity. Regionalization can reduce the concentration of housing choice vouchers and provide tenants with easier flexibility to move around metropolitan areas.

If PHAs do not want to regionalize, adjacent PHAs should be encouraged to form agreements to ease the porting process, which may include provisions to not rescreen

porting tenants. Statewide PHAs may also play a role by becoming the receiving PHA for porting tenants in their state.

Housing Mobility Services

The finding that portability can create moves to higher opportunity aligns with the growing popularity of housing mobility services, which provide personalized support to tenants in making informed housing choices. Portability should be emphasized as an important tool for mobility. Housing mobility services can equip tenants with the necessary information, resources, and support networks to navigate the housing market and portability administrative barriers successfully, enabling them to make well-informed decisions about their housing choices. The analysis in this article also supports the targeting of mobility assistance to high-poverty census tracts, which are more likely to result in moves or ports to areas of higher opportunity.

Housing mobility services could benefit from cooperation and coordination among adjacent PHAs. Collaboration can involve sharing information, resources, and best practices, and it can help develop regional partnerships to enhance the effectiveness of mobility initiatives.

Nudges to Inform Tenants of Porting

Regulations mandate that public housing authorities must clarify the workings of portability while prohibiting actions that dissuade families from using this option.[3] This information is typically provided to tenants as part of an initial packet containing a substantial amount of other information. To promote porting, HUD can implement targeted nudges department-wide and through PHAs. At the departmental level, HUD can create a user-friendly landing page explaining the right to port vouchers and the necessary steps. At the PHA level, informational flyers and webinars can serve as on-the-ground nudges, gently reminding tenants about the benefits of moving to higher-opportunity neighborhoods.

Even with those efforts, however, policymakers and housing practitioners should keep in mind that a household may choose to port for any number of reasons, including being closer to existing support networks, such as family. Higher-opportunity neighborhoods are not inherently better for households, nor should they be a scale for success in regulations aimed at supporting the porting process. The approaches outlined herein give tenants autonomy to make the right choices for their households while easing the process of porting.

The analysis presented here raises many questions for future research. Porting can be studied with a qualitative lens from the tenants' perspective to identify decision factors when porting and the burdens faced. The analysis in this article can be reconstructed with different definitions and understandings of neighborhood opportunity, including linking tenant movements to distances from higher-quality schools. Practitioners and researchers may also match the quantitative findings herein with the unique PHA relationships in their region, and the data can be parsed to certain

[3] 24 CFR 982.301(a)(2).

metropolitan areas to understand trends in certain regions. That information sharing should extend to Puerto Rico voucher tenants, who have high rates of porting to the contiguous United States. All these research findings and suggestions may better inform policy implementation.

Conclusion

This article suggests that porting is a mechanism for tenants to move to neighborhoods of higher opportunity. In general, porting moves tend to be to neighborhoods of less poverty and inequality and greater household incomes and educational attainment. Those moves may lead to intergenerational benefits that generate higher economic opportunities for children in HUD-assisted households.

Appendix

Exhibit A-1

2012 Cohort Demographics

Variable	Value
Age	42.32813
1: White, Non-Hispanic	39%
2: Black, Non-Hispanic	42%
3: Asian, Non-Hispanic	1%
4: Native, Non-Hispanic	1%
5: Pacific, Non-Hispanic	0.5%
6: Other, Non-Hispanic	1%
7: Hispanic (any race)	14%
Disabled	35%
Female	73%
Median Income	$10,140

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

Exhibit A-2

Sending PHAs With the Most Outgoing Ports

Sending PHA	Sent
Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles	466
Housing Authority of New Orleans	294
Chicago Housing Authority	238
Puerto Rico Dept of Housing	200
Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles	185
Metropolitan Council (Minneapolis area)	134
NYS Housing Trust Fund Corporation	133
Arlington Housing Authority, TX	119
Housing Authority of the City of Tulsa	118
Georgia Residential Finance	117

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

Exhibit A-3

Receiving PHAs With the Most Incoming Ports

Receiving PHA	Received
Southern Nevada Regional Housing Authority	308
Georgia Residential Finance	289
Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles	266
Chicago Housing Authority	237
Housing Authority of the County of Cook	207
Metropolitan Council (Minneapolis area)	201
Houston Housing Authority	172
Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles	171
PHA in and for the City of Minneapolis	154
NYS Housing Trust Fund Corporation	152

Source: Calculations of HUD Administrative Data

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