The Maryland Opportunities through Vouchers Experiment (MOVE)

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Over 600,000 prisoners are released from U.S. prisons each year, and roughly one-half of these individuals are back in prison within just three years. Non-experimental research suggests that a key contributor to the vicious cycle of recidivism is the fact that many released prisoners return home to the same problem-filled locations with the same criminal opportunities and criminal associates that proved so detrimental to their behavior prior to incarceration. The Maryland Opportunities through Vouchers Experiment (MOVE) seeks to examine the counterfactual scenario—that is, the causal effects on criminal recidivism of residential migration far away from former neighborhoods. In this randomized controlled trial, residential migration is incentivized through the use of housing subsidies. A pilot of the MOVE program was launched in February 2015, with twenty newly released prisoners randomly assigned to receive a housing subsidy in the jurisdiction where they resided prior to incarceration (i.e., stayers) and twenty randomly assigned a housing subsidy in a jurisdiction at least 25 miles from where they resided in the past (i.e., movers). Details of the experimental design will be discussed, as will the successes and challenges of the program to date.

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