As part of the Road Map Initiative, a survey of 218 people involved in the justice system was conducted to explore housing challenges, needs, and preferences before and after incarceration. Survey respondents were a voluntary sample of clients from Safer Foundation and TASC Inc., as well as participants in focus groups for justice-involved people.

Prior to incarceration or detention, housing insecurity is the norm

For many, living situations are dangerous or unstable, including:
- Homelessness
- Transitional housing
- Shelter or hotel
- Abandoned building

41% of survey respondents experienced at least one of the above in the year prior. Many reported experiencing more than one of these during that year.

Social support is a crucial life-line to access shelter.
1 in 2 respondents lived with another person without paying rent before incarceration.

Respondents who did have housing had severe rent burden.
If and when they did pay rent, 44% of all respondents paid more than half of their income on housing.

Many moved more than once, showing housing inconsistency was common.
33% of respondents moved residences more than once during the year prior to incarceration.

Some did not have a place to call home.
26% of respondents were homeless in the year prior to their most recent detention.

Many also experience housing insecurity at release

Although 22% lived in their own apartment or house upon release, 15% were homeless or lived in transitional housing at point of release.
The housing that is available does not account for what people need

There is equal need for housing in Chicago, suburban Cook County, and other counties outside of Cook. Nearly 40% of respondents preferred to live in the city of Chicago. However, the remainder were split between suburban Cook County, other counties outside of Cook, and no preference. This helps illustrate the need for affordable housing in many areas for people who have criminal justice involvement.

Available housing is not accessible to people with disabilities.
12% of respondents identified that they or someone living with them had a physical disability. Though walk-up units may be more prevalent, investments should also be made in accessible housing.

Important factors in choosing housing are often not considered.
Cost, neighborhood safety, proximity to family and friends, and access to public transportation were important to survey respondents. These factors can facilitate a more successful community re-entry and should be considered by housing providers.

We also learned that many aspire to housing that accommodates multi-persons, including minors. It is important that we further explore the role of family and friends in housing for this population.

We need to address barriers to stable housing

Without this, people with justice involvement will not see successful community re-entry. Housing is critical to prevention of initial criminal justice involvement and of recidivism. Investments to increase availability of affordable housing that meets the needs and aspirations of people involved with the criminal justice system will serve to support success in communities for this population and their families.

This survey was conducted by the Road Map Initiative, a collaboration of organizations looking to stop the cycle of justice-involvement, emergency department use, and homelessness. Partners of the Road Map Initiative include Smart Policy Works, TASC, Inc., Mercy Housing Lakefront, AllChicago, the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Cook County Sheriff’s Office, Safer Foundation, UIC Health & Hospital System, Sinai Health System, Conlon & Dunn Public Strategies, the Women’s Justice Institute, and Urban Labs at the University of Chicago.