The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), at the direction of Congress, established a demonstration program called “Moving to Work” (MTW). The original demonstration program began in 1996 with 30 housing authorities selected to participate. The original program was created to experiment with locally designed strategies to test new ideas and allow greater flexibility from federal regulations to improve delivery of housing assistance while helping residents gain employment and become economically self-sufficient. Over the past 20 years, the MTW program has produced many successful strategies. The public housing sector has pushed for legislative expansion of the program so that all interested agencies may benefit from this initiative.

Congress, after many unsuccessful attempts over several years, finally authorized the expansion of the program to 100 additional housing authorities in the 2016 Appropriations Act. HUD is currently working on the application process. The legislation is quite prescriptive, and while 100 new participating agencies are allowed, only three slots are reserved for large agencies such as Akron.

We are working on our application and awaiting instructions about the process and schedule that HUD will follow. Over the next few months, AMHA will identify possible strategies and will be seeking comments and ideas from residents, our board and others in the community.

Over the years, AMHA has sponsored or partnered with other community organizations to offer a wide array of resident services. None are more important than creating opportunities and support to help residents advance their education and gain meaningful employment. As we so often hear, it is all about jobs. Research on the costs of rental housing tells us that to afford unsubsidized housing, jobs that pay double the current minimum wage are needed. MTW programs around the country demonstrate enhanced capacity to expand housing options while promoting education and employment.

This will be a very competitive process because of the limited number of available slots. We expect to benefit from the MTW lessons learned throughout the country, regardless of whether our application is selected. However, the administrative flexibility and savings from being deregulated makes a major difference in what housing authorities can afford to do.

Stay tuned!
On September 8, 2016, Ohio became the 25th state to amend its drug laws to allow limited possession and use of “medical marijuana” by individuals with certain health conditions. Medical marijuana will not be available until the Ohio Department of Commerce, in conjunction with an advisory committee, the State Medical Board and the Board of Pharmacy, establish regulations. Medical marijuana will be available only through entities licensed by the state to cultivate, process or dispense it. Individuals may not grow marijuana and must have a prescription from an approved and registered physician; use is limited to marijuana in forms such as oils, tinctures, patches or vapor. Smoking marijuana is still prohibited in all circumstances under the new Ohio law.

To allow for the limited medical use, Ohio reclassified (rescheduled) marijuana from a schedule I substance to a schedule II substance. A schedule I substance is considered unsafe with a high potential for abuse and having no accepted medical use. A schedule II substance is acknowledged to have some medical value, but remains regulated as it is still considered to have a potential for abuse.

Importantly, however, the United States government has NOT changed the classification of marijuana and possession, and/or use of marijuana remains a violation of federal law and, therefore, is still a federal crime. That position was specifically reaffirmed in August 2016 by the federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).

AMHA administers federal housing programs under the regulation of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and must follow the federal law and housing regulations. Therefore, even with the change in Ohio law, medical marijuana is still prohibited in all AMHA public housing, the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP/”Section 8”) and other properties participating in AMHA-administered housing programs.

Accordingly, please take notice that the use or possession of medical marijuana remains a violation of federal law, federal housing program regulations and the AMHA residential lease, and may result in denial of admission or termination of participation in any AMHA-administered housing program.