



CITY OF SAINT PAUL

Melvin Carter, Mayor

HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY (HREEO) COMMISSION

Maria Mitchell, Chair

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CHAIR

May 7, 2020

Maria Mitchell,
Ward 5

COMMISSIONERS:

Saint Paul City Council
15 Kellogg Blvd. West
City Hall 310
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Babatope Adedayo,
Ward 5

Tyler Blackmon,
Ward 3

RE: Tenant Protections Ordinance

Damon Drake,
Ward 1

Dear Councilmembers Brendmoen, Jalali, Noecker, Prince, Thao, Tolbert, and Yang:

Devon Gilchrist,
At-Large

The City of Saint Paul Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity (HREEO) Commission has followed with great interest the development of Chapter 193 of the Legislative Code pertaining to tenant protections. While we recognize that Chapter 193 defines multiple tenant protections that hold great potential for the expansion of human rights in Saint Paul, this communication relates specifically to critically needed protections for persons with arrest and conviction records.

Erin Hayes,
Ward 2

Muria Kruger,
Ward 2

Kaliah Linear,
Ward 1

Janessa Marquette,
Ward 2

Emily Peterson,
Ward 3

Erika Sanders,
Ward 4

Christopher Smith,
Ward 2

You may recall our letter of November 26, 2019, in which our Commission described to you our concerns about the stark racial and ethnic disparities embedded in every part of our criminal justice systems (this letter may be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/3d4B714>). For example, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people are dramatically overrepresented in Minnesota's prison and jail populations, and these disparities are among the highest in the nation. Latinx people are imprisoned in Minnesota at a rate 2.5 times higher than White people, and Black people are imprisoned in Minnesota at a rate 11 times higher than White people. Further, there are racial inequities in arrests, convictions, and sentencing, particularly for drug-related offenses. In addition, people with disabilities are very frequently criminalized and thus face additional barriers to housing. More than half of Minnesota's imprisoned women have received mental health treatment and it is estimated that as many as three-quarters need it.

Jim Thayer,
Ward 1

Eva Wailes,
Ward 4

James Wilkinson,
Ward 3

As noted in our letter, we believe that all Saint Paul residents deserve fair and equal access to housing opportunities, and that the success and safety of every Saint Paul resident is dependent on the success and safety of their neighbors. Presently, however, many Saint Paul residents find their access to housing hindered by rental screening policies that exclude them based on their criminal records, including very old and minor offenses. Because of aforementioned racial disparities in our criminal justice systems, the harmful effects of criminal background screening

policies are borne disproportionately by persons who have disabilities and people in Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.

The difficulty faced by persons with criminal convictions in finding housing has far-reaching repercussions. It damages family and community stability. Families of people with records are given the inhuman choice of turning away a relative or letting them come into their home, with the substantial risk of losing their rental homes. This contributes to a cycle in which people who have been incarcerated are at higher risk of becoming homeless, and people who are unsheltered are at higher risk of becoming incarcerated. We must break this cycle because it harms our city as a whole, and because it represents an unacceptable violation of the human rights of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities in Saint Paul.

In addition, recent and local research tells us that most types of criminal offenses do not significantly increase a household's likelihood of a negative housing outcome when other factors are held constant, and that the effect of a prior criminal offense on a resident's housing outcome declines over time.

For these reasons, the City of Saint Paul HREEO Commission supports fair housing protections for persons with arrest and conviction records and supports limiting look-back periods for certain crimes, as described in the draft language of Sec. 193.04 of the proposed Tenant Protections Ordinance.

Thank you for your attention to the human rights concerns of Saint Paul and for the vast amount of work and preparation that preceded the crafting of this draft Tenant Protections Ordinance.

Sincerely,

5/7/2020

X Maria Mitchell

Maria Mitchell

Chair signing o.b.o. the Commission

Signed by: Mitchell, Maria S

HREEO Commissioners