

Joint letter in support of Minneapolis renter protection ordinances regulating tenant screening and security deposits

Dear Minneapolis City Council and Mayor,

The individuals and organizations below submit this testimony in support of Minneapolis File #2018-00308, a proposed slate of renter protection ordinances designed to address harmful challenges that many of our neighbors face in their attempts to access rental housing throughout the city. Minneapolis is now a majority renter city, and the City Council has adopted numerous policies and plans that identify support for renters and ending racial disparities as priorities (Minneapolis 2040, Unified Housing Policy, Renter-First Policy, Strategic and Racial Equity Action Plan).

The renter protection ordinances proposed by Council President Lisa Bender and Councilmember Jeremiah Ellison regulate aggressive barriers in tenant screening practices (eviction, criminal, credit history) and limit unreasonable security deposit charges that deny many households fair access to rental opportunities. These critically important initiatives address discrimination and power imbalances in rental housing that disproportionately impact communities of color.

It is well documented that:

- [renters of color, particularly single African-American women with children, are disproportionately harmed by evictions,](#)
- in Minneapolis, [neighborhoods that are majority non-white are the most impacted](#) by evictions,
- the [criminal justice system arrests, convicts and incarcerates certain communities of color at rates disproportionate to their share of the general population, which can lead to a disparate impact in the use of criminal records in housing,](#)
- locally, [criminal backgrounds have little effect on housing success,](#)
- credit scores, [which in Minneapolis, are significantly lower in nonwhite ZIP codes](#), are rooted in a [long history of housing discrimination and the information on which they are based can be inaccurate, limited in scope, and incomplete](#) as to timely rent payments,
- security deposits, which are frequently the most significant upfront cost for securing housing, [are regulated/capped in more than half of all states.](#)

While we anticipate that the current draft ordinance will change as policymakers tweak and improve the language leading up to a formal vote, we support the City of Minneapolis in these efforts to curb discriminatory screening practices and reform expensive security deposit policies that ultimately result in a significant gap in fair access to rental housing for people of color in Minneapolis. We hope that any changes to the draft ordinances do not detract from their focus on addressing racial inequities that persist in fair access to rental housing.

We applaud Council President Bender and Councilmember Ellison, the authors of these proposals, and call on the Minneapolis City Council and Mayor to enact them while continuing to pursue additional meaningful legal protections for tenants and proactive policies to preserve and increase the supply of decent, safe, affordable housing accessible for all. No single policy will accomplish universally affordable and fair access to housing, so many more unique and creative strategies like these must be on the table for consideration.

Sincerely,

[Signing individuals and organizations]