City of Seattle
Edward B. Murray
Mayor

April 19, 2016

Honorable Bruce A. Harrell, President
Seattle City Council
City Hall 2nd Floor

Dear Council President Harrell:

I am pleased to transmit the attached proposed legislation for your consideration in accordance with Resolution 31622, which adopted the work plan for implementing the City's Housing Affordability and Livability (HALA) agenda.

Consistent with the HALA Advisory committee's recommendations, in July 2015, I outlined my vision to address Seattle's housing affordability crisis in *"Housing Seattle: A Roadmap to an Affordable and Livable City."* One of the recommendations put forward by the HALA Advisory Committee and included in my action plan calls for an expansion of fair housing protections beyond Section 8 voucher holders, to also include tenants who use other subsidies and alternative sources of income such as Social Security Income, veteran's benefits and child support payments to pay for their rent.

To carry out this recommendation, the Office for Civil Rights and my policy staff convened a stakeholder committee comprised of tenant advocates, landlords, social service agencies and nonprofit housing providers to provide input on a legislative proposal.

If enacted, the proposed legislation brings us one step closer to carrying out the comprehensive strategy outlined in the HALA report to address the growing affordability crisis in our region. The proposed legislation also helps to address the needs of our most vulnerable residents and those experiencing homelessness as fair housing protections would be extended to short-term rental assistance provided through Rapid Rehousing or similar programs and to subsidies used to prevent eviction.

Specifically, this proposed legislation would prohibit a landlord from any of the following practices if a tenant uses subsidies or alternative sources of income to pay rent:

- Deny application for housing;
- Evict a tenant;
- Use advertisements that state a preference;
- Apply different terms and conditions;
- Harass or retaliate against a tenant.

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The legislation also provide rules for how subsidies and alternative sources of income are to be calculated if a landlord elects to use rent to income ratios when screening a tenant.

As a companion to this legislation, today I will also be sending the City Council and the City Clerk guidance issued by the Office of Civil Rights on a related issue, the use of preferred employer programs in rental housing. Preferred employer programs that offer discounts or differing terms and conditions to some rental applicants and not others can present a potential fair housing issue if they result in a discriminatory effect on one or more protected classes. The guidance provides landlords and tenants with greater clarity on whether a specific preferred employer program complies with fair housing laws, and the process by which a case brought to the Office for Civil Rights would be investigated.

By expanding fair housing protections to low-income households who are in need of subsidies to ensure their rent is paid, we are protecting vulnerable populations and creating a more diverse and inclusive city. I look forward to working with you to realize the vision of promoting equity, affordability and creating a Seattle for all where people of all backgrounds can call Seattle home.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation. If you have any questions, please contact Leslie Brinson Price at 386-9136.

Sincerely,

Edward B. Murray
Mayor, City of Seattle