



City of Seattle
Mayor Edward B. Murray

June 20, 2017

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

Dear Council President Harrell:

I am pleased to transmit the attached proposed Fair Chance Housing 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.

For nearly a decade community groups have called on the City to address the impacts that criminal records have on a person's ability to rent housing. Due to the rise in access to online records, employers and landlords are increasingly relying on criminal background checks when screening applicants and often applying overly broad exclusions to anyone with any conviction record. In 2010, women living in transitional housing and community groups working to support people who had served their time, called on the City to adopt regulations in employment and housing to address these practices. In 2013, the City passed Fair Chance Employment legislation, removing barriers for those seeking jobs. Community groups have continued to call on the City to address the barriers in housing and HALA made the issue one of its final recommendations.

Racial equity is central to the issue of fair chance housing. Due to racial bias in tenant selection and racial disparities in the criminal justice system people of color face compounding effects of criminal records. While this legislation will not cure the deep racial inequities that exist in housing access and within our criminal justice system, it aims to make an impact by centering racial equity and addressing the ways in which African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and other communities of color are disproportionality harmed by current policies and practices.

The legislation was developed with input from a stakeholder committee comprised of tenant advocates, landlord associations, affordable housing providers, organizations working on re-entry issues, and people experiencing barriers to housing because of their criminal history. The legislation does not represent a consensus from the group, but the legislation aims to address barriers while balancing concerns.

Specifically, the proposed legislation:

- Prohibits blanket or categorical exclusions of criminal history in rental advertisements;
- Regulates the tenant screening process by prohibiting a landlord from asking about:
 - Arrests that did not lead to a conviction, including pending criminal charges;

- Convictions that have been expunged, vacated or sealed;
- Juvenile records, including information obtained from a sex offender registry against a juvenile;
- Convictions and other criminal history that are older than two years.

The legislation requires a business justification when a landlord takes an adverse action against a tenant or applicant because of a conviction record that is less than two years old or information obtained from a sex offender registry. The legislation also requires landlords to ensure the applicant is given notice of this law and an opportunity to correct erroneous records. The legislation includes exemptions for certain types of housing and federal requirements.

If enacted, the proposed legislation brings us one step closer addressing the racial inequities in our community. Fair access to housing is the bedrock of a strong and inclusive community. In 2013, Seattle passed fair chance legislation in employment which has assisted those who have served their time, find jobs. Yet for many, housing remains out of reach. This legislation will address that gap and assure that women and men who have served their time and have found employment, can also find a safe and stable place to call 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