

June 8, 2020

Dear Mayor Carter and Saint Paul City Council Members:

As representatives of the Minnesota HIV Housing Coalition and organizations serving people living with HIV in the City of Saint Paul, we are writing in support of Ordinance 20-14 "S.A.F.E. Housing Tenant Protections Ordinance" to increase access and protections for renters in Saint Paul.

Affordable housing is one of the greatest needs for people living with HIV and other chronic illnesses. Having safe, accessible, fair and equitable housing is critical to allowing a person to have stability and nurture their health and family. Now more than ever, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, renters need a place to call home.

Research shows that housing is healthcare. People living with HIV who do not have a home are more likely to delay entry to care, be less adherent to medication, have worse overall health outcomes, and are likely to more frequently use costly services like emergency rooms and hospitals. People who are homeless or unstably housed have HIV infection rates as much as 16 times higher than people who have a stable place to live. Housing not only affects an individual's health; it is also a public health issue that affects the entire community.

We support the five policies in this ordinance: creating uniform screening criteria, limiting the maximum amount for security deposits, ensuring landlords provide just cause for nonrenewal of lease or termination of tenancy, providing advance notice of sale, and ensuring that both tenants and landlords know their rights and responsibilities.

As organizations driven by racial equity, we believe that overly-strict tenant screening criteria often ends up disproportionately affecting low-income people and especially communities of color – the same populations that already face disproportionate HIV rates and inequitable access to health care. Too often, a person is denied housing due to something that happened long ago or something unrelated to their ability to be a credible tenant and neighbor. Credit scores affected by medical bills or other hardships, a prior loss of housing or a criminal charge inhibit finding a place to rent far into their future.

Having uniform screening criteria and a limit on security deposits reduces these undue burdens. Just cause allows for housing stability, and advance notice of sale can allow the tenant time to prepare and plan for a move. When both landlords and tenants understand their rights and responsibilities, they may develop a relationship that will be beneficial to all.

We urge you to vote YES on this ordinance. Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

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Jeremy Hanson Willis

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Matt Toburen, The Aliveness Project, Executive Director

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the **Aliveness** project

