



June 16, 2020

Dear Mayor Carter and Saint Paul City Councilmembers,

As an association of nearly 50 nonprofit community development organizations working collectively to build strong communities, the Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers (MCCD) would like to share our support for the proposed SAFE Housing protections for Saint Paul renters.

MCCD and our members appreciate the important affordable housing work done by the City, including the City Council's July 2018 resolution calling for action on affordable housing and to address racial, social, and economic disparities in housing; and more recently, the Bridge Fund program to support families and small business impacted by COVID-19. As this global pandemic impacts our communities, it underscores the power of strong equitable local policies and systems to keep people in their homes.

Lack of affordable housing and the subsequent instability for families and neighborhoods limits Saint Paul's progress. The criminalization of poverty and homelessness, and historical and current racial discrimination in our housing and legal systems, require intentional action to interrupt and repair harm to communities. The proposed ordinances are one strategy to improve access to housing and end racial disparities. MCCD members are also firmly committed to these goals through building and preserving affordable housing and providing safe, healthy, and high quality homes for low-income residents.

MCCD's mission to build strong, stable communities can only be achieved by addressing the inequities that have shaped housing policy and prevented Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and other communities from accessing capital and wealth building opportunities. Tenant protection policies are one step towards the change system that will deliver us to a more resilient and equitable future. We must confront the horrifying and insidious structural racism that terrorizes BIPOC communities, and limits opportunities in every area of life—including the opportunity to life itself. We cannot allow the targeting of BIPOC lives and communities to continue and we stand with those who call for justice. We must acknowledge and actively work to dismantle the system of oppression that permeates our society and culture. MCCD will stand with our partners and BIPOC leaders in dismantling systems designed to perpetuate disparities. Our community is powerful and we can enact change.

MCCD members provide safe and affordable housing opportunities— as well as other services and supports—for many who are turned away from the private market. Mission-driven and relieved of profit motivation, they are uniquely positioned to address the housing and services needs of those who are not well served in the general market place. However, MCCD members acknowledge that non-profit housing developers cannot meet the full housing needs of our community, underscoring why these tenant protections are an important step forward for a majority-renter city. The housing opportunities MCCD members are able to provide are limited

by the amount of public funding invested in affordable housing and social services. They see their work as complementary to private, for-profit owners and managers, but not interchangeable with the work done by those market actors.

MCCD members create and preserve opportunities along the entire housing continuum, serving a wide range of households throughout the Twin Cities. Our members provided feedback to the City of Minneapolis as during their process to pass similar tenant protection policies in the summer of 2019, and appreciate the need for complementary regional policy and funding solutions for housing. As the Saint Paul City Council considers the SAFE Housing protections, MCCD offers the following feedback:

- **Screening criteria:** With their combined decades of experience producing and managing housing, MCCD's members know screening is complex and benefits from a nuanced approach.
 - In January 2019, a subset of MCCD members released a study completed with Wilder Research on the impacts of criminal background history and its relationship to successful tenure in housing settings where social services were offered. This study was a self-motivated effort with a goal of re-examining internal policies to better serve community housing needs.
 - Staff at these organizations questioned the premise that applicants with criminal backgrounds present too much risk or are unlikely to be successful in their housing, particularly when considering the increased likelihood of criminal justice system involvement among people experiencing homelessness, and housing and employment systems that limit opportunities after incarceration.
 - One of the key findings was that 11 of the 15 criminal offense categories studied had no significant effect on housing outcomes. The study also found that effects of a criminal offense decline over time.
 - Each MCCD member organization has its own specific screening tools along with clearly-defined appeals processes. Many members have a stated objective of "screening more residents in," and have found that having sufficient income and/or rental assistance and a strong support system are the strongest predictors of housing success.
- **Security deposits:** The proposed security deposit limits are largely in line with MCCD member current practices.
- **Credit score:** MCCD members do not currently use credit score and do not have any concerns in this area.

- **Advance notice of sale:** In addition to policy/regulatory initiatives, funding for affordable housing production and preservation is crucial, particularly to support acquisitions under the proposed advanced notice of sale.
- **Risk mitigation:** Another strategy the City might consider to alleviate concerns from building managers is risk mitigation strategies to lower landlord risk and financial exposure when expanding to whom they will rent.

MCCD and our members support the full continuum of housing and believe firmly that local renter protection policies are one of the ways that we can work towards greater housing access. Renters across Saint Paul contribute to the City's vibrancy, prosperity, and resiliency, and we support passing policies that will provide protections to the 51% of Saint Paul residents who are renters.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to additional engagement with the City to support the important work of achieving housing stability for all Saint Paul residents.

Sincerely,



Elena Gaarder
President & CEO

Sent to:

Mayor Melvin Carter
Deputy Mayor Jaime Tincher
Ward 1 City Councilmember Dai Thao
Ward 2 City Councilmember Rebecca Noecker
Ward 3 City Councilmember Chris Tolbert
Ward 4 City Councilmember Mitra Jalali
Ward 5 City Councilmember Amy Brendmoen
Ward 6 City Councilmember Nelsie Yang
Ward 7 City Councilmember Jane Prince

cc:

Kirstin Burch, Fair Housing Coordinator, Office of Financial Empowerment
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