

## UnSAFE in St. Paul

Rental housing is deeply and directly a racial justice and fair housing matter. 80% of Black people in St. Paul rent, as do about 60% of Native Americans, Latinx, and Asian residents. However, as with other systemic racial equity issues in the Twin Cities, renters in St Paul currently lack protections that are routinely provided elsewhere in the country. For example, at present, landlords can refuse to renew a tenant's lease and put them on the street without providing any rationale at all (an action called "informal eviction.")

In the spring and summer of 2020, MICAH and a number of other community groups (in the Housing Equity Now St. Paul, or HENS, coalition) came together in a campaign to establish S.A.F.E. Tenant Protections in the City of St Paul.

Those tenant protections, passed unanimously by the St Paul City Council in June 2020, made triple damage deposits illegal, limited the types of information that could be used for renter screening, required a 90-day advance notice of sale of affordable apartments, required renters to be informed of their rights, and perhaps most importantly, required property managers to automatically renew the leases of renters unless they had a good reason (a "just cause") not to – and to put that reason into writing. These protections mirror those provided in states like New Jersey. The City initiated an implementation planning process in summer 2020, and planned to implement those protections on March 1, 2021.

Just days before the protections were scheduled to be implemented, a group of landlords sued to prevent these provisions from going into effect, seeking a temporary injunction. In late April, U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson granted that injunction, stopping enforcement of the ordinance until the lawsuit is resolved. And now, just a month later, the Council has initiated a fast repeal process; the final vote to repeal is on the calendar on June 16.

The City of St. Paul could have vigorously defended the tenant protections they unanimously adopted last Spring, directing their attorneys to pick apart the preliminary injunction. They could have requested input from St Paul citizens at large on the level of support for the protections. Instead, the Council is in the process of **repealing the entire ordinance**.

The MICAH St. Paul chapter and the following members vigorously oppose the Council's action to repeal the S.A.F.E. tenant protections.

The landlords' case, and the temporary injunction protecting the landlords, are not strong, as we believe a fair hearing before the District Court would show. Indeed, the tenant protections landlords object to have already been reviewed and implemented elsewhere in the country.

Predatory and corporate landlords use lawsuits such as this to try to strike down laws that prevent unjust practices. The City of St Paul is not alone here – there are many outside legal resources ready and willing to join with the City to defend these tenant protections. And finally – while it costs money to take things to court, deep matters of housing justice, like these renter's protections, are worth the cost.

We hereby request that the Council delay the repeal process for at least a month. It took several years of hard work by many players to put together the tenant protections that were passed last year. Pushing through this repeal process with no advance notice or input from the wider community within 6 quick weeks of Judge Magnuson's decision – while the HENS coalition and other community fair housing advocates are in the midst of a month of signature collection for rent stabilization – seems either a tactic to reduce input, or a decision to ignore what the community has to say. This delay should be used to gather input widely from St Paul citizens on their level of support for the tenant protections, and to explore strategic options for contesting the landlords' lawsuit, that might include the St Paul Mayor, City Council and fair housing advocates in the community. If, after the delay, the City Council still wants to restart the repeal process, they would still have heard substantially more feedback from the wider community, and considered a wider array of response options.