



Investment • Access • Opportunity

March 10, 2020

Dear Mayor Carter and members of the St. Paul City Council,

We write today in strong support of the proposed tenant protections ordinance.

For years, community-based organizations in St. Paul have been engaging and organizing with tenants who have been **calling on city leaders to pass policies that protect the rights of the growing number of renter households**. The proposed tenant protections ordinance takes the first steps in following that lead toward tenant protections.

Making up the majority of our vibrant city, more than half of St. Paul residents are renters. Deeply rooted in every neighborhood, renter households are the lifeblood of the economy, the heart of our community, the creativity and passion that make our city great. When a family pays their rent, they're also paying the mortgage — and property taxes — for their landlords, making every tenant household an equal investor in our city. And yet, in so many ways, renters are denied their basic human dignity and equal protection under the law.

Equity in Place (EIP) is a diverse group of strategic partners from organizations led by people of color and housing advocacy organizations working to advance housing justice and equitable community development. We organize and advocate by leading with a race equity lens to understand and center how power inequities in our region and society shape inequitable outcomes for our communities. **In housing, structural racism in policies, impact and power couldn't be more clear:** For instance, while only 41% of white households are renters, 83% of Black, and nearly two-thirds of Native, Latinx and Asian households are renters.

Every day, EIP members in St. Paul hear from renters who are living in unsafe conditions because their landlords have failed to do necessary repairs, from desperate families who have been pushed out of their homes for no reason, and people from all backgrounds who can't find housing because of exploitative security deposits or discriminatory screening processes.

Thanks to the individual campaigns and collective efforts of community-based organizations, some of whom dedicated their time and insight to the **Anti-Displacement Policy Network**, several of the measures highlighted in the **Equity in Place Policy Agenda** are central to the St. Paul ordinance. For instance...

- Right now, a landlord can simply not renew a tenant's lease for no reason, even if the household has paid its rent and done nothing wrong. This leaves renters in Saint Paul vulnerable to retaliation when they try to assert their right to a safe, healthy, and dignified place to call home. This ordinance would require landlords to have a stated cause, like non-payment of rent, to stop

renting to a tenant. **Just Cause Notice** is a clear step toward ensuring that the property rights of tenants are respected and the balance of power between landlords and tenants does not leave thousands of people in St. Paul a short notice away from losing their homes for no reason at all.

- Right now, thousands of families live in fear that their building will be sold to another owner or investor who will upscale the property and price or push them out. This ordinance would require an **Advance Notice of Sale** so tenants would have time to search for already scarce available housing – and hopefully lay the foundation for a future Tenant Opportunity to Purchase policy that would empower renters’ to collectively organize and buy their own buildings.
- Right now, countless renters are barred from housing because of discriminatory screening practices and egregious security deposits that further harm communities of color that have suffered disparate policing and incarceration, as well as economic marginalization. This ordinance begins to address those issues with **tenant screening reforms and a cap on security deposits**.

But these measures are just small steps toward equity and empowerment for St. Paul renters. Tenant protections **MUST be paired with measures that contain skyrocketing rents** that are pushing families out of their communities every single day. More than 50% of St. Paul renters pay more than they afford for housing and even a \$20 increase – let alone a hike of several hundreds dollars, which we’ve seen across the city – is the difference between staying in place or being cast into chaos and homelessness. Stabilizing rents is essential to housing stability.

We support this ordinance and the positive impact it will have on thousands of our neighbors, AND we call on the city to prioritize **not just tenant protections but renter power**. For long-term solutions, city leaders need to prioritize and create policies that actively **increase community ownership models and create pathways for tenants to come together and decide the future of the place they call home**.

Equity in Place is convened by the Alliance and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. Members include:

African Career, Education, and Resources, Inc.

American Indian Family Center

Community Stabilization Project

Frogtown Neighborhood Association

Hope Community

Housing Justice Center

Jewish Community Action

Minnesotans Standing Together to End Poverty and Homelessness

Native American Community Development Institute

New American Development Center

Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza

Urban Homeworks

West Side Community Organization