

Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing, St. Paul Chapter
463 Maria Ave.
St. Paul MN 55106

Madame President and City Councilmembers -

Now is the time for the Saint Paul City Council to make good your promise to care about renters and housing justice. It is time to stand on the side of racial justice, fair housing, and the end of abuses of landlord power. If you are in solidarity with communities of color and low-wealth, now is the time to act.

Before you are five proposals that have been brought forth from calls from the community. They grew out of action you took as a council and have been vetted both legally and in a public process. From the hundreds of hours of staff time to the multiple community meetings to the Anti-Displacement Policy Network, these proposals were built with care. All five of them are important and they ALL need to be passed.

We, the St. Paul chapter of the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing, have been involved with the S.A.F.E. Housing proposals from the beginning. We met with Councilmembers Jane Prince, Mitra Jalali, and Rebecca Noecker and heard you say you supported the proposals. Most of you stood alongside advocates as you lifted up these policies in a press conference in front of the whole city.

We support removing the racially biased credit scores from screening and other reforms. We support limiting damage deposits. We support a 90 day notice for sale. We support letting renters know in simple language what their rights are. And we support Just Cause for non-renewals of leases.

Just Cause is one of the most needed parts of this proposal. When we did fair housing listening sessions, we heard repeated examples of heinous discriminatory, abusive, and racist actions. We heard of a black renter being asked by a corrupt landlord for sexual favors for back rent. We heard a Latina renter afraid to complain - "My baby is kept up at night from the mice running over him in the crib," in fear that her corrupt landlord would retaliate against her family. We heard of renters being taken to housing court because their corrupt landlords did not like them, but those landlords know any claim in housing court will hurt a renter's records, even if it's bogus.

When someone says to you "I know these people are dealing drugs. They have a lot of people over all the time going in and out. But I can't prove it," then you have someone with no proof who is relying on a racist stereotype. When a landlord has that much grey area to play with, corrupt landlords will abuse that power.

Some landlords argue the Just Cause ordinance is too broad, or one-size-fits-all. We disagree. This ordinance is specifically targeted at landlords who are abusing their power over renters. We have talked to small landlords and renters. These are easy regulations that most follow already. These changes will not impact their business operation at all. Yes – the few predatory landlords who do not already follow these rules WILL have to change their business practices – for the better, resulting in a drastic improvement in the conditions for their tenants.

Good landlords want long-term tenants. Bad landlords want the freedom to discriminate. Councilmembers who support racial and housing justice will support the S.A.F.E. Housing proposals, including Just Cause. The 5 proposals, including Just Cause, aim to move toward more secure safe affordable housing for low income racial minorities in St Paul — one of the institutional injustices that underlie recent expressions of rage and unrest on our streets.

In peace, with love, for justice - MICAH St Paul