



Housing Opportunities Made Equal

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Cincinnati City Council,

Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Greater Cincinnati (HOME) would like to voice our support for both the Access to Counsel program and the ordinance package known as the Neighborhood-Tenant Protection Act. HOME is a nonprofit fair housing organization working to eliminate unlawful discrimination in housing in the Greater Cincinnati area. HOME advocates and enforces housing regulations for all protected classes and promotes stable, integrated communities. HOME's Tenant Advocacy program provides information and resources to individuals about their rights under landlord tenant law and works to stabilize housing and prevent evictions.

We see a tremendous need for increased tenant protections, including benefits for tenant relocation, repairs in instances of severe conditions issues, and access to legal counsel and support for tenants facing eviction. These ordinances come at a critical moment when many of the pandemic-era programs aimed at helping keep people housed are ending, with few to no alternatives offered. These programs proved to be successful and kept many of our neighbors housed over the past few years.

At HOME, our clients feel the impact of these policies every day. To illustrate just how meaningful these new ordinances would be, we'd like to share a few of our clients' experiences under the current landlord-tenant laws.

Deferred Maintenance Destroys Homes:

A tenant called HOME to report that she was having an electrical issue in her unit where half of the lights worked but the other half of the lights did not. She emailed our Director of Tenant Advocacy and included documentation of the three work orders that she had put into the maintenance crew using the landlord's designated portal. Although the tenant did her duty by reporting this issue, the problem was not attended to properly by the staff.

While the tenant was at work, she received a notice that there was a fire in her unit. The tenant raced home to find her home and all her belongings destroyed. Despite being on a year lease, the landlord illegally refused to place her in a hotel or another unit. The tenant had to hire an attorney to receive any compensation for her loss. On top of paying a lawyer, she had to pay out of pocket for a hotel to stay in because of the landlord's refusal to hold up their end of the lease. Several days later, the tenant received a letter of eviction from the court.

While our client was scrambling to put her life back together after this preventable disaster, the landlord filed an eviction on the tenant. This wrongful eviction put her in further hardship and danger of another landlord accepting her application due to this eviction placed on her public record.

Finding Housing Shouldn't Put You Behind:

HOME received a call from a tenant that just moved into a unit after recently being homeless. The tenant had called the landlord to put in a maintenance request for sewage back up in the bathroom. HOME provided the tenant the number to call the Health Department for an inspection. The Health Department came out to the unit, found a broken pipe, and orders were placed on the landlord to complete the repair done.

Eventually the pipe was repaired, but the landlord decided to illegally charge the tenant over \$500 for the repair. The landlord knew the tenant could not afford to pay this amount because she was coming from a homeless situation and her rent was being subsidized by an agency. The broken pipe was no fault of the tenant and responsibility for fixing it fell squarely on the landlord's shoulders. Regardless, the landlord would not accept the next month's rent without the extra \$500. The tenant paid rent but was given a three-day notice to leave the unit because she could not pay the extra \$500.

The tenant not only had an eviction filed against her, but she was unable to afford or retain any legal representation to fight the illegal eviction properly. The actions taken by this landlord left the tenant further behind than she was before moving into the unit.

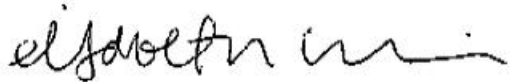
Unfortunately, stories like these are all too common among tenants in our city. The ordinances being considered by Council are crucial steps toward leveling the playing field and ensuring that tenants' rights – including those of tenants with oral or implied leases – are no longer easily ignored.

These ordinances also mark a significant change in how the City goes about protecting tenant rights. Currently, if your rights as a tenant are violated, it is your job to know your rights were violated and your job to find the help that you need. This is an extremely heavy burden for tenants, and as the stories above show, this arrangement leaves far too many tenants behind. If passed, these ordinances would begin to shift the burden of enforcement towards the City – an entity that is far more equipped to bear that responsibility.

The ordinances up for consideration today aren't some "gotcha" designed to get landlords in trouble. They are well written ordinances that establish firm tenant protections while still providing the necessary flexibility for tenants, landlords, and advocates to make things right and avoid worst-case outcomes. To face consequences under the Neighborhood Tenant Protection ordinances, landlords must be doing something that is already illegal under current landlord-tenant law. Moreover, the ordinances contain a variety of clear and reasonable exceptions that prevent landlords from being liable when a situation is not their fault.

HOME fully supports both the Access to Counsel program and the Neighborhood-Tenant Protection Act. The real-life experiences shared by our clients underscore the urgent need for these ordinances. It is essential for our community to rally behind these ordinances, not as punitive measures but as a collective commitment to building a housing environment that is just, compassionate, and truly protective of tenants' rights. We are eager to see these ordinances passed and implemented.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elisabeth Risch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Elisabeth Risch, Executive Director
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