

## **Just Housing Amendment Rules Testimony**

Cook County Rules Committee Hearing  
Cook County Building, Board Room  
118 North Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois  
Wednesday, September 4, 2019 at 9:30am

Chairman Suffredin, Vice Chairwoman Degnen, and Honorable Members of the Rules Committee,

My name is Ahmadou Dramé, and I serve as the Director of Policy, Advocacy and Legislative Affairs at Safer Foundation. I am also a member of the Just Housing Coalition.

Last Winter and Spring, we worked with many of you to pass the Cook County Just Housing Amendment. And I thank you all for your efforts to bring Cook County steps closer to ending housing discrimination against people with records.

Our coalition has many issues with the proposed rules. And I am here today to request just three specific changes to proposed rules that will ensure that the spirit of the ordinance remains intact.

### **1. The Rules Must Not Exempt Public Housing Authorities.**

An exemption of PHAs would close off a critical source of affordable housing for returning citizens. Moreover, it could create a slippery slope to the exemption of other federally subsidized housing providers, such as owners of project-based Section 8 developments and landlords participating in the Housing Choice Voucher program.

### **2. The Rules Should Reduce the Time Limit on Considering Criminal History to 3 Years**

A three-year limit on the use of criminal records would bring the county ordinance in line with Illinois state law. Individuals with conviction records, for example, may now apply for nearly all state-issued occupational licenses, and if more than three years has passed post-conviction, the state must consider the time beyond the three years as evidence of rehabilitation.

A three-year time limit would bring the county ordinance in line with the Illinois record sealing law, which allow individuals with records to seal their records. It is worth noting that this three-year time limit can be waived for people seeking record sealing provided an applicant can verify their participation in an education or training program.

A three-year limit on the use of criminal records would bring the county ordinance in line with existing practices from the Chicago Housing Authority and the Housing Authority of Cook County.

A 3-year time limit helps to shrink the pool of applicants in need of an individualized assessment, which would make the Just Housing Amendment easier to administer for landlords and easier to access for applicants.

### **3. The Rules Should Remove Examples of Categories of Criminal Convictions**

The Amendment entitles every applicant—with a record or not—to be considered as an individual. The categories are too broad. By emphasizing felony drug-related criminal activity, violent criminal activity, and criminal sexual conduct in the definition of demonstrable risk, housing providers are more likely to adopt broad exclusions for applicants with these types of convictions in order to comply with the Just Housing Amendment. These examples of categories of criminal convictions simply violate the spirit of the ordinance and open the door to other exclusions.

In closing, it is worth noting that these rules as currently drafted violate the spirit of the ordinance. The ordinance would also exclude many of our coalition members from its protections. I hope you will consider these recommendations favorably.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ahmadou Dramé  
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