

Begin forwarded message:

From: Jessica Hyman <jhyman@cvoeo.org>
Subject: Public comment re: Just Cause charter change
Date: September 16, 2020 at 5:05:43 PM EDT
To: Joan Shannon <jshannon@burlingtonvt.gov>, Perri Freeman <pfreeman@burlingtonvt.gov>, "jstromberg@burlingtonvt.gov" <jstromberg@burlingtonvt.gov>
Cc: "eblackwood@burlingtonvt.gov" <eblackwood@burlingtonvt.gov>

[WARNING]: External Message

To: Burlington City Council Charter Change Committee: Joan Shannon, Perri Freeman, Jane Stromberg

Via email: jshannon@burlingtonvt.gov, pfreeman@burlingtonvt.gov, jstromberg@burlingtonvt.gov

CC: Eileen Blackwood, eblackwood@burlingtonvt.gov

Dear Councilors Shannon, Freeman, and Stromberg,

I am writing to express my support for a Just Cause eviction amendment to the Burlington City Charter and I respectfully ask the Charter Change Committee to take the necessary steps for the question to be warned for a March 2021 Town Meeting Day vote.

A Just Cause eviction policy in Burlington would strengthen protections for the most vulnerable renters in a very tight housing market by stabilizing their housing and providing additional safeguards against discrimination and retaliation.

Although Vermont is a small state, we are not without housing discrimination problems, including de facto systemic discrimination, which is often manifested in municipal-level policies. Nationally, low-income women (especially low-income women of color), domestic violence victims, and families with children are at the highest risk for eviction. No-cause evictions, which allow a landlord to end a tenancy at any time for any reason (with notice periods defined in state and city statutes) disproportionately impact tenants in federal and state protected classes under fair housing law, such as people of color, people with children, and those who have vouchers.

The proposed charter change language forwarded from the CDNR committee states what may be included in a just cause eviction ordinance, but does not mandate the inclusion of specific items. This flexibility allows for some finessing of the content of an ordinance when it gets to that point in the process.

There are many successful examples of just cause policies to draw from across the country - including Seattle, Oakland, Berkeley, and Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and in the states of New Hampshire and New Jersey - that outline a fixed set of “good” causes for evictions, such as failure to pay rent, substantial damage to the premises, behavior that affects the health and safety of others, violation of the lease, and criminal activity. Some areas allow evictions for other reasons, but require relocation payments or other tenant supports.

Some states, including New Jersey, have also enacted statutory protections that prevent landlords from raising rent as a means of circumventing just cause eviction protections. It’s important to note that these regulations are not the same as rent stabilization — instead of setting a process or a schedule for raising rents, they allow tenants to contest rent increases.

Especially now, as the light is shining bright on systemic racism, the important role that housing plays in individual, household, and community health, and the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 crisis on black, indigenous, people of color, and low-income households, we need to ensure that everyone has equal housing opportunity and choice. I hope that the committee sees the value in this Just Cause eviction proposal and will move the proposal forward.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Jess Hyman
Fair Housing Project
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The Fair Housing Project is part of the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO), a nonprofit organization that works with more than 23,000 people each year to address fundamental issues of economic, social, and racial justice, and to help them achieve economic independence. We provide fair housing education and outreach statewide with a focus on trainings for municipal officials, housing and service providers, and the general public.

Fair Housing is the right to equal opportunity in housing choice and the right to rent or buy a dwelling free from discrimination. The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, and as amended, disability and family status. Vermont has additional protections based on age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, receipt of public assistance, being a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking, and denial of development permitting based on the income of prospective residents. For more information about Fair Housing in Vermont, visit www.cvoeo.org/FHP.

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Jessica Hyman

Director, Fair Housing Project

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