

June 8, 2021

Dear Members of City Council,

The Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP) fully supports the passage of the Renters' Access Act. As lawyers for people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, we possess a real-world understanding of how the bill's protections will significantly reduce the number of people in living in shelter or on the streets in Philadelphia.

HAP provides comprehensive legal assistance to people experiencing homelessness in a broad range of areas. Through our work, we routinely encounter people living in shelter or on the street whose applications for housing have been rejected by landlords solely because an eviction complaint has been filed against them at some point in the past. With most of these people, the cases against them were withdrawn or dismissed many years ago. Even so, the mere fact that a case was filed against them at all, regardless of the outcome, causes landlords to reject their applications.

The Renters' Access Act is a reasonable response to this unfair rental practice. By prohibiting landlords from denying housing based solely on previous filings against an applicant, applications will be decided based on criteria that actually reflect a tenant's ability to pay or maintain a residence. By requiring that landlord's explain in writing why a housing application is denied, and by allowing applicants to dispute information contained in credit reports and request reconsideration of denied housing applications, people are much less likely to be denied housing based on the false and inaccurate information that is often contained in these reports.

Recently I heard from several individuals who courageously talked about being forced to remain in shelter or on the street as one housing application after another was denied. In each case, past landlords had filed cases against them, cases that were ultimately withdrawn or dismissed but were nevertheless the basis of their denials. Their stories were not only heartbreaking – some remained in shelter for years –

they were reflective of an arbitrary and broken screening process for tenants.

It doesn't have to be this way. Prospective tenants can and should be judged on criteria that accurately reflects their rental history. They should not be forced to languish in shelter or on the street while landlords continue to decide rental applications arbitrarily and based on incomplete or, even worse, inaccurate information.

The Renters' Access Act is a fair and non-onerous solution to the plight faced by a significant number of people experiencing homelessness. By passing it, City Council is giving them a chance to re-establish themselves in housing they would otherwise be denied. It is a common-sense solution to a practice that makes no sense at all. We support it in its entirety, and we are asking that City Council do the same.

Signed,

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