



# Just Housing Initiative

Housing is the lifeline to stability. Eliminating barriers to housing can have a resounding effect on vulnerable individuals and save countless taxpayer dollars. Currently in Cook County, private landlords and local public housing authorities regularly deny an applicant housing if s/he has had a prior arrest record or conviction. Barriers to housing based on criminal screenings are problematic due to the following:

## Restricting Housing Options

**According to the Sentencing Project, 1 in 3 U.S. adults have an arrest or criminal record.** In Cook County, the Department of Corrections admits about 100,000, primarily pre-trial detainees, annually.<sup>1</sup> Even for those whose charges are dropped, a simple arrest can unfairly tarnish a housing seeker's record in perpetuity. It is reprehensible that such charges can translate into lifelong consequences. With this high volume of individuals cycling through the Department of Corrections every year, the housing implications are significant.

## Fair Housing Implications

**Research demonstrates that African Americans and Latinos, and persons with disabilities, experience vastly disproportionate arrest rates, with Black men incarcerated at rates 6 times that of white men.**<sup>2</sup> Factors contributing to this disparity include residential segregation and consequent concentrations of poverty, and inequities in arrests and convictions based on race. Therefore, housing denial based on criminal record screenings can be a proxy for race and disability-based discrimination, in violation of the Fair Housing Act. With limited housing options post-arrest and conviction, those with records are often relegated to resource-poor communities, furthering segregation and limiting rehabilitative opportunities.

## Cost to Society

Barring from housing those with mere arrests and those with criminal backgrounds who have been rehabilitated only serves to ensure recidivism and perpetuate a cycle of instability that is unjust to the individual and costly to society. And the impact is not isolated to the individual. The Sentencing Project estimates that more than half of U.S. inmates are parents of minors whose lives are impacted as well.<sup>3</sup> Faced with a lack of options, individuals with records and their families face an amplified risk of homelessness. Researchers find that people released from jail or prison into stable housing are seven times less likely to recidivate than those facing homelessness.<sup>4</sup> **At an estimated \$38,000 per year per inmate cost to taxpayers, it is cost-effective to provide opportunities for reintegration.**

## The Solution

**An amendment to the Cook County Human Rights Ordinance banning unlawful discrimination in real estate transactions based on one's covered criminal history;** including arrests, convictions that are older than two years or not substantially related to the offender's residence, and records of offenses that have been ordered sealed or expunged.

Other jurisdictions within Illinois already offer protections for people with criminal histories. In municipalities like Urbana, IL, people with records are considered a protected class in housing-related transactions, and the use of criminal histories in housing decisions is expressly prohibited. **Ending discriminatory housing barriers is a matter of justice; join us in supporting this needed solution!**

1 Cook County Department of Corrections: [http://www.cookcountysheriff.org/doc/doc\\_main.html](http://www.cookcountysheriff.org/doc/doc_main.html)

2 <http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>

3 [http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc\\_Parents%20in%20Prison\\_Factsheet\\_9.24sp.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc_Parents%20in%20Prison_Factsheet_9.24sp.pdf)

4 Marta Nelson, Perry Deess, and Charlotte Allen. *The First Month Out: Post-Incarceration Experiences in New York City* (New York, NY: Vera Institute of Justice. 1999) Retrieved from: <http://www.reentrypolicy.org/publications/1576;file>

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