

Council for the Homeless

Policy Recommendation to the City of Vancouver to Protect Vulnerable Renters

The Council for the Homeless (CFTH) appreciates the Vancouver City Council's interest in examining policy changes to increase protections for vulnerable renters in our community. The board of directors of CFTH urges the Vancouver City Council to adopt the following three policies to accomplish this goal. Each policy recommendation includes a scenario to illustrate the need for the policy. The scenarios are based on our experience working with vulnerable renters in Vancouver.

I. Source of Income Discrimination

CFTH supports the development of an ordinance that prohibits landlords from refusing to rent residential units based solely on the renter's source of income. This policy must indicate that landlords apply their income screening criteria solely to the portion of the rent paid by the voucher recipient versus applying income screening to the combined rent of the voucher recipient and the assisting agency. Today, many recipients of rental assistance vouchers are unable to find a place to live and return their voucher unused. This policy would increase the supply of potential housing opportunities for voucher holders as long as they meet the landlord's screening criteria.

Why do we need source of income discrimination with income screening only applying to the families' portion of rent?

Melissa earns \$1,800 a month working as a part-time veterinary technician and has a rental voucher for \$300. She and her 3-year-old twin boys are staying with friends in an overcrowded apartment because she has been unable to find a landlord who will accept her rental voucher. Melissa finds a two-bedroom apartment for \$900 where the property requires that Melissa have at least 2.5 times the rent (\$2250) in monthly income to qualify. If the voucher were to be considered income ($\$1,800 + \$300 = \$2,100$), she would not be able to move in. However, if the voucher is properly considered rent rather than as income, Melissa and her boys would be able to rent the apartment because the voucher reduces the rent payment to \$600 and her income is more than 2.5 times her portion of the rent (\$1500).

II. 60 day Notice to Vacate

CFTH believes that the most equitable policy would be to eliminate the Notice to Vacate in favor of a Just Cause Eviction ordinance. However, in the absence of a Just Cause Eviction ordinance, ***CFTH supports the development of an ordinance that extends the required period of notice from 20 to 60 days.*** Sixty days is a far more reasonable amount of time for families to locate safe, stable housing. ***CFTH opposes any effort to extend the amount of time families must give a landlord to terminate a lease.*** There is no burden on landlords who can easily re-rent the unit in the current 20 day time frame

and such an extension would be a significant barrier to families' ability to move without paying double rent.

Why do we need a 60 day Notice to Vacate?

John, Beth and their 3 children have lived in a duplex in central Vancouver for years. The duplex sold recently and the new owner and John disagree over who is responsible for some trash that had been left in the alley. The new owner sends John and Beth a Notice to Vacate. John and Beth start looking for a new rental and are overwhelmed to find there is little on the market in their price range and what is available is not located near their current neighborhood. John and Beth need to save money to move; find an apartment in a tight rental market; and find a new neighborhood that won't be overly disruptive to their jobs or their children's education and extracurricular activities. While John and Beth have to work hard to be able to complete the move within 60 days, they are thankful that this happened after the Vancouver City Council extended the notice to vacate from 20 to 60 days or they would be living in a car with their children.

What would happen if families were subject to an increased timeframe to notify landlords?

Michael, a custodian at a local school, needs to move to be closer to his children. He has been looking for a place to rent for a long time because there isn't much available. He finally finds a rental that he can afford that is available August 1st, but when he gives notice to his current landlord his landlord informs him that because the Vancouver City Council changed the ordinance to require longer than 20 days notice, Michael must pay rent for August as well. Because Michael does not have enough money to pay August rent at his current apartment *and* pay the August rent and security deposit to lock in the new apartment, he cannot move. Unless Michael is able to pay double rent he will be unable to move in the future as well.

III. 60 day Notice of Rent Increase

CFTH supports the development of an ordinance that extends the required period of notice for a rent increase from 30 to 60 days. Rents are rising in our community much faster than incomes and this additional time will allow families who are unable to stay in their apartments due to a rent increase to find a new home.

Why do we need a 60 day Notice of Rent Increase?

Frank is 83 years old and lives on social security retirement income. He receives notice that his landlord is raising his rent \$75 a month. He was barely making ends meet with his current rent and his costs for medications. He cannot afford a rent increase so he decides to look for a less expensive apartment. In order to move he must find a place he can afford in a tight rental market, get help to look and apply for new apartments now that he doesn't drive, give the required amount of notice to his landlord and find people to help him move. He is very thankful that the Vancouver City Council changed the ordinance so that he has 60 days notice of the rent increase rather than the old 20 days.