

Offered by Councilor Kenzie Bok, Louijeune, Fernades-Anderson, Worrell, Breadon, Arroyo, Murphy, Mejia, Flaherty, Lara, Baker and Flynn



## CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

### ORDER FOR A HEARING REGARDING REDUCING BARRIERS TO SECURING RENTAL HOUSING IN BOSTON

*WHEREAS:* While initiatives currently underway in the City of Boston under our Office of Fair Housing and Equity will assist with identifying unlawful discrimination against renters in Boston, additional steps are needed to remove legal discrimination and barriers to obtaining adequate, safe, and stable housing; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Major barriers to obtaining housing that are currently legal in the City of Boston include credit screenings and criminal background checks, as well as large security deposits and deposits or fees required to fill out rental applications; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Municipalities including Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN, and Portland, OR have undertaken credit screening reform by introducing tenant screening criteria for credit checks that minimizes the impact of a low or nonexistent credit score on a prospective tenants' eligibility, and allows for supplemental information and additional factors to be considered, while New York City no longer requires credit checks for those applying to the city's affordable housing; *and*

*WHEREAS:* While credit screening requirements already made securing housing difficult for low-income and unbanked individuals, including those with housing vouchers, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, reforms to credit screening by landlords are especially needed as the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to increase the number of Boston residents that may face eviction or may have had to rely on credit cards to pay for basic needs; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Many city, state, and nonprofit agencies are working to get Boston's families that are currently homeless, living in shelters, living in overcrowded conditions, or otherwise unstably housed housing vouchers; however, the Boston Housing Authority and FamilyAid reported in an October 2020 Housing Committee hearing, that credit checks remain a barrier to securing housing even with federal, state, and local governments that guarantee an individuals' rent; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Municipalities including Seattle, Washington, Portland, Oregon, Detroit, Michigan, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Washington, D.C. have or are currently undertaking reforms to criminal history screening criteria for housing including limiting the types of criminal records landlord can access, when in the screening process landlords can access them, and what types of criminal offenses landlords can reject applicants for; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Currently, landlords in Boston can access an extensive criminal record check which includes cases where a 17 year-old was tried as an adult, misdemeanors when either the conviction or release date is within five years, and felony charges when either the conviction or release date is within ten years; *and*

*WHEREAS:* According to the Prison Policy Initiative, formerly incarcerated individuals are at increased risk of homelessness when compared to the general population, with those that have been incarcerated once experiencing homelessness at rates seven times higher and those that have been incarcerated more than once experiencing homelessness at rates 13 times higher, trends which perpetuate the “revolving door” of homelessness and incarceration; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Formerly incarcerated women, particularly Black women, experience even higher rates of homelessness than formerly incarcerated men, putting them at risk of returning to an abusive partner or otherwise unsafe environment to gain shelter; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Reforms to credit history screening and criminal background checks by landlords, as well as limits on application, security, and other fees or deposits would reduce the barriers to obtaining affordable and decent housing for many of Boston’s residents; *NOW THEREFORE BE IT*

*ORDERED:* That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to discuss reforms to credit checks and criminal background checks in applications for private, public, and subsidized housing, as well as regulating costly application fees or deposits, and that representatives from the Department of Neighborhood Development, the Office of Housing Security, the Boston Housing Authority, and the public be invited to testify.

Filed on: January 6, 2022