

**For Immediate Release**

December 20, 2023

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## **City Council Takes Historic Action to Tackle Housing Discrimination by Passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act**

*The Act Will Allow 750,000 New Yorkers with Past Convictions to Access Stable Housing, Reducing Recidivism and Increasing Safety*

The New York City Council voted today in favor of the Fair Chance for Housing Act (Intro 632-A), a landmark piece of legislation that prohibits housing discrimination against New Yorkers with previous convictions. Currently, landlords are free to deny housing to anyone with a previous conviction, no matter how minor or how long ago; 53 percent of landlords will not even allow an applicant with a prior conviction to view a property. Housing discrimination is not a part of someone's sentence, and any New Yorker who has served their time and is working hard to rebuild their life deserves a second chance.

The Fair Chance for Housing Act voted on today is the culmination of months of conversations and feedback received from advocates, housing providers, and industry stakeholders. The Act establishes a lookback window that allows for background checks going back three years for misdemeanors and five years for felonies. The lookback window does not apply to sex crimes, and landlords can consult state and federal registries going back as far as needed. The Act also excludes 1- and 2- family owner occupied homes. Finally, as always, landlords are free to review financial and credit information, check references, and conduct interviews with prospective tenants.

"The Fair Chance for Housing Act will provide thousands of New Yorkers with a second chance to have a stable home, which is the foundation for a stable life," said **City Council Majority Leader Keith Powers**. "Mistakes made in the past should not translate into a lifelong struggle to find a place to call home, and it's time our laws reflect that. Thank you to the many stakeholders that worked diligently with me to get this critical legislation across the finish line."

Without a stable home and permanent address, formerly incarcerated individuals have much more trouble finding secure employment, healthcare, or educational programs, which greatly increases their likelihood of recidivism. Studies show that formerly incarcerated individuals experiencing homelessness are seven times more likely to interact with the criminal justice system than those who aren't homeless, and 13 times more likely if they've been incarcerated more than once.

Nearly 750,000 New Yorkers have some prior conviction, and this new law will provide them—and their families—with a second chance. It will also help alleviate pressure on the city's overburdened shelter system. 11 percent of single adults entering New York City shelters cite release from jail or prison as the reason they are homeless and more than 40% of people released from state prison between 2015 and 2021 were released directly to a shelter.

"I'm proud to be part of a community that recognizes the importance of giving individuals with past convictions a fair shot at housing. The recent approval of the Fair Chance for Housing Act (Intro 632-A) by the City Council is a significant step toward justice and compassion. This legislation sends a powerful message about our city's commitment to second chances and the belief that every New Yorker deserves the opportunity to rebuild their life. Let's embrace this positive change and build a more inclusive and compassionate community together," said **Council Member Nantasha Williams**.

"Our communities are healthier and safer when we ensure everyone has access to housing. When people can't access housing because of discrimination, they don't go away – they are forced to live in less stable environments, like shelters or the streets. A conviction history should be history, and the Fair Chance for Housing Act will put an end to the legally sanctioned housing discrimination that has impacted so many New Yorkers," said **Council Member Carlina Rivera (D-02)**.

“Stable housing is a necessary part of economic well-being and safety for all New Yorkers. Every formerly incarcerated person facing discharge’s first aim is to figure out where they will sleep. For those who cannot rely on family homes, they turn to the city’s housing stock. Growing research indicates that housing, particularly supportive housing, for formerly incarcerated persons reduces recidivism, makes neighborhoods safer, promotes family reunification, and is more humane and cost-effective than re-incarceration. Yet, many New Yorkers are locked out of this potential because of their record, particularly the 80% of those with a conviction record who are Black and Latina. We have to interrogate why we continue to practice mechanisms that uphold the structural barriers marginalized communities experience,” said **Council Member Pierina Sanchez**. “The Fair Chance Housing Act is critical to not only maintaining housing for our formerly incarcerated neighbors, but to bring about safety for all New Yorkers. Utilizing unreliable and unregulated criminal background checks will not make us safer, housing and equitable vetting mechanisms will.”

“Formerly incarcerated New Yorkers deserve a fair chance – truthfully, often a first chance – and in too many areas, their past record leads to discrimination and barriers rising to interfere with re-adjusting and increase recidivism. Years ago, we passed a law to give people a Fair Chance – often a first chance – at employment, and it's past time we ensured a Fair Chance at housing. This battle is occurring in a city with growing housing and homelessness crises, which are further compounded if you are a returning resident determined to be a productive member of the city. I’m proud to co-sponsor this legislation with Council Member Powers and thank the Speaker and Council passing this vital protection,” said **Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams**.

“Housing is key to ensuring that formerly incarcerated New Yorkers don’t have another interaction with the justice system,” said **Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine**. “Everyone in New York deserves access to stable housing, and The Fair Chance for Housing Act will help put a stop to unfair discrimination against formerly incarcerated New Yorkers and their families. I’m grateful for Council Member Powers’ leadership on this issue, and to all the advocates who helped make sure we got this legislation right.”

“Everyone has the right to decent housing, including those who have a past criminal record,” said **Queens Borough President Donovan Richards**. “The Fair Chance for Housing Act will protect those with criminal records from unfair discrimination and ensure they have access to the quality housing that can help them get on their feet. I commend Council Member Powers for leading the way on this legislation and for securing its much-deserved passage today.”

“The Fair Chance for Housing Act is about justice and ensuring your past does not define your future,” said **Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson**. “For years, New Yorkers who have been involved with the justice system have been unfairly discriminated against because of their past, but today, the New York City Council is eliminating barriers for residents with previous convictions to successfully reintegrate into society and reaffirming housing as a fundamental right for all. I want to thank Speaker Adams, the New York City Council, and advocates for their commitment to fighting for housing equity and ensuring our previously justice-involved residents have a second chance.”

“The Fortune Society is overjoyed and heartened by the passage of the Fair Chance for Housing Act by the City Council today,” said **JoAnne Page, CEO of The Fortune Society**. “This is a historic stand against pernicious and pervasive housing discrimination against people with convictions. Fortune has been fighting for housing access, on multiple fronts, for years and we are a proud member of the Fair Chance for Housing Coalition. We urge the Mayor to sign this bill into law immediately, and we stand ready to partner with the City on education, outreach, and implementation. We are tremendously grateful to our bill sponsor, Majority Leader Keith Powers for being a staunch ally and true partner, Speaker Adrienne Adams, and all of our supporters on the Council, for recognizing that everyone deserves a home.”

“We applaud the City Council for passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act. Mass incarceration has resulted in too many families unable to find housing because of the widespread use of background checks,” said **Juanita O. Lewis, Executive Director of Community Voices Heard**. “We know that 80% of people with a conviction in New York City are Black or Latinx. Today, the Council took a historic step toward racial justice by ensuring that families who have been impacted by the criminal legal system have a fair shot at housing.”

“We are elated that the City Council has taken this step towards transforming the lives of many New Yorkers and their families. New Yorkers who have paid their debt should be allowed to rejoin society and should not have the collateral consequence of exclusion from something as basic as housing following them for the rest of their lives,” said **Robert**

**Desir, Staff Attorney with the Civil Law Reform Unit at The Legal Aid Society.** “Providing a fair chance at housing will go a long way towards helping New Yorkers avoid the pitfalls that prevent them from stabilizing their lives, reuniting with their families after criminal system involvement and creating safer communities for all. We urge the City to sign this bill into law.”

“Exodus Transitional Community knows all too well the harmful effects of housing discrimination. As a leading preventative, reentry, and advocacy organization, we witness not only our participants but staff experience discrimination daily. Ensuring all New Yorkers have fair access to housing makes our entire city safer. It helps to end the perpetual punishment so many of us have and continue to experience. Housing is a human right, and we are thrilled to see that our City Council Members agree!,” said **Kandra Clark, Vice President of Policy & Strategy, Exodus Transitional Community.**

“Congratulations to the New York City Council for the passage of Intro 632A, the Fair Chance for Housing bill, in New York City,” said **Archana Jayaram, President and CEO of Osborne Association.** “For the thousands of New York City residents who continue to return home from incarceration each year, they finally have the opportunity to not have the burden of sanctioned discrimination when they apply for housing. They finally have a chance for fair and equitable access to housing and the stability that comes with it. Much applause and thank you to Speaker Adams, Council Member Powers, the many bill co-sponsors, and all those who have worked tirelessly to pass the bill for the past 3 years. Housing is a human right and on this day never have those words meant so much to so many. We now urge the Mayor to sign into law the Fair Chance for Housing bill.”

“Access to stable and affordable housing is key to economic stability, mobility out of poverty, and community safety,” said **Jason Cone, Chief Public Policy Officer at Robin Hood.** “Surveys show housing is New Yorkers’ top priority for creating safer neighborhoods – yet far too many New Yorkers, especially those with prior convictions, struggle to find housing. The Fair Chance for Housing Act will prevent needless and harmful housing discrimination against New Yorkers with old convictions and will help address New York City’s pervasive housing instability and homelessness crisis.”

“Today, the New York City Council took a momentous step towards ending the perpetual punishment of thousands of New Yorkers by passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act,” said **Alexandra Dougherty, Senior Attorney & Policy Counsel with Brooklyn Defenders’ Civil Justice Practice.** “An arrest or conviction should not be a permanent barrier to stable housing. By banning discriminatory background checks, the Fair Chance for Housing Act will allow New Yorkers to access safe and affordable housing and build strong communities, and we urge the Mayor to sign it into law immediately.”

"Freedom Agenda thanks the Speaker and every City Council member who voted for the passage of the Fair Chance for Housing Act today. Not only are discriminatory practices against people with a conviction history illegal but they are unabashedly practiced. This legislation is a giant step forward in ending this New Jim Crow practice in New York City. Now the work of implementation begins," said **Darren Mack, Co-Director at Freedom Agenda.**

“We applaud the Council for recognizing that people should not be denied access to housing because of a previous criminal conviction and for passing this important piece of legislation. Housing is essential to the stability of individuals and communities. If we want safe communities, we need to assist people who are released from incarceration through connecting them with the supports they need. With today’s vote, the Council is standing up for human rights and recognizing the dignity of all people,” said **Jennifer J. Parish, Director of Criminal Justice Advocacy - Mental Health Project, Urban Justice Center.**

“The pursuit of family reunification rests upon the fundamental pillar of compassion. As advocates for humanity and leaders within this city, we bear a responsibility to foster inclusivity and uplift those in need. The New Year season symbolizes a time of renewal, prompting us to address the barriers that have hindered the reintegration of previously incarcerated individuals into our community. Visionary V Ministries extends its heartfelt appreciation to the NYC City Council for their commendable actions in rectifying the injustices of the past. By passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act, they have taken a momentous stride towards providing an opportunity for returning parents and individuals to establish a solid foundation and regain their independence. We wholeheartedly applaud this measure and encourage its speedy implementation with unwavering resolve” said **Chaplain Dr. Victoria A. Phillips, CEO and Founder of Visionary V Ministries.**

"The Women's Community Justice Association is excited to see the City Council taking a step towards a more just New York by passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act. Housing is a foundational human right--it not only is necessary for basic survival, but serves as a prerequisite for or avenue to individuals' ability to participate in society—and housing discrimination against people with arrests or convictions in their histories cuts them off from the very tools they need to build stable, safe lives. We applaud the City Council's decision and urge them to continue to support true community justice and safety by fighting for the rights of those most marginalized by current systems," said **Jay Edidin, Director of Advocacy at Women's Community Justice Association.**

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