

Advocates Applaud NYC Council's Passage of The Fair Chance for Housing Act to End Pervasive Housing Discrimination

Hundreds of Thousands of New Yorkers with Past Convictions Have Been Given New Hope

(December 20, 2023, NEW YORK, NY)—Today, the New York City Council passed the transformational Fair Chance for Housing Act (Intro 632-A), which will sharply curtail housing discrimination against New Yorkers with convictions. These New Yorkers have served their time, and this new law offers them a second chance, ensuring they can move on with their lives with the foundation of a place to call home.

[The Fair Chance for Housing Coalition](#)—including **Community Voices Heard, The Fortune Society, Osborne Association, The Legal Aid Society, Exodus Transitional Community, Freedom Agenda of the Urban Justice Center, Mental Health Project of the Urban Justice Center, Brooklyn Defender Services, Women's Community Justice Association, and Visionary V Ministries**—commends the New York City Council for passing Intro. 632-A and urges the Mayor to sign it into law immediately.

The Fair Chance for Housing Coalition stated:

“Today, a long-standing wrong has finally been righted with the passage of the Fair Chance for Housing Act, which ends discrimination in the private housing market against people with convictions. We are grateful to our prime bill sponsor, Majority Leader Keith Powers, Speaker Adrienne Adams, and our many supporters on the New York City Council who voted in favor of the bill today. Safe and stable housing is the foundation for a safe and stable life, allowing people to commit to employment, take care of their physical and mental health, and work toward their family's well-being and their community's success. Yet for too long, housing discrimination against people with convictions – who are disproportionately Black and Latinx – has prevented countless people from accessing that critical foundation. We look forward to the Mayor signing this bill into law, and to turning our efforts to outreach and education. But today, we celebrate this historic moment when the City Council recognized that everyone deserves a home.”

“I greatly appreciate the tireless work and dedication of the entire Fair Chance for Housing Coalition for getting us to today's historic vote,” said **City Council Majority Leader Keith Powers**. “New Yorkers who have served their time and are working hard to rebuild their lives deserve a second chance, and today's passage of the Fair Chance for Housing Act will make that second chance a reality.”

"Today, the New York City Council took bold action to address the long lasting harms of mass incarceration by passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act. Ending discrimination based on past convictions helps individuals and their families find safe and stable housing," said **Juanita O. Lewis, Executive Director of Community Voices Heard**. "New Yorkers with convictions are overwhelmingly Black and Latinx because of deep racial disparities in the criminal legal system.

The council members who stood up today and voted to pass Fair Chance for Housing have voted in favor of racial justice, housing justice, and family justice. And people impacted by pervasive discrimination now have new hope in being able to move forward with their lives."

"The Fortune Society applauds the City Council for passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act. We are proud to have spent years fighting for people to have a safe and stable place to lay their heads at night. We know from our 56 years of serving people impacted by the criminal legal system that the pernicious stigma of a conviction can derail peoples' attempts to rebuild their lives. Ending blanket discrimination against people with convictions will not only enhance public safety, promote racial equity in housing, and ameliorate intergenerational cycles of poverty, it is also simply the right and just thing to do. Everyone deserves a home." - **Andre Ward, Associate Vice President of The Fortune Society's David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy**

"Congratulations to the New York City Council for the passage of Intro 632-A, 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."

"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."

"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."

"I am extremely pleased that today the City Council decided to pass the Fair Chance for Housing Bill because it now makes it possible for those with criminal legal history to find a safe stable home and end the draconian system which made the worst thing we might have done into a life sentence, which kept me and my family living on the margins of life." - **Hilton N. Webb, Jr.**

“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!” - **Kandra Clark, Vice President of Policy & Strategy, Exodus Transitional Community**

"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.” - **Jennifer J. Parish, Director of Criminal Justice Advocacy at 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.” - **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." - **Jay Edidin, Director of Advocacy at Women's Community Justice Association**

“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.”

“The Community Service Society of New York (CSS) applauds the City Council for passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act, a reasonable bill that limits senseless and counterproductive housing discrimination against New Yorkers with old criminal convictions,” said **David R. Jones, President and CEO of CSS.** “We know that affordable housing is the top priority for New Yorkers struggling to get ahead economically, and the dire housing situation is exponentially worse for anyone with a conviction record, as well as their family. The Fair Chance for Housing Act is a vital step towards ensuring that individuals with conviction records can fully participate and thrive in our shared communities.”

“The passage of the Fair Chance for Housing Act by the New York City Council is a tremendous step towards a city where everyone has a roof over their heads. Our homelessness crisis is worse than ever, and it's because there are too many barriers between New Yorkers--new and old--and safe, permanent, affordable housing. By protecting New Yorkers with conviction histories from housing discrimination, Fair Chance for Housing will allow New Yorkers to move out of shelters and create stronger neighborhoods where everyone's needs are met--which is good for everyone,” said **Bennett Reinhardt, Advocacy Coordinator & Neighborhood Organizer at the Open Hearts Initiative.** “We're excited for the implementation of these protections upon the legislation's effective date in January 2025.”

“As advocates for children, youth and families in New York, we celebrate the passage of the Fair Chance for Housing Act and the tireless work of the Coalition to make this day a reality. Housing is the foundation of strong communities and permitting more people to find safe and stable homes is crucial for young people to thrive. We know that true community safety is about resources and reducing barriers for those with conviction records to access housing in New York City benefits all of us, especially those most marginalized. We appreciate the leadership of the bill sponsor, Majority Leader Keith Powers, Speaker Adrienne Adams, and all of the supporters on the New York City Council for listening to the call of our communities and championing this important legislation,” said **Julia L. Davis, Director of Youth Justice and Child Welfare, Children’s Defense Fund-New York.**

“The Fair Housing Justice Center (FHJC) commends the New York City Council for passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act. Blanket ban exclusions in housing based on a conviction record are unfair and unacceptable. Fair housing investigations have revealed that housing providers frequently deny applicants on the grounds of their criminal legal histories, which serve as a proxy for refusing individuals based on their race and national origin, thus resulting in unequal access to housing for communities of color. Fair Housing laws were established for everyone, including New Yorkers who have served their time. Everyone deserves access to housing free of discrimination,” said **Britny McKenzie, Policy Manager at the Fair Housing Justice Center.**

"It goes without saying that residing in the streets can have a profoundly negative effect on recently incarcerated young people's ability to get themselves off the ground," said **Shomari Ward, Litigation Director at Youth Represent**. "This bill removes a significant barrier to reentry for those individuals seeking to move on with their lives after falling prey to the criminal legal system."

New York City is in the midst of a housing and homelessness crisis, due in part to exclusionary policies that foreclose housing options based on conviction records. Discrimination impacts so many more than people with convictions – it impacts whole families and creates intergenerational cycles of instability. Reducing barriers to housing so that people and families have stable homes can interrupt these intergenerational cycles of poverty and homelessness.

In New York City alone, nearly 750,000 residents have a conviction record – that's nearly 11 percent of the adult population. Due to long-standing inequities in our criminal legal system, 80 percent of these individuals are Black or Latinx, even though they make up less than 30 percent of the population. This means that Black and Latinx people, and their families, are disproportionately impacted by housing discrimination against people with convictions.

The Fair Chance for Housing Act will prohibit housing discrimination against New Yorkers with convictions and allow them a second chance after they've served their time by prohibiting landlords and brokers from discriminating based on conviction history outside of the "look back window" of 5 years for felonies and 3 years for misdemeanors. This will accelerate their reintegration into society and put them on a path towards the stability that reduces their likelihood of further system involvement and increases safety for all New Yorkers.

While housing providers may still request a criminal background check for convictions within the look back window, they can only do so after they have pre-qualified a potential tenant based on finances, income, and other factors relevant to their ability to be a good tenant. By putting the background check at the end of the screening process, applicants with a conviction history who have done their time will have a stronger shot at securing housing.

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