

HCDC Public Comments 7/18/23

7/18/23 – Dominic Voz, Open Communities (via email to staff) – Just Cause

Firstly, I would like to thank the City of Evanston for engaging with tenants and their advocates and for allowing us to provide guidance and perspective to the committee.

We would like to point out that this particular issue, and this particular process of policy creation, easily falls prey to what is considered a classic “collective action problem.” That is to say that, the group most burdened by some of the provisions being proposed – and we would argue that any burdens are modest and that ultimately the proposals amount to whole community holistic benefit, but they could be seen as burdens to landlords nonetheless – are imposed upon relatively few who have the power and resources to organize and stymie the effort. Meanwhile, the group that principally benefits – a much, much larger group of thousands of tenants – is much more diffuse, disconnected, often marginalized, and is ultimately far less heard in the political process.

This “collective action problem” is what we saw during the last meeting, when landlord after landlord expressed what ranged from concern to outrage over the proposals while a total of 1 Evanston tenant was heard.

We strongly urge this committee to continue thinking about who does not end up in this room, who cannot make it because of their own burdens and barriers, and to think about how just cause would benefit their lives.

I will finish with two points.

First, just cause was cast by some commenters as something radical, but it is anything but. Just or “good” cause laws have long been standard procedure for all public housing, all units funded by low-income housing tax credits (which constitute the majority of affordable housing in this country), and relocation assistance has been a feature of condo conversion laws and policies regarding displacement due to government action (such through the The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act, for example) for decades.

Second, a recent commenter cast Just Cause as a violation of basic contract principles; either party should be able to end the contract when it is over for whatever reason they wish, the commenter said. I just want to address the plain fact that housing is not a normal market good.

It is like water, it is a need.

When housing is treated like a normal market good, we see homelessness skyrocket and cities become mono-cultural bastions for the well-off. Just cause is necessary because tenants should not have to live with such a severe and nagging feeling of insecurity – that they may be subject to some landlord's whims at any given time and lose not just their homes but community ties, school system, their social networks, sometimes risking homelessness and a host of other downstream negative effects.

This type of upheaval should happen only for good reason. And when it happens, tenants should be afforded some dignity and resources. This is all just cause asks.

7/18/23 – Jessica Trujillo – Just Cause

Housing and Community Development Committee Members,

My name is Jessica Trujillo and I have lived in Evanston since 2012. I represent myself and my experience as a renter in Evanston for the past 11 years. I am a single mother of 4 children within the Evanston community. I have lived in my current residence since 2012, and I was told my lease would not be renewed for another term.

As the Housing and Community Development Committee considers updates to Evanston's Residential Landlord Tenant Ordinance (RLTO), I urge the committee to consider, at a minimum, implementation of the Just Cause for Eviction provision before you. Transparency between the landlord and tenant honors the commitment and trust individuals are forced to place in the security of their housing. Although there are many considerations to discuss beyond the current proposal, Just Cause would begin to bridge reasonable communication more clearly with the agreements made between tenant and landlord, particularly when there is either a violation of the leasing agreement or an independent need for the landlord to end the lease or not renew with the current tenant.

In Evanston, 43% of residents rent. With rents up 17%, Evanstonians are facing high housing cost burdens, risk of displacement through gentrification, as well as safety and health issues in their homes that need real solutions. Even at the "most affordable" costs of rent in Evanston, the burden of cost is no small sum for most individuals within the Evanston community. We live in a city of working people, many with families and young families at that. Housing is a basic need for all humans. This, the essential need for housing, is foundational in approaching the conversation around housing availability,

cost, and security. It is what should be considered in each discussion on the rights and protections between landlords and tenants.

In my experience renting and working in Evanston, there has been a clear need for stronger tenant protections such as Just Cause. I have seen this need through my own experience—the needs for this basic protection. Because of this, I strongly support the implementation of a Just Cause provision within the updates to our current RLTO.

Beyond this, I would urge the committee members to continue to listen to the Evanston renting community about the problems they face in maintaining safe and affordable housing as well as security of housing. There are a historic set of challenges facing renters right now. Evanston showed national leadership by enacting the first municipal reparations ordinance, and we have the chance to be leaders again by allowing renters to live more stably in their housing, with dignity.

As an Evanston renter and resident, I want to encourage the community of Evanston to live up to its values of human rights and inclusion by passing a Just Cause for eviction provision, again, as a minimum, or at least an opening to start a generous conversation between landlords and tenants.

I believe that when the basic human needs of the people within our community are earnestly considered in conversation and established protections, we have a safer community and one more able to move beyond the need to constantly worry about the possibility of losing their homes without course for disclosure and remedy.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment,

Jessica Trujillo

7/18/23 – Laura Jaliff – Just Cause

Housing and Community Development Committee Members,

My name is Laura, and I am a PhD student at Northwestern University who has lived in south Evanston for three years. The Housing and Community Development Committee has an opportunity to make a positive lasting impact on the housing landscape in this update to the Evanston’s Residential Landlord Tenant Ordinance.

I am a part of the 43% of Evanstonians who rent in this city. My rent has increased by 9% from what it was two years ago, not including hundreds of dollars of “lease renewal”

fees, pet fees, and increases in utilities. Every year, I dread receiving my new lease. Every year, I spend significant time pouring over it to tally up hidden fees and changes to maintenance policies that might later result in large unexpected bills for basic fixes, and finally I ask myself the dreaded question of how much less can I afford to spend on food, transportation, and overall quality of life in order to stay in the apartment I've called home for 3 years. This kind of uncertainty alone is difficult to experience, but I am lucky enough to have never finished tallying these increases in housing-related expenditures and realized that my only option was to move.

Many other Evanstonians aren't so lucky, so I am writing in support of Just Cause for Eviction in Evanston to protect all of us. Just Cause for Eviction will increase fairness and transparency in the landlord/tenant relationship and will offer dignity and resources to those displaced through no fault of their own. Displacement is traumatic, and it leads to a broken and more dangerous community. By limiting evictions and lease non-renewals to a set of good causes, Evanston will join the forefront of a movement that is of great relevance and importance to everyone.

This community has a chance to ensure its long-lasting safety and prosperity by reducing the frequency of housing crises that have lateral effects across the wider community, like increased homelessness, and longitudinal effects across generations, as when tenants are evicted from their homes, so are their primary school children – so are their infants. I urge committee members to envision a community where housing stability is the standard for all residents.

In the time I've been here, I have been so impressed by the city of Evanston's decisive and thoughtful responses to complex topics on which cities with more resources and visibility have vacillated and floundered. Alongside all the council-members and Evanston residents, I want to continue proudly along such a path.

Thank you for allowing the chance to comment.

Laura Jaliff
Northwestern University

7/18/23 – Herb Brenner – Just Cause

A "Just Cause" ordinance would help individuals who are living in a more modest apartment- individuals who are generally paying more than 30% of their income toward rent and have little disposable income. This ordinance will likely not apply to the owners of corporate owned luxury apartment buildings or their tenants. Whenever a tenant is

forced to relocate, it will probably mean an increase in rent as less affordable housing becomes available. Let's at least help with relocation expenses for those who are least able to afford it.

7/18/23 – James McKee (via email to staff) – Just Cause

Here are the reasons why, as an Evanston landlord and resident, I oppose the proposed “just cause” ordinance for lease non-renewals:

1. Landlords are already prohibited by law — including under the current Evanston landlord/tenant ordinance — from discrimination and retaliatory conduct. Furthermore, landlords are in the business of renting apartments, not terminating leases and evicting people unnecessarily so as to end up with empty units in need of costly cleaning, repainting and leasing expenses. The landlord's economic incentive is to keep apartments rented and receive income rather than to lose income and incur vacancies.
2. If this ordinance were implemented, landlords would presumably need to “prove” just cause and I can assure you that the problem tenant in question is not going to admit to guilt. So presumably I would have to go before a judge with a file of evidence that I now have to compile and “prove” that a non-renewal is fair? What standard of evidence would I be held to — a preponderance of evidence or guilt beyond a reasonable doubt? I suppose I would have to try to get other tenants to come to court with me and testify against say their neighbor the drug dealer - what could go wrong with a that?!
3. As a landlord, the only instance when I would consider non-renewal would be due to continued tenant noncompliance with reasonable expectations and rules of the building after many discussions, warnings and - if necessary — the threat of eviction or non-renewal if the behavior doesn't change. These are rare situations and can usually be worked out by negotiating with said tenants, but if my ability to use the threat of non-renewal is taken away, I fear being unable to control the unacceptable behavior. I have seen time and again how one bad neighbor can make life very difficult for all the other tenants in a particular building, and it is patently unfair to the good neighbors in a building to have to put up with a problem neighbor or be forced to move themselves, all because the landlord's hands are effectively tied by an ordinance such as this.
4. I would argue that the number one housing issue facing renters in Evanston is not blatant/unfair discrimination by landlords at the time of lease renewals, but rather a decreasing supply of affordable housing. Adopting such a “just cause” ordinance does nothing to provide more affordable housing. In fact, I would say that it makes it all the more likely that small-time landlords providing affordable

housing to low and moderate income tenants (such as myself) cannot afford the legal costs of having to potentially litigate every lease non-renewal and end up selling their buildings. Likely the new owners will be a big conglomerate REIT's which have a lot less interest in treating tenants fairly and keeping rents affordable — and there goes even more Evanston affordable housing.

5. If the goal here is to deal with a situation where a long-term owner with many long-term tenants sells his or her buildings to a new corporate entity that wants to fix the units up and raise the rents (such as happen recently with the Wirtz properties in SE Evanston) then measures that could be taken to assist these tenants should be considered. However, this ordinance would not even apply to situations like these because, as I understand it, it would exempt exactly the situations where landlords choose to not renew leases because of major renovation work to be done to the building.

While I support and agree with the overall goals of the committee in wanted to see tenants being treated fairly, I would urge the city and committee members to not rush to create new law that is likely to have unintended negative consequences.

Thank you, Jim McKee

7/18/23 – Robin Sindelar – RLTO

I work for the City of Evanston. My building was sold last winter and rent raised by 25%, making it unaffordable. The new owners began rehab work soon after the sale. All of my neighbors moved out when their leases were up - disbanding a polite, respectful small community that everyone enjoyed. The water was often turned off with little notice in order for the rehab to be completed. I have lived here for 23 years and have had two children graduate from ETHS. I'd like to live in a community that loves and respects everyone - no matter their income level - from my perspective Evanston often does not put the money into the values it professes to hold.

7/18/23 – Daniel Cheifetz – Tenant Lease Protection

Just cause termination is generally fair. However, in our building at 1727 Oak, residents are being arbitrarily and seemingly randomly terminated. Residents need protection from management actions that are personally punitive. This is a 55+ building and many residents have infirmities and are not in the financial position to move on the short notice they are given Thank you

7/18/23 – Claire Bacon – Just Cause for Eviction Notice

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to express my support for a Just Cause for Eviction provision to be included in the city's updates to the RLTO. I have worked in Evanston for the past couple years in the field of housing, and I have seen the need for strong tenant protections to prevent community displacement. In Evanston, 43% of residents rent, and with rents up 17%, low- and moderate-income residents are facing high housing cost burdens and an ever-present risk of displacement.

When displaced, the process of finding a new place in a rental landscape where there is a lack of affordable housing (and often strict rental requirements that screen out many low- and moderate-income tenants) is incredibly difficult. A Just Cause for Eviction provision is crucial in limiting evictions and non-renewals to a set of "good causes". Limiting no-fault evictions will in turn limit the community displacement that community members face when given a non-renewal notice for no fault of their own. When discussing these issues, I want us to remember what is at stake for renters. When housing is treated as a commodity and tenants are faced with a no-fault eviction, they are at risk of housing insecurity, community displacement, and even homelessness.

We have the chance to treat housing as the human right that it is and put in place crucial tenant protections through a Just Cause provision. I want to urge committee members to envision a community where housing stability is attainable for all its residents, and I genuinely believe a Just Cause provision will bring us closer to this reality.

Thank you for the chance to comment!

7/18/23 – League of Women Voters –Just Cause for Eviction

Dear Committee Members:

The League of Women Voters of Evanston supports housing policies that prioritize equity, lower housing costs, reduce segregation, and that focus on resident wellbeing and housing stability. Consistent with that position, we are writing in support of a Just Cause for Eviction policy for the City of Evanston. Just Cause for Eviction is a policy designed to prohibit arbitrary and discriminatory displacement of tenants and to promote stability for renters. Under current law, landlords have the right to not renew a lease or evict a month-to-month tenant without giving any reason, and often with as short as 30 days' notice.

Unregulated, no-cause evictions can hide unlawful retaliation and discrimination against renters. A Just Cause policy would define the bounds of eligible reasons to terminate a tenancy or evict renters. Under such a policy, the landlord must prove that the tenant violated the rental agreement in some way, or, if the tenant has done nothing wrong, the landlord must demonstrate an enumerated reason to compel the renter to move. In the latter cases, the landlord must pay some amount of relocation assistance so that

the tenant has the financial means to move. But in every case, landlords can follow the standard eviction process when the renter fails to pay rent, does not follow the lease, or refuses to renew the lease.

Just Cause for Eviction policies result in tenants with greater stability and who are more incentivized to invest in their property and their community, which is good for property owners as well. We encourage you to take this opportunity to create a more equitable rental landscape in Evanston.

Sincerely,

LWVE Executive Committee

Michelle K. Jordan

Elizabeth Harford

Mary Keefe Kelly

Lonnie Dunlap

Lois Taft

7/18/23 – Jennifer O’Niel – Just Cause for Eviction

Dear Housing & Community Development Committee Members:

I write to you as an individual and not representing any organization. As a retired housing manager – Certified Property Manager (CPM) through the Institute of Real Estate Management (IREM) – I bring 20 years’ experience as a property manager of multi-unit market rate, mixed income, scattered site, elderly and family rental units, and an additional 30 years in subsidy administration.

In my experience, the most successful property owners and managers – both large companies and landlords of small properties – were those who conducted their businesses consistent with the requirements of “Just” or “Good” Cause policies currently under discussion by the Housing and Community Development Committee. Sometimes they operated in this way because it was required, sometimes because it was simply the right thing to do, but always because it was good business.

I have found through the years that landlords who consistently enforce their leases, inspect their properties regularly, and maintain written records of communications between landlord and tenant are not harmed by being transparent, giving adequate notice and reasons for their decisions and actions; in fact, they are usually rewarded both financially as well as by reputation. It is my hope that you will support changes to the Residential Landlord and Tenant Ordinance that support transparency, fairness and housing stability, and prohibit arbitrary and discriminatory displacement.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Lee O'Neil

7/17/23 – Richard Timms – Just Cause Eviction

My wife and I were born in Chicago. We have been Evanston residents since 2017. We moved in to our current apartment as soon as the building opened, in 2020. We were the 3rd tenants in our 169-unit building, which houses tenants aged 55 years and older. After 3 trouble-free years, we received notice that our lease would not be renewed. This was a bolt from the blue. Management gave us no prior indication of any displeasure with our tenancy, nor any opportunity to resolve whatever prompted the decision to send us away. I am 71. My wife has a chronic, degenerative disease. We were given 83 days to find other living quarters, pack up and leave. We would not wish this predicament on anyone, even whoever decided to expel us. Please make it unlawful in Evanston to force tenants to move without just cause. Richard Timms 1727 Oak Avenue

7/17/23 – Megan McClung, Moran Center – Just Cause for Eviction Overview

The Evanston RLTO must be updated to be consistent with the greater protections provided by the Cook County RTLO. The challenges to tenants facing evictions and qualifying for new leases must be re-imagined. The Just Cause Ordinance and Right to Pay and Stay, for example, are 2 new ways to provide stability and support for ALL Evanston renters.

7/17/23 – Laurie Hillamn – Continuation of Discussion of Potential Changes to the Landlord Tenant Ordinance (Just Cause)

I'm a resident of the 3 year old Avidor Evanston. The Community of Residents is amazing; Many have made many new friends & care, support each other in this robust Community. Since new management arrived (10/2022), services have been reduced, changes that attracted active residents discontinued & treatment of us residents has been poor to non-existent. *** I heartily support this law. It will give us Seniors improved protection in the Rental market. *** I disagree with a community representative's comment last month in the Evanston Round Table, "We are trying to think broadly about people who don't have as much as probably many of us in this room have. The system works very well for people with enough. It just does. My guess is we all have housing, my guess is we're not at risk of being evicted, and I just want to say that some of this is about thinking about people who are not in that position." The majority in my rental building DO have "enough". Some have chosen to give up ownership for community

living. Yet, we are all at risk at losing our homes. It happened to 3 residents recently. This law will protect all tenants from reprehensible managers.

7/17/23 – Susan Taylor Landlord Tenant Ordinance

I live the Avidor, in downtown Evanston, a 55+ community. Many of us are elderly women, who are especially vulnerable to being dismissed and refused prompt maintenance for such issues as gas leaks, scorching shower water, and other day to day maintenance requests. Some of our neighbors have been threatened for trying to organize a residents' association and others have been refused lease renewal for no apparent reason. The proposed ordinance will provide due process, a fundamental right of all Americans, which will allow residents to organize if they chose to do so, and speak freely, without fear of reprisal. I support this important bill and ask that you do so too. Thank you.

7/15/23 - Christa Vragel - Landlord Tenant Ordinance

Gentlewomen,

I am a renter in the City of Evanston. I am concerned about renter's rights, particularly as they relate to non-renewal of lease contracts without informing the renter of cause. I do believe, as a matter of fairness both to the renter(s) and to the community in which they reside, that renters should not be given notices of non-renewal without cause, thereby denying them any chance to amend or modify such cause. Not only does such notice create a sense of confusion and uncertainty for the renters, and negative feelings about management, which by the way could be carried to the next place they live, and spread negative publicity for management, but it also creates a tension, dissatisfaction, and fear throughout the community, that is normally cheerful and content, into a community speculating as to what was the cause, and fear that they might be next. It should not be solely up to the algorithms of management to determine the perfect composition for a perfect community.

Thanking you kindly for your attention to this adjuration, I remain,
B.Christa Vragel
1727 Oak Street
Evanston, IL 60201

7/15/23 Gail Weisberg - Landlord Tenant Ordinance

I am writing to speak out for including specific "fair" reasons to not renew a tenant's lease in the updated Ordinance. The ordinance should make it clear that a landlord

cannot refuse to renew a lease without providing grounds such as 1) non-payment of rent, 2) performing an illegal act within the apartment, or 3) a specific lease violation which the tenant fails to correct after they've been given notice. I am a resident of Avidor Evanston, a 55+ Apartment Community at 1727 Oak Ave. In the past couple of months, at least 4 residents have been given a notice that their lease will not be renewed, with no reason given. One of the residents lives in an affordable unit and two are disabled. All are up to date on their rent and are active in the community. No one, especially seniors, should be faced with anxiety that our lease will not be renewed and with the burdens of moving, as rents go up and the rental market is tight. We urge you to support the proposed changes and to act quickly on updating the Tenant Landlord Ordinance so that all tenants will feel secure in their home.

7/13/23 - Sharon Biondi - Require Reasons for Non-Renewal of Leases

As a resident of Avidor, I, and many other residents have grave concerns about new management decisions, including non-renewal notices being delivered to tenants, with no reason stated for the decision. Changes under this management company appear to be made (30% rent increase for some tenants) to force current residents to leave. It is not the 55+ community that was marketed to potential tenants. Amenities are disappearing, but rent is going up.

7/13/23 - Margie Elstein - Just Cause Ordinance

“JUST CAUSE ORDINANCE”—this amendment is critical to protect tenants from arbitrary and self-serving determinations by landlords to not renew a lease or evict a tenant without providing a transparent explanation, and where the tenant would have the right to dispute any allegations before an impartial panel. I live in a 55+ community (the Avidor building) where seniors are particularly vulnerable and should feel and know that they have a secure place to live without having the “fear” of having to uproot without explanation of the cause. We urge you to please support this important/critical bill not only for seniors but for any person or “class” that is currently not being protected from non lease renewal or eviction without just cause. Thank you for your understanding.

7/12/23 - Rita Kashner - Proposed Amendments to the Just Cause Ordinance

I am a resident at Avidor Evanston, 1727 Oak Avenue. This 55-and-over building is under new rental management (Greystar) and in the last couple of months, at least three residents have been advised by management that their leases will not be renewed, with no reasons given. Two of these three neighbors are disabled. All are active participants in the building's activities and are up to date on their rent. Another resident who was deemed to have uttered a mild profanity in the lobby has been given

notice that if she repeats the offense her lease will not be renewed. What was a friendly, happy community in this building has become a place of anxiety and insecurity for its senior residents who have limited choices of places to live and limited resources for a move. I support the new Renter/Landlord amendment. I think that the city should make it clear that a landlord cannot refuse to renew a lease without giving (and proving) any reasonable grounds for non-renewal, especially to seniors. Reasonable grounds for refusal to renew leases should be listed as part of the amendment. I moved here from New York. I'm glad to be living in a city that stands up for its citizens. Thanks, Rita Kashner

7/8/23 - Wendy Paul - Just Cause for Non-Renewal of Tenant's Lease

I live in a senior community where the landlord can and does fail to renew tenants' leases for no apparent reason. In a community such as Evanston, with a shortage of rental housing, this is a much needed change. Finding another apartment and moving is difficult for anyone, but especially so for seniors who are particularly vulnerable. Under the proposal, landlords would never be required to renew the leases of tenants who are not in full compliance with all of the lease requirements, so their objections are not well founded. Please vote in favor of this much needed ordinance and recommend its passage to the city council. Thank you. Wendy Paul

We live in a 55 plus community, the Avidor, in downtown Evanston. Many of us are widows or otherwise single women on fixed incomes. All of the proposed amendments to the Landlord Tenant Ordinance are important, but we are especially focused on the proposal that would require a landlord to have just cause for failure to renew a tenant's lease.

No one should have to be uprooted from their home for no reason, and have to face the many burdens of moving, especially in a tight rental market like Evanston. But as seniors, we are especially vulnerable to the physical challenges of packing and moving, and finding a new place accessible and appropriate for the elderly.

In the last few months, three residents in our building were given notices that their leases would not be renewed, for no given or apparent reason, and were given only a few months notice to vacate. One of these residents receives disability payments; another suffers from a debilitating illness.

We urge you to support this critical bill. Thank you.

Wendy Paul	312-203-4244	Debra Cheneff	203 215 7612
Bill Schneider	312-505-5788	Bill Schneider	
Sharon Juy	773-646-8068	Noelle Baker	
Nancy Davitt	773-733-1150	Susan Taylor	
Lorie Rowley	312-593-3682	Karen McNamara	
Carol Richardson	773/330-2067	832-217-9731	
Dara Putz	773-401-7786	Richard Timms	
Marie Gleiten	516-246-4571	Marge Os	
		Susan Becker	
		Richard Borko	

Ann Molly

~~Ann Molly~~

847-347-1384

Deborah Guya 312-543-0733

Christine Vogel 419-248-9846

Patricia M. Miller 847-309-1338 Avidor resident

~~Patricia M. Miller~~ ~~847-309-1338~~

Bonnie Lamborn 585-750-9733

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Beverly Paul 312-944-8879

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Rev. Dr. Michael C. R. Nabors

President

Evanston/North Shore NAACP Branch

www.evanstonnaacp.org

July 19, 2023

The Evanston/North Shore NAACP stands in support of the “Just Cause for Conviction” policy solution and is in support of Open Communities efforts regarding this issue. For far too long black and brown people, as well as other marginalized groups of people have been victims of convictions without cause. In addition, many black, brown and marginalized people have suffered embarrassment, humiliation and egregious actions and behavior by landlords. This has been inhumane for decades.

While several states have already instituted a just cause policy to protect tenants, we advocate for such a policy not only as a public requirement, but private landlords as well. We add our names to many organizations who are supporting this effort towards creating a more humane, just and equitable society, community by community.

Our Housing Committee will work with others to ensure that those we seek to represent will not have their human and civil rights denied.

Warmly,

Rev. Dr. Michael C. R. Nabors
President
Evanston/North Shore NAACP