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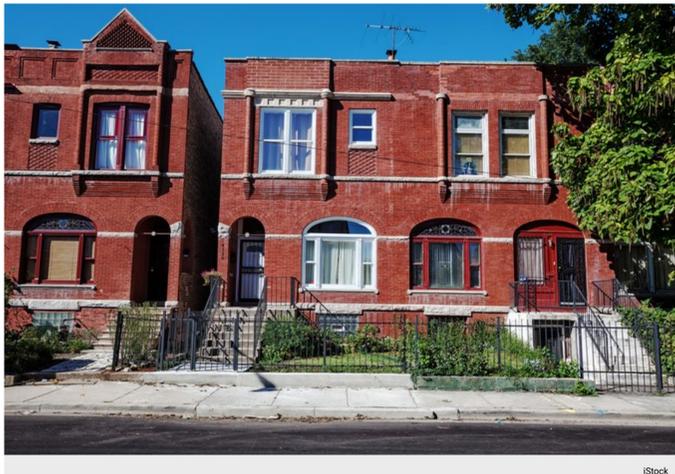
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# Chicago needs the 'just cause for eviction' ordinance

It's a policy that can reduce evictions, housing instability, homelessness, community displacement, health inequities, and racial and class disparities in Chicago—and the City Council should adopt it now.

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Most of us Chicagoans are renters. Our rental units provide more than shelter. Our apartments are our homes.

Thousands of times each year in Chicago—10,000 times by some estimates—a landlord casts a fellow Chicagoan or an entire family out of their home due to no cause and no fault of the tenant.

What if I told you that a commonsense policy is already in place in many cities and states around the U.S.—and has been in place in some cases for decades—that can reduce several related problems simultaneously: evictions, housing instability, homelessness, community displacement, health inequities, and intertwined structural racism and class inequity in Chicago?

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Cook County's legal aid program supports landlords, too

Known as just cause for eviction, such an ordinance is currently before the Housing and Real Estate Committee of Chicago's City Council. The committee should advance, and Chicago's City Council should pass, this ordinance into law to protect tenants from unjust no-cause and no-fault evictions and non-renewals of leases—and to advance housing and health justice in Chicago.



Under current law, Chicago landlords are not required to give a reason for lease termination or non-renewal. A lease termination notice is given, and if the tenant does not leave by the specified time, a court eviction case is filed.

The just cause ordinance will stop the practice of ending the landlord-tenant relationship through termination, non-renewal, and eviction without good cause or fault on the tenant's part. Just cause would establish seven exclusive reasons for ending the landlord-tenant relationship.

Three of these are tenant faults, covering existing reasons: non-payment of rent; material breach of the lease or law, such as disrupting neighbors, damaging property, criminal activity, denying landlord access, or drug-related activity; or refusing to renew the lease on similar terms.

The four non-tenant-fault reasons included are: the landlord wishes to occupy the unit or move in a close family member; the unit needs substantial repair or rehab; condominium conversion; and demolition or removal of the unit from the market. For these four reasons that are no fault of the tenant, relocation assistance would be required to be paid to the tenant to help them successfully relocate to a different apartment—with financial support to protect small landlords.

People often choose homes for proximity to work, friends, school, and for a particular community, among many other reasons such as accessibility and affordability. Homes provide the base from which we connect with and contribute to our communities, make and share meals, care for children and older family members, participate remotely in classes and work, start and build businesses, and more.

A no-cause eviction often throws an individual's or an entire family's life and livelihood into disarray—at no fault of their own—while saddling the unfairly displaced household with thousands of dollars for the cost to move, replace possessions left behind, and hopefully settle into a new apartment. Oftentimes, such an eviction leads people to doubling up, homelessness, and even displacement from our city altogether, thus worsening population loss.

Given the compounding effects of structural racism and class inequity, such evictions are disproportionately experienced by Black Chicagoans and people living in poverty. This reflects and exacerbates systemic oppression.

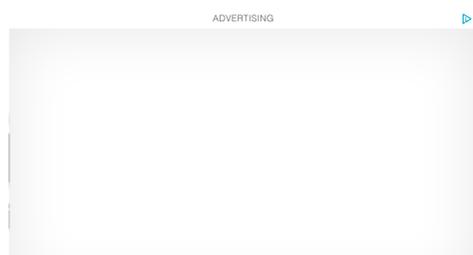
Additionally, evictions contribute to broader health inequities, including in both physical and behavioral health and maternal and child health. Evictions interrupt children's education and disrupt people's ability to go to work, causing job destabilization and loss, harming our local economy and people's health.

Government's purpose is to protect people's health and well-being. Passage of the just cause for eviction ordinance will protect Chicago's renters against several ills; help stabilize our rental housing market, communities, and local economy; and promote the health of the public. Chicago needs the just cause for eviction ordinance now.

Wesley Epplin is policy director of the Health & Medicine Policy Research Group in Chicago.



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