Cosponsor the Fair Chance at Housing Act of 2016

From: The Committee on Financial Services - Minority Staff
Sent By: Esther.Kahng@mail.house.gov
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This bill is supported by the following organizations: the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), the National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA), CSH, the National Housing Law Project (NHLP), the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP), the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights (LCCR), the National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund, the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Housing Task Force, the Arc of the United States, and the National Disability Rights Network.

Dear Colleague,

In honor of National Reentry Week (April 24-30, 2016) as well as Fair Housing Month (April), I have introduced the "Fair Chance at Housing Act of 2016," which would comprehensively reform the eviction and screening procedures for federal housing assistance programs under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to roll back harmful policies that continue to create unfair barriers to housing for people with criminal backgrounds. This bill would build upon the steps that HUD has already taken to discourage the use of arrest records as a sole basis for screening or eviction determinations, and to clarify the application of the Fair Housing Act to persons with criminal backgrounds. I invite you to join me in this effort to provide individuals and families with a second chance and a fair chance at housing by cosponsoring this legislation.

For decades, the mass incarceration resulting from the War on Crime and the War on Drugs have done far more harm than good, jailing millions of Americans while having very limited impact on either crime or drug use in the U.S. Moreover, these efforts have had profoundly disproportionate effects on minorities, who have historically been the primary target of anti-drug policies, enforcement, and rhetoric for reasons that are simply unjustifiable. And the consequences of these debunked policies reach much farther than the doors of our prisons and jails; a criminal background can have lifelong implications for a person's ability to obtain housing, employment, education, and to otherwise rebuild their lives. Access to stable housing in particular is one of the most important first steps to rehabilitation and re-entry, but federal laws enacted decades ago continue to pose unnecessary and punitive barriers to federal housing assistance for those with criminal records, and even for those suspected of being involved in criminal activity.

For example, under current law, tenants can be evicted for crimes committed by a guest without their knowledge, they can be evicted for a single incident of criminal activity no matter how small the crime, and they can be evicted for criminal activity without much evidence that they actually committed the crime. This bill would reform these overly punitive policies, while

maintaining the ability for public housing authorities (PHAs) and property owners to protect the health, safety and right to peaceful enjoyment of other tenants. This bill is a smarter and safer approach to both fair housing and public safety. It would help reduce recidivism and prevent homelessness by helping ex-offenders find stable housing upon exiting a jail or prison, and by ensuring that individuals and households currently receiving federal housing assistance are not unfairly evicted.

You can find press release with links to the bill, a bill summary and section-by-section here. If you would like to cosponsor this legislation, or if you have any questions, please contact Esther Kahng at Esther.Kahng@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

MAXINE WATERS

Ranking Member

Committee on Financial Services