



Nation Outside



City of Jackson adopts ordinance to protect justice-impacted families from discrimination

'Fair Chance' rule ends blanket discrimination against people with a criminal past

JACKSON — The Jackson City Council voted 5-1 to adopt a Fair Chance Housing Ordinance Tuesday night that will end blanket discrimination against housing applicants who have a criminal record. Once the ordinance takes effect in 90 days, Jackson will join other Michigan cities like Detroit, Ypsilanti and Kalamazoo that have similar rules in place.

The Fair Chance ordinance doesn't mandate that property owners rent to people who have a criminal past. It simply says that landlords and rental agents cannot screen them out of the application process by asking about a criminal record before tentative leasing offer has been made — however, a background check can be done after that offer has been extended. Even then, a landlord can still refuse to rent to someone who has been convicted of a violent crime, people on the sex offender registry, people convicted of a drug-related crime within the past five years, and certain other situations. People who were arrested but not convicted of a crime, people convicted as a minor, people convicted of a misdemeanor more than five years previously or people with an expunged offense still could not be denied housing under the ordinance.

"This new ordinance is something that helps everyone in the community and will end a discriminatory practice in our City," Jackson Mayor Derek Dobies said. "I thank the City Council for taking this bold step for our underserved residents and helping to continue equity and justice efforts in Jackson."

Policies like the Fair Chance Housing Ordinance are crucial in helping people with a criminal record re-establish their lives and reintegrate into their communities. It's estimated that about [a third of the adult U.S. population](#) have a criminal record, and they face significant barriers in securing housing, good jobs, education and other needs. Many researchers believe that finding safe and

affordable housing is the most critical need formerly incarcerated people face because having a home creates a sound foundation for a person's life. It enables them to find work and concentrate on the job, provide stability for their family and build a sense of belonging to their community. Finding a home has also been linked to lower rates of recidivism, [according to research](#).

“No one loses with the Fair Chance Housing Ordinance,” said Tony Gant, the Jackson Coordinator of Nation Outside, a nonprofit led by justice-impacted people working for criminal justice reform. “Finding a home and creating a sense of independence means everything to someone who used to be incarcerated. The community benefits because housing opportunities are related to less recidivism and less crime. Landlords don't lose, either — they still get to run background checks and decline applicants who may not be a good fit for their property. This ordinance simply gives everyone a chance to be considered for a lease, no matter what they did in the past.”

Several landlords routinely exclude anyone with a criminal record from renting, even if a conviction was for a minor offense that occurred decades ago. This practice continues even though the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development warned in 2016 that it [was tantamount to racial discrimination and therefore illegal](#).

The Fair Chance Housing ordinance under consideration in Jackson would require landlords and management companies to determine that an applicant is otherwise qualified to rent and make a conditional lease agreement before inquiring about an applicant's criminal history. It would also be prohibited to reject an applicant for any of the following:

- an arrest that didn't lead to a conviction;
- participating in a deferral program;
- an expunged offense;
- a juvenile conviction;
- misdemeanor convictions more than five years old;
- or civil infractions.

The proposed Jackson ordinance would allow property owners to deny leasing to people who are or have been:

- convicted of violent offenses;
- on the sex offender registry;
- people convicted of arson, metal theft, vandalism or damaging real property;
- people convicted of crimes against landlords, management agents or other tenants;
- or people who have a drug-related conviction in the past five years.

###

Nation Outside (www.nationoutside.org) is an organization working for criminal justice reform that is led by people who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system. Nation Outside uses community education strategies and civic engagement initiatives to inspire members and the community to get involved in knowledgeable, sustainable, and socially just forms of advocacy to support currently and formerly incarcerated folks, their loved ones, and their communities in order to inspire and create real reform in the criminal justice system. Safe & Just Michigan is currently the financial sponsor of Nation Outside.