

Home > Opinion

December 09, 2020 02:13 PM

Chicago protects renters. Cook County must do the same.

In the city, an ordinance ensures basic renters' rights for renters and requires minimum safety standards for units. It's time the county followed suit to extend similar protections to 245,000 suburban renter households.

DAVID ORR



CoStar Group

Evanston Place

 TWEET

 SHARE

MORE 

Thirty-four years ago, Chicago's Residential Landlord and Tenants Ordinance, for which I was chief sponsor, passed the City Council. The ordinance ensures basic rights for renters and landlord and requires minimum safety standards for units. Now, [Cook County](#) has the opportunity to extend similar protections to 245,000 suburban renter households—and it's long past time to do so.

Housing is a core need of any family and individual. As the COVID-19 pandemic has made even clearer, a home is never just walls and a roof: a home is the foundation from which we build our entire lives. It is essential to everyone's well-being.

The stability and health of our communities depend on everyone having somewhere to shelter in place, work, rest, and take care of ourselves or family when we get sick. Any home needs to be decent, safe, and healthy, and landlords have a basic responsibility to ensure reasonable living conditions for the families and individuals to which they rent.

MORE

Affordable housing is cropping up in some unlikely areas



This is the city's new tool to chill gentrifying hot spots



Missing Crain's in print? Get the full experience on your screen.

In Cook County, 43 percent of residents rent their homes, according to the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University's 2019 State of Rental Housing in Cook County (nearly 850,000 households). The majority of these households—64 percent—are low-income, and far, far too many are rent-burdened, spending more than a third of their income on housing costs.

This means they face impossible decisions between paying for food and medicine or rent. The economic distress of the pandemic has only made their situations more precarious, and even before COVID-19, our affordable housing supply in Cook County has been dwindling, pushing families into even more tenuous housing situations.

The proposed Cook County Residential Tenant Landlord Ordinance (RTLO) will give more renters the fundamental rights they need to navigate an increasingly challenging rental landscape. The measure will not make a difference for the many landlords who are already acting fairly and justly, but it will make an immense difference for renters dealing with predatory landlords.

Bad landlords must be held accountable when they charge absurdly high late fees, fail to provide common sense termination notices, enter homes without permission, and neglect repairs, all of which will be covered by the RTLO.

ADVERTISING



 TWEET

 SHARE

MORE ▾



This last is a particularly important provision. According the Metropolitan Tenants Organization, nearly 40 percent of renters who call their rights hotline have unresolved repair problems. In Chicago, these tenants have options—but suburban Cook County renters do not. The proposed RTLO gives tenants much-needed options to get necessary repairs done.

The Cook County bill also creates limits for late fees on rental payments, which some landlords jack up to \$100, an extraordinary cost for families already living on the brink. It establishes guidelines for when landlords can enter a unit, defends tenants from landlord retaliation, and protects tenants from landlords locking them out without legal authority. In sum, the RTLO will provide basic floors for actors in the rental market. And it will do so without costing the County; the ordinance provides tenants with the tools to enforce their rights through court action and other means.

Ensuring these fundamental rights for tenants is a matter of racial justice. Low-income renters are more vulnerable to predatory landlords, and they are disproportionately people of color.

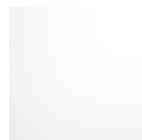
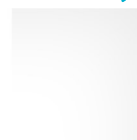
In their 2020 report called *The Gap*, the National Low Income Housing Coalition finds that 20 percent of Black households, 18 percent of indigenous households, and 16 percent of Latino households are extremely low-income renters (only six percent of white households are extremely low-income renters).

Renters of color, particularly Black women, are much more likely to face eviction. In order to build more equitable communities, we must ensure that everyone who rents a home has protections that are essential for living safe, healthy lives and finding paths to financial stability.

Chicago renters have had these rights since 1986, when Mayor Harold Washington signed a law that created greater equity and fairer housing conditions for renters and landlords. Now it's time for Cook County Commissioners to extend these basic rights and create a fairer rental landscape for all their constituents.

David Orr is former Alderman of Chicago's 49th Ward and former Cook County Clerk. He was Chief Sponsor of Chicago's Residential Landlord and Tenants Ordinance, which passed in 1986.

ADVERTISING



Sign up for Crain's Chicago Real Estate Daily: A free newsletter delivering exclusive insights on commercial real estat

[TWEET](#)[SHARE](#)[MORE](#)

EMAIL ADDRESS

SUBMIT

Letter — to the — Editor

Have something to get off your chest? You can send us an email. Or tell us on our Facebook page or on Twitter, @CrainsChicago.

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU



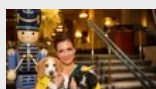
How'd the first year of recreational pot sales go? Pretty darn well.



Lightfoot risks falling into a familiar trap



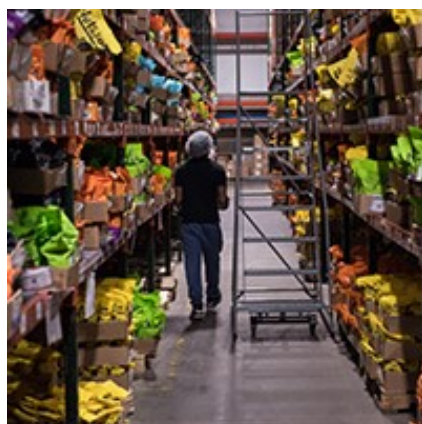
McDonald's: Our business decisions aim for long-term success



Sponsored Content: 2021 Big Dates

SPONSORED BY SMALL UNITES

How three mission-driven companies are navigating the pandemic



These three mission-driven businesses are living and breathing their company values every day. And sticking to their mission has helped them to be more

[TWEET](#)[SHARE](#)[MORE](#)

SIGN UP FOR NEWSLETTERS

- ☐ Morning 10 - *Need-to-know stories from Crain's and around the web. Monday-Friday at 7 a.m.*
- ☐ Today's Crain's - *A roundup of the day's important business news. Monday-Friday around 3 p.m.*
- ☐ Breaking News Alerts - *Up-to-the-minute info on what's happening in Chicago business right now.*
- ☐ Health Pulse Chicago - *Your source for actionable, exclusive and inside news and data on the health care industry. Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 5:30 a.m.*
- ☐ People on the Move - *Highlights prominent personalities, job changes and executive appointments. Thursday.*
- ☐ Chicago Real Estate Report - *The best source in Chicago for exclusive commercial real estate news. Monday-Thursday.*
- ☐ Chicago Residential Real Estate Report - *Scoops on Chicago's residential real estate industry. Tuesday-Thursday.*

EMAIL ADDRESS

SUBMIT

 TWEET

 SHARE

MORE 

GET OUR NEWSLETTERS

Staying current is easy with Crain's news delivered straight to your inbox, free of charge.

Email Address

[SIGN UP NOW](#)

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

Get the best business coverage in Chicago, from breaking news to razor-sharp analysis, in print and online.

[SUBSCRIBE NOW](#)

CONNECT WITH US



CRAIN'S CHICAGO BUSINESS

CONTACT US

150 N. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60601
E-mail our editor
(312) 649-5200

[More contacts](#)

[FAQs/Customer service](#)

RESOURCES

[About Us](#)

[Crain's Chicago jobs](#)

[Advertise with Us](#)

[Media Kit](#)

[Classified Advertising](#)

[Staff](#)

[Reprints](#)

[Ad Choices](#)

[Sitemap](#)

AWARDS

[Special reports](#)

LEGAL

[Terms and Conditions](#)



TWEET



SHARE

MORE



[Privacy Request](#)

CRAIN

Copyright © 1996-2020. Crain Communications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[TWEET](#) [SHARE](#) [MORE](#) 