

CITY HALL

## South Side Alderwoman Pushes For 'Senior Bill Of Rights' As Elders Fight To Be Heard

An ordinance sponsored by Ald. Jeanette Taylor would protect older renters from predatory landlords and reinstate the Department of Aging.



By Jamie Nesbitt Golden

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Ald. Jeanette Taylor (20th) is sponsoring a Senior Bill of Rights to protect the city's senior residents from unsafe living conditions. The ordinance also calls for the reinstatement of the Department of Aging. Credit: Jamie Nesbitt Golden / Block Club Chicago

**CITY HALL** — A coalition of older Chicagoans and activists are demanding the city create a “Senior Bill of Rights” to protect them from predatory housing practices.

**The proposed ordinance**, introduced this week to the City Council by Ald. Jeanette Taylor (20th), calls for the reopening of the Department of Aging and new safeguards for residents 55 and older against mistreatment by landlords and property managers.

At a Wednesday press conference at City Hall, Taylor, who has 18 senior buildings in her ward, criticized local elected officials for ignoring older residents until campaign season, saying many in her ward feel unseen and unsupported.

“No one at City Hall can tell seniors where to go when they’re being mistreated or abused,” Taylor said. “These seniors came to me and said they want a Bill of Rights that protects us and ensures the city holds accountable the people who say they love seniors. They’re good enough to vote for you but not good enough to listen to when it’s not election time?”

Taylor said reviving a standalone Department of Aging, which was **folded in the Department of Family and Support Services in 2009**, would allow older people to have a direct connection to the city in which they’ve invested and paid taxes.

The alderwoman was joined by the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, People for Community Recovery, Mothers Opposed to Violence Everywhere and fellow Aids. Byron Sigcho-Lopez (25th) and Angela Clay (46th). Sigcho-Lopez and Clay signaled a commitment Wednesday to getting the ordinance passed.

Mayor Brandon Johnson appeared briefly to offer his support before heading into council chambers for Wednesday’s meeting. In a statement to Block Club, he said he and the budget and finance team are “working through” the Department of Aging proposal to analyze what the budget impact would be.

“This is a critical issue, and we want to make sure that it is done right,” Johnson said.

The coalition spent three years drafting the bill after older residents across the city complained to community leaders of rodent infestations, broken appliances and infrastructure falling into disrepair, organizers said.

Included in the Senior Bill of Rights is the right for older people to organize and be protected from retaliation by property managers and landlords. If staff is found in violation, older tenants retain the right to break their rental agreements under the proposed ordinance. They’d also be entitled to recover the greater of two months’ rent or twice the actual damages they’ve sustained, plus attorney fees. If the rental agreement is terminated, the landlord would be responsible for fees incurred, according to the proposed ordinance.