

City of Renton protects Section 8 tenants

City of Renton Contacts:

Preeti Shridhar, Deputy Public Affairs Administrator, 425-430-6569

Landlords are prohibited from discriminating against tenants and potential tenants based on participation in Section 8; civil penalties are prescribed for violations

Renton, WA – Renton City Council unanimously passed an emergency ordinance last night prohibiting property owners and managers from discriminating against tenants or potential tenants based on their participation in the Section 8 housing program. The ordinance also establishes penalties and an appeals process. The ordinance takes effect immediately and will expire on August 1, 2017.

“When a group of tenants who participate in Section 8 housing came to us two weeks ago with the predicament that they were being displaced, we were very concerned about their challenges and we felt it was critical to address the issue right away,” said Mayor Denis Law. “We are very pleased that the Council passed the emergency ordinance that helps protect families under these circumstances.”

The Mayor and city administrators held several meetings with housing advocates to better understand what the families need and determine the steps to take. City staff worked with the Renton Housing Authority, Tenants Union and three community organizations (St. Vincent de Paul, Catholic Community Services, and Multi-Service Center) to provide assistance and find solutions for the families impacted.

“We have also taken steps to address the issues faced by the group of tenants who came to us initially,” said Law. “We brought various organizations together including the Renton Housing Authority, the Tenants Union and various human services organizations to find solutions. As a result many of the landlords have either withdrawn their renewal notices or are now allowing tenants to stay until the end of their leases.”

“We heard passionate debate on both sides of the issue, at council meetings and via email,” said Council President Randy Corman. “These families are among Renton’s most vulnerable and it’s our duty to protect them. The ordinance gives us the ability to make sure they are treated fairly.”

In an email to the Mayor and City Council Dr. Linda Smith, a community advocate, had the following comment:

“I want to say thank you for your compassionate care in passing the Section 8 voucher protection for families and individuals here in Renton. I especially appreciate the urgency you placed on this matter and the fact that you took immediate action to find a solution. This was a major success as it does eliminate undue stress from so many families and children lives who potentially faced sleeping on the streets.”

The ordinance makes it illegal for any property owner, manager, landlord or agent to refuse to rent to a person solely on the fact the person plans to pay a portion of the rent using money from Section 8, which is administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Landlords are also prohibited from refusing to allow required health and safety inspections by the public housing authority, and must now provide written notice to explain why the unit is ineligible. The first violation of the ordinance is subject to a \$1,000 civil fine. A second violation by the same person within a two-year period is subject to a \$2,500 fine. A third violation by the same person within a three-year period would be classified as a gross misdemeanor and subject to a jail sentence of 364 days and up to a \$5,000 fine and restitution. Appeals must

be made in writing to the City Clerk's office no later than 14 days after the fine was issued. The appeal will be reviewed by the Community and Economic Development administrator or designee.

The passing of an ordinance is just the latest step the city has taken to assist low-income families.

"The housing market throughout the region has shifted and caused hardships for families of all income levels," said Law.

"Cost of homes and rental rates are increasing throughout the region. Like other areas in Seattle and Bellevue, Renton is also becoming increasingly unaffordable. We need to find long term solutions for affordable housing."