

LA to consider prohibiting landlords from asking about criminal history

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The Los Angeles City Council voted Tuesday to consider prohibiting landlords from inquiring about prospective tenants' criminal history.

Council members voted 11-0, with no discussion, to reactivate a motion seeking to establish a so-called "fair chance" housing ordinance. Council President Paul Krekorian and Councilman Curren Price recused themselves, and members Katy Yaroslavsky and Monica Rodriguez were absent during the vote.

On April 2, council members Hugo Soto-Martinez, Eunisses Hernandez and Imelda Padilla introduced a motion to reconsider the Fair Chance Housing Ordinance. It had been originally introduced by council members Marqueece Harris-Dawson and Nithya Raman, and then-Councilman Mike Bonin in 2022, but was left untouched and expired per policy. It required a motion for the city council to take up the matter again.

According to city documents, some members of the council are looking to create a more "just and equitable" system for Angelenos and reduce barriers to housing, especially for "Black and Brown communities and people experiencing homelessness."

The ordinance would "prohibit landlords from, at any time or by any means, whether direct or indirect, inquire about an applicant's criminal history or requiring an applicant to disclose criminal history" when an applicant is applying for an apartment or other types of housing. Additionally, the proposed city law would prevent landlords from using such information, if received, to outright deny an applicant.

Cities such as Oakland and Berkeley have implemented similar housing laws. Those cities have detailed exceptions for when the law would not be considered, such as when a person is applying for housing at owner-occupied units or shared living arrangements.

The potential Los Angeles law would also incorporate a private right of action for prospective renters, meaning if a landlord discriminates based on their record, those landlords could face fines. During Tuesday's City Council meeting, three members of the public expressed their thoughts on the matter. One man said if the city were to enact such an ordinance, it could endanger families and children. Another woman encouraged council members to pursue the ordinance.

According to the motion introduced by Raman, Harris-Dawson and Bonin, "Angelenos with past criminal histories often face insurmountable barriers to housing and are routinely screened out when applying to rent housing due to criminal background checks in private rental, nonprofit affordable housing and public housing units.

"We must follow the lead of cities like Oakland, Berkeley and Seattle and prohibit the use of criminal background checks when evaluating rental applications for housing," the motion read.

The motion will now head to the council's Housing and Homelessness Committee for further consideration.