

Good afternoon and thank you for taking the time to address this crucial issue our city is facing. My name is Dan Hyman, and I am an attorney at SeniorLAW Center. I am here today to testify about the challenges senior tenant are facing in our city and to propose some solutions this council should adopt to address these issues.

At the SeniorLAW Center, we seek justice for older adults. We are the only nonprofit organization in Pennsylvania whose mission is dedicated solely to providing legal services to seniors – and one of the few in this nation. We provide free legal assistance to thousands of seniors each year, including victims of elder abuse and financial exploitation, grandparents raising grandchildren, and elders facing housing crises and homelessness.

In our work, we assist seniors facing tenant rights issues, such as evictions and other threats to safe shelter. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the housing epidemic that vast numbers of our seniors are facing.

While the housing crisis is something this council is painfully aware of, seniors face additional burdens compared to the average tenant.

Firstly, many seniors have lived in their rental properties for years, if not decades. For example, one senior SeniorLAW Center recently aided has been a tenant at the same property for 28 years now. Over time we all accumulate many possessions, seniors especially. Their age and physical disabilities make moving difficult. Seniors must rely on family or expensive moving companies when forced to vacate their homes.

With these physical disabilities come mobility challenges. As a result, the already limited housing stock in this city further diminishes for elder tenants, as Seniors often require units on the first floor or with elevators.

Finding alternative housing presents additional challenges for seniors. Waitlists are often accompanied by extended periods of waiting and are frequently for sub-standard housing. For example, a loose or worn carpet to the average tenant is just unsightly, but to a senior this becomes a serious tripping, and thus health hazard.

Seniors face the additional challenges that come with technology, as many are unable or uncomfortable using online platforms to search for alternative housing. This problem is ever expanding as rental companies switch to online platforms for payments and maintenance requests.

Lastly, many seniors in this city currently reside in senior complexes. These complexes are greatly deteriorating and pose health hazards to the hundreds of seniors currently housed within them.

This is not a crisis without a solution. First, we recommend L&I prioritize complaints from elders. Other cities have adopted similar procedures, prioritizing complaints filed by classes of individuals who are more susceptible to public health issues.

Additionally, we recommend rental assistance funds be set aside specifically for seniors. Seniors are a vulnerable population within our city. We should make rental assistance more easily available to these individuals who have worked their whole lives to build and help our community. It is a matter of justice and public health.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Dan Hyman