



Commissioner Chloe Eudaly
City of Portland

Friday, January 18, 2019

To: Shannon Callahan, Director, Portland Housing Bureau

Cc: Jessica Kinard, Interim Director, City Budget Office

From: Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, Commissioner JoAnn Hardesty

Re: PHB Directive to Develop FY 2019-2020

Issue Title: Rental Services Office

Commissioner(s) Issuing Direction: Commissioners Eudaly and Hardesty

Bureau(s) Directed: Portland Housing Bureau

Issue Overview and Desired Goal/Outcome(s): The Portland Housing Bureau is stretched to capacity with its current budget and does not have the ability to add new staff or resources in the Rental Services Office to meet the growing need. The status quo budget is already considered underfunded for the office and increasing capacity is the only way we will be able to adequately address growing much needed city services for both landlords and tenants.

SHORT TERM REQUESTS

These are requests that need to be funded immediately in order to meet our obligations to landlords and tenants in the city.

Screening Criteria Implementation

It is very likely that in the next few months, Council may be approving a tenant protection regulation ordinance that will dramatically increase the need for more resources from the Rental Services Office. Commissioner Eudaly's screening criteria and security deposit regulations will require a 6-month implementation plan that will include trainings, mailings, website updates, and staffing to navigate the increased volume of calls and visits to the office in Spring 2019.

Increased Staff Capacity

Because of new tenant protections we have already passed, plus additional protections we intend to bring to council, it is critical for staffing to be adequate to meet the demand. At current levels, staffing is unable to address the high volume of calls and processing of administrative rules and enforcement of policies. We are requesting a doubling of current staff levels.

LONG TERM REQUESTS

In addition, there are services that the RSO currently do not provide that would benefit the city including:

Rental Licensing: *Require ongoing registration of all rental dwelling units in order to collect data and distribute landlord/tenant educational materials.*

Registration of landlords is essential to collecting the data we need to make sound policy decisions in the future. However, licensing of landlords in the city would increase our ability to bring enforcement of our regulations in-house and minimize the need for a discriminatory complaint based system that relies on the courts to hear cases. In the future, we can consider expanding to a licensing model that uses mandatory inspections to ensure safe housing and compliant businesses.

Landlord/Tenant Notices: *Require that tenant notices of any kind conform to a specific template and be submitted to the city as well as the tenant.*

This is an essential component to acquiring data and providing for the proper training and education of not only landlord and tenant rights, but also of the laws and regulations. Providing this service will allow for lessening conflicts and increasing knowledge of rights and responsibilities as well as standardize the process for both parties.

Universal Eviction Defense: *Expand legal services to cover eviction defense for all tenants.*

Evictions that land in court are rife with power imbalances and often result in displacement outcomes for the tenants. Landlords have access to money which affords them the privilege of attorneys that the average tenant does not have access to. Universal eviction defense has been proven to be an effective strategy in New York, where a large feasibility study found major cost savings for the city by providing legal assistance and preventing evictions. It has proven so successful they are improving and expanding the program. Portland tenants are regularly evicted without the opportunity to respond or remedy and it is costing the city money in externalized costs to provide resources once they have been displaced.

Funding Options: General fund

Additional Information Requests/Notes: While our offices clearly prioritize funding the short term requests first, it is our preference that we also receive a full budget analysis on the long term requests with an explanation of their potential feasibility for future implementation if it is determined they cannot be funded this year.