

**Testimony of Salik Karim, Advocacy Coordinator, On behalf of John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity, Before the Council of the City of New York Committees on General Welfare and Civil and Human Rights Oversight Hearing: Rental Assistance and Source of Income Discrimination**

Good morning NYC Councilmembers Levin and Eugene. My Name is Salik Karim and I am the Advocacy Coordinator at the John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity. However, I am also a formerly incarcerated person living in New York City, who has been unfairly discriminated against in the housing application process by the use of criminal background checks.

In spite of being released from prison in 2005, maintaining full time employment since May 2005, and receiving both a bachelor's and master's degree in social work, I continue to be discriminated against in the housing process. This discrimination not only affects me but my family as well. The use of criminal background checks creates a false narrative about who I am, and who I have become in spite of my past history. It locks me into my past, and creates barriers blocking movement into my future.

I want to clearly stated that housing is a human right and not a human privileged. Therefore, everyone should be able to secure this human right. The use of criminal background checks has negatively impacted not only me, but my finance (now wife) by not allowing us to use my income as a resource for potential other housing opportunities i.e. fair market, lottery apartments, housing subsidy, and rent stabilized apartments. In order to find an apartment together when we got married, we both had to leave Brooklyn, where we both lived for all of our lives, because I kept being denied apartments because of my record. This effectively resulted in displacement from our family, friends and community. It has also limited our selection ability and opportunities to obtain more secure and stable housing as well.

Though I have recently secured housing in Queens, NY, I can be evicted at the landlord's whim because there are little, if any, protections available, and then I will be back in the same situation of being denied apartment after apartment because of my record. The simple act of moving apartments, which most New York City residents do many times, isn't available to me and my family. If my landlord raises the rent and I can't afford it, I may not be able to find another apartment before my lease expires. My 24-year-old conviction leaves me and my family in perpetual housing instability.

I am not the only person in this situation. 1 in 3 Black men in the United States has a felony conviction. By continuing to allow housing providers to deny housing based on a conviction, we are condemning a significant portion of the Black male population to lifetime housing insecurity. This is one of the reasons so many people need shelter, and why there are glaring racial disparities in shelters.

This is why the City Council must pass Int. #2047, to bar the use of criminal background checks due to a person's arrest and/or conviction history. No one should have to live with this sense of insecurity, like I have experienced, when it comes to the human right of housing.