

CITY OF SEATTLE
ORDINANCE 126450
COUNCIL BILL 119585

AN ORDINANCE relating to residential rental properties; requiring a minimum of 180 days' prior written notice to tenants whenever the housing costs to be charged a tenant are to increase; and amending Sections 7.24.030, 22.202.080, and 22.206.180 of the Seattle Municipal Code.

WHEREAS, Article 25 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes housing as a human right; and

WHEREAS, notwithstanding a temporary drop in rents in 2020 due to the pandemic and recession, which fell hardest on low- and moderate-income households, Seattle faces an affordable housing and homelessness crisis as rising rents have forced thousands of Seattle renters out of their homes, neighborhoods, and the City; and

WHEREAS, between 2010 and 2018 average rent in the Seattle area rose 69 percent while inflation for Urban Wage Earners (CPI-W) in the Seattle area rose only 20.3 percent; and

WHEREAS, in large part due to high rents, Seattle is the fifth most expensive U.S. city to live in; and

WHEREAS, in 2021, as Seattle residents begin recover from the pandemic and recession, they are experiencing landlords once again raising rates well above the rate of inflation; and

WHEREAS, rental housing industry analysis firm ApartmentList.com calculated that Seattle rents increased an astounding 3.5 percent just between March and April 2021, the fifth largest month-over-month increase among the nation's 100 largest cities, which is an annualized rate of 42 percent rent increases with a trend expected to continue, as "the days of plummeting rents in pricey coastal markets are officially behind us"; and

1 WHEREAS, ApartmentList.Com data also show that between January and April 2021, rents
2 across the board in Seattle for apartments of all sizes increased by nine percent, putting
3 rents on track to more than rebound in 2021 from the temporary 2020 drop; and

4 WHEREAS, the “Seattle Housing Market Forecast for 2021” of real estate investment consulting
5 firm Mashvisor, notes that “Seattle real estate investors are continuing to enjoy a good
6 return on investment on rental properties. . . .Although affordability continues to be an
7 issue for local residents, it does have a positive aspect for Seattle real estate investors.
8 Owning a rental property in Seattle does mean high demand which translates into good
9 occupancy rates and cash flow”; and

10 WHEREAS, Washington State and The City of Seattle currently require that landlords provide
11 tenants with only 60 days’ written notice before imposing any rent increase, an
12 insufficient amount of time for Seattle renters to adjust to the increase or seek out a new,
13 affordable living situation; and

14 WHEREAS, because current State and City protections have not been sufficient to stave off
15 large rent increases, many Seattle renters have had to leave the City, sometimes with little
16 time to prepare; and

17 WHEREAS, the more the rent increases, the longer time a tenant may need to accumulate the
18 savings needed to pay the increased rent or pay for first and last months’ rent in a new
19 unit; and

20 WHEREAS, with sufficient notice, tenants may be able to manage their finances to pay a rent
21 increase or save enough to move, but short notice periods of only a month or two make
22 that management or savings less likely and increase the chances that the tenant will have
23 to move; and

1 WHEREAS, giving tenants a longer period of notice may decrease the likelihood of moving, and
2 consequently decrease the risk of housing instability or homelessness; and

3 WHEREAS, in September 2020 the City of Auburn adopted a law that requires landlords to
4 provide at least 120 days’ notice for any rent increase of over five percent; and

5 WHEREAS, Portland, Oregon requires landlords to provide at least 90 days’ notice for any rent
6 increase over five percent, Vancouver, British Columbia provides 90 days’ notice, and
7 Tacoma, Washington provides 60 days’ notice; and

8 WHEREAS, in April 2019, the Seattle Renters’ Commission sent a letter to the Council
9 recommending amendments to Seattle’s laws to provide renters with 180 days’ notice of
10 a rent increase rather than 60 days; and

11 WHEREAS, the Seattle Renters’ Commission made clear that “[w]hile Portland, Vancouver, and
12 Tacoma all offer better protections than Seattle, we see Montréal as the example to
13 follow, as even 60 or 90 days is still not enough time for most Seattle tenants to rearrange
14 their lives”; and

15 WHEREAS, Montreal requires up to 180 days’ notice of a rent increase, depending on the type
16 of lease; and

17 WHEREAS, economic displacement has fallen hardest on Black communities and other
18 communities of color, as evidenced by the fact that Seattle’s historically Black Central
19 District, which used to be more than 70 percent African American, is today less than 20
20 percent Black, and that Seattle has been found to be the third most gentrifying city in the
21 country, and

1 WHEREAS, this gentrification and displacement due to rising rents has an overall deleterious
2 effect on the social fabric of our community, and further magnifies and reinforces historic
3 racial inequities; NOW, THEREFORE,

4 **BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF SEATTLE AS FOLLOWS:**

5 Section 1. Section 7.24.030 of the Seattle Municipal Code, last amended by Ordinance
6 125951, is amended as follows:

7 **7.24.030 Rental agreement requirements**

8 A. Any rental agreement or renewal of a rental agreement for a residential rental unit in
9 The City of Seattle entered into after ~~((October 28, 1998,))~~ the effective date of this ordinance
10 shall include or shall be deemed to include a provision requiring ~~((a minimum of))~~ at least ~~((60))~~
11 180 days' prior written notice whenever the periodic or monthly housing costs to be charged a
12 tenant are to increase, except that for a subsidized tenancy where the amount of rent is based on
13 the income of the tenant or circumstances specific to the subsidized household, the rental
14 agreement shall instead provide ~~((a minimum of))~~ at least 30 days' prior written notice of an
15 increase in the amount of rent to each affected tenant.

16 * * *

17 Section 2. Section 22.206.180 of the Seattle Municipal Code, last amended by Ordinance
18 125952, is amended as follows:

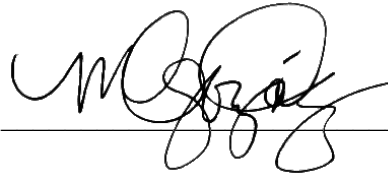
19 **22.206.180 Prohibited acts by owners**

20 Except as otherwise specifically required or allowed by this Title 22 or by the Washington State
21 Residential Landlord-Tenant Act, chapter 59.18 RCW, it is unlawful for any owner to:

22 * * *

1 Section 3. This ordinance shall take effect and be in force 30 days after its approval by
2 the Mayor, but if not approved and returned by the Mayor within ten days after presentation, it
3 shall take effect as provided by Seattle Municipal Code Section 1.04.020.

4 Passed by the City Council the 27th day of September, 2021,
5 and signed by me in open session in authentication of its passage this 27th day of
6 September, 2021.

7 

8 President _____ of the City Council

9 Approved / returned unsigned / vetoed this 8th day of October, 2021.

10 **Returned Unsigned by Mayor**

11 Jenny A. Durkan, Mayor

12 Filed by me this 8th day of October, 2021.

13 

14 Monica Martinez Simmons, City Clerk

15 (Seal)