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Tenants Bill of Rights Statement

Up until we passed the Chicago Residential Landlord Tenant Ordinance in the City Council 30 years ago this month, the city of Chicago was not a sympathetic place for renters who had been suffered harm – whether it was financial or by quality of life – under unscrupulous landlords.

With the ordinance, also known as the Tenants Bill of Rights, renters got a voice and they got the power to take the worst of those landlords to court. Then, as now, the ordinance was opposed by the powerful real estate interests which had the ear of City Hall.

Tenants, though, do not have lobbyists on their payrolls, to continually work at influencing politicians. The Bill of Rights is their defense against the powerful real estate interests and unscrupulous landlords who would otherwise run over them.

The Tenants Bill of Rights doesn't make unreasonable demands on landlords – it requires them to adhere to the moral responsibility to provide their renters with at the very least, a decent, livable, clean, and safe place to live, while not taking advantage of them. When landlords shirk this responsibility, or when they treat tenants unfairly, those tenants have the Bill of Rights to seek fair recourse.

We cannot allow this power that tenants have to be rolled back. We can't go back to the way it was. We can't allow people who pay their rent every month to live in unlivable apartments or face unfair financial penalties from their landlords without having a way to fight it. The most powerful among us have the lobbyists and the political connections. The least powerful among us have the Tenants Bill of Rights. We must uphold it, and just as we had to fight to pass it, we must fight to protect it.

David Orr,
Cook County Clerk