

Testimony in support of House Bill 2357

My name is Mike Hoheisel, and I've served as City Councilmember for the 3rd District of Wichita for the past 3 years. We are one of the most economically challenged districts in the state, and I've had firsthand experience with trying to find housing for many individuals in my community who have little income and a lack of options for affordable housing. It's heartbreaking to have to tell a single mom, or an elderly person, or people with disabilities, that we can't help them navigate the increasingly expensive housing market to find a suitable place to live. I am aware of the abuse of the system that some perpetrate, but of greater note to me is the abuse and exploitation of tenants that some landlords perpetrate on low income people with little means to help themselves.

Two years ago, a pretty infamous case of neglect and illegal activity took place in my district. Residents of Emery Gardens, an apartment complex that is notorious for code violations, reached out to CM Johnson and myself with concerns of black mold, bed bugs, roaches, and many other code violations. You can go here to see some of the violations the local news reported on.

https://www.kake.com/archive/stories/former-emery-gardens-employee-speaks-out-on-building-conditions/article_c57d83cc-cf87-53b3-b7d1-13ea72fff781.html

In speaking with many of the residents about their situation, we learned that they had made a deal with the current management company that they didn't have to pay rent until either they moved out or the infestation problem was taken care of. The reports made the news, and not long after, the property manager came to town to assess the situation. What he in fact ended up doing was evicting everyone who had withheld their rent and reported violations to the press or the city. This was, I believe, in direct violation of landlord eviction laws passed on the state level, although with no enforcement arm. We have since passed a landlord retaliatory ordinance on the city level to help stop this from happening again, but since rent had been missed, even though it was under an agreement with the management company, the residents were still evicted, and this will be on their records permanently.

It's easy to see the injustice under this situation. It takes a closer look to see just how it has impacted these residents, victims of predatory landlords. Earlier this year, a grandmother reached out to me because she was trying to flee an abusive relationship, but since she was one of the residents evicted from Emery Gardens, she was not eligible for vouchers to help women escape violent situations like this.

This law may not help everyone, and there may be a gap in how long an unfair eviction will stay on the record, but it is a great step towards addressing retaliatory evictions. I thank the committee for their work, and am here to help in any way I can.