

Dear Chair Draheim and committee members,

My name is Vivian Ihekoronye, ISALAH Lead Organizer for Saint Paul and the East Metro. I am also a resident of Saint Paul.

Saint Paulites across race, income and ward deserve to have a home they can count on. Something had to be done to stop predatory practices and egregious rent spikes happening in a city where a majority of residents are renters. Additionally, since we are blocked from limiting rent increases at the state level because of a statewide rent control law in MN, we took legal action at the local level to address the crisis we saw in our community.

ISALAH invited people to engage in the democratic process and vote on the rent stabilization ballot initiative. We contacted over 56,000 Saint Paul voters during the 2021 municipal election. The campaign we were a part of, Keep St. Paul Home, was outspent 20 to 1. Over \$4 million dollars was used by the corporate landlord lobby, investors and other local and national interests groups to challenge our efforts to have a real public conversation about this important issue. Fortunately, Saint Paul voters were not intimidated and we knew our community needed action now. With 53% of the Saint Paul voters voting in favor of this policy, we made it clear that we wanted to ensure our neighbors can have predictable housing costs and stable housing.

This win shows a clear mandate for this policy and commitment to have rent stabilization as one of the tools in the toolbox to address our housing challenges.

In Saint Paul, I'm excited about our current efforts this spring to figure out how to implement an effective and sustainable rent stabilization policy through constructive conversation with many community stakeholders. This is what democracy and coming together to solve tough collective challenges looks like.

This is why I oppose efforts to pre-empt rent stabilization at the local level. I believe it is an obstruction of the will of thousands of voters in Saint Paul and strips our city of our right to make decisions that work for us. It is also an attempt to wrongfully tamper with our legal right to use ballot initiatives to pass rent stabilization at the city level – which is the only way we could pass this policy in the first place.

Instead of fear mongering and efforts to strip people of their right to use our vote to address solutions that respond to the crisis we face, we need to give cities the chance to explore whether they want to use this policy as one of the tools in the toolbox to address their housing challenges. I urge you to not move forward with attempts to block voters from exercising their legal right to govern themselves locally through pre-emption. Thank you.