

TENANT TALK

FALL 2014 // VOLUME 5, ISSUE 3



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- 2014 VOTER CHECKLIST
- VOTING RESOURCES
- TIPS FOR DISCUSSING VOTING
- VOTER REGISTRATION DEADLINES

A NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION PUBLICATION

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ABOUT NLIHC

The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) is a nonprofit organization in Washington, DC that works to achieve socially just public policy that secures affordable and decent homes for our country's poorest citizens. We believe a decent, affordable home is a right everyone has, and we are here to advance public policy that will serve those who need the help the most.

Part of the way we do that is through public education and engagement. NLIHC is committed to sharing resources and tools that help individual Americans become informed advocates. *Tenant Talk* is one of the many resources we provide the public.

BECOME A MEMBER

NLIHC relies heavily on the support of our members to fund our work and guide our policy decisions. Hundreds of low income residents and resident organizations have joined the NLIHC community by becoming members.

We suggest an annual membership rate of only \$3 for a low income individual membership, and \$10 for a low income resident organization. Please consider becoming a member of NLIHC today at www.nlihc.org/membership, or mail us the enclosed form.

Dear Readers,

The clock is ticking down to Election Day 2014. There is no presidential campaign this year, but there are still important choices for voters – 36 senators, 36 governors, and the entire House of Representatives will be up for reelection on November 4.

Congress needs to make decisions on things like protecting tenants at foreclosure and passing a strong HUD budget that restores the vouchers lost due to sequestration. All of this can happen when low income renters vote in large numbers, sending a message that their concerns must be addressed.

Renters' needs are too often ignored by policymakers because renters do not vote at the same rate as homeowners. In 2008, 52% of renters voted, compared to 68% of homeowners. We can do better.

What is Voterization? It is a term that includes the range of voter activities that lead to better election results for low income people. There are three pieces to Voterization:

- 1 **REGISTRATION** — Increasing the number of renters and allies who can legally vote.
- 2 **EDUCATION** — Providing voters with information about candidates' positions on housing issues.
- 3 **MOBILIZATION** — Getting Out the Vote!

It's time for voters to take action and make sure representatives are elected who will be leaders on housing issues.

Our work this year as leaders, organizers, and advocates will provide experiences for a larger Voterization effort for the 2016 presidential election.

Please reach out to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) for information on how you can be involved. Contact any of the organizers on the NLIHC field team by emailing outreach@nlihc.org.

Yours in advocacy,

Tenant Talk Editorial Board

Delorise Calhoun
Daisy Franklin
Matt Gerard
Deirdre "DeeDee" Gilmore
Martha Weatherspoon
Leonard Williams

A Letter
from the
EDITORIAL
BOARD

“RENTERS' NEEDS are too often IGNORED by POLICYMAKERS because RENTERS do not vote at the SAME RATE as HOMEOWNERS”

Voterization Activities Are Already Underway

ARE YOU READY?



Throughout the country, resident organizations, neighborhood centers, and advocacy groups are engaged in Voterization campaigns. Four examples of efforts that you can adapt in your community are presented below.

Registering Voters

Housing California and the Center for Community Change recently launched a statewide resident organizing network called Residents United Network (RUN). RUN formed regional teams in Sacramento, Fresno, the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and San Diego. RUN's first goal is to create a surge in voting, and then support ongoing civic engagement among affordable-home residents.

"In each region, resident leaders attended trainings, learning how their votes can improve their communities. Resident leaders are now helping other residents register to vote. The potential for RUN is enormous," said Shamus Roller, Executive Director of Housing California.

RUN is a potential political force because there are one million people in California living in homes and apartments with legal affordability requirements. If organized, they can significantly increase the number of affordable homes in healthy communities in a state with many of the nation's least affordable housing markets. RUN will be working to increase registration until California's deadline on October 20.

There may still be time for you to make sure your friends, neighbors, clients, or volunteers

are registered. Find your state's registration deadline at <http://bit.ly/1s2SjII>.

Educating Voters and Candidates

Beyond just increasing the number of voters, Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness (MCAH) understands that voters need to know candidates' positions on issues related to affordable housing and people who are homeless. So MCAH issues questionnaires to every candidate running for state or federal elective office, distributing the responses to their network of advocates. Questionnaire responses are used to inform candidates about the issues of highest importance.

"Our first goal is to make sure the issue of homelessness is on their radar screen," notes Eric Hufnagel, MCAH's Executive Director, "and secondly,



Residents organizing in Fresno, CA make sure to have voter registration cards at their meetings.



MHRC Board member Tamir Mohamud (left) encourages highrise resident guests at a health fair in Minnesota to complete voter pledge cards. These cards invite residents to list their most important issues and why they're voting. MHRC will mail these cards back to residents shortly before the election as a reminder to vote and of why they're voting.

to understand what they do and don't know about homelessness, and to help educate them accordingly."

MCAH also uses questionnaire responses to begin advocacy conversations with candidates who get elected. Responses are shared directly with local homeless service planning bodies (Continuums of Care) as a starting point for dialog with elected officials.

MCAH posts all questionnaire responses to their website, <http://bit.ly/1q5JdoR>, which you can review as an example to begin similar efforts in your community.

Getting Out the Vote

"I vote because we have to show them our muscle," explains Diane Hosley, a resident of Signe Burkhardt Manor, one of the 42 downtown buildings where Minneapolis Highrise Representative Council (MHRC) coordinates Voterization efforts.

"We always make sure that there are volunteer drivers to get people to the polls on Election Day," said Barb Harris, Executive Director of MHRC. "We have also had success in keeping nine of our highrises as polling locations."

MHRC encourages groups of residents to walk together or car-pool to polling locations. Absentee balloting is promoted, especially for residents with disabilities or language barriers. Somali immigrants who are naturalized citizens, for example, find that absentee balloting or early voting gives them an

opportunity to vote with the help of a translator in a low-pressure environment.

Many resident councils door knock their buildings on Election Day to remind folks to vote and to share details of same-day registration requirements. Councils also host Election Day coffee parties in their building lobbies.

The Importance of Early Voting and Keeping Polling Places Nearby

Organizing around early voting is also a key piece of the Voterization work done by the Jurisdiction-wide Resident Advisory Board (J-RAB) in Cincinnati, Ohio. Many J-RAB members work odd hours or have mobility concerns, so early voting makes it possible to get more residents to the polls with less rush.

According to Delorise Calhoun of J-RAB, being able to vote at a nearby polling place is also very important for low income residents. Many residents would have trouble affording the cost of transportation if they had to travel further because polling locations were moved.

“I VOTE BECAUSE WE HAVE TO SHOW THEM OUR MUSCLE”

—Diane Hosley,
Signe Burkhardt Manor

Ms. Calhoun notes that churches and tenant groups, including J-RAB, have worked hard to educate the local board of elections about the importance of having polling places close to public housing. So far, their efforts have paid off. For this year polling places will stay the same. Ms. Calhoun credits broad community involvement with this victory, stating, "None of this work would be possible without the participation of the residents." ■



2014 VOTER CHECKLIST

Election Day, Tuesday, November 4, 2014, is rapidly approaching, so be prepared to cast your ballot. Follow this checklist to make sure that your vote will be counted.

1. Register to Vote

If you haven't done so already, register to vote immediately. In most states, you'll need to do this *before* Election Day. There are many places to register to vote, such as state or local voter registration and/or election offices, the DMV, social service agencies, armed services recruitment centers, state-funded programs that serve people with disabilities, or a public facility that a state has designated as a voter registration agency. Some states even allow you to register online.

If you are in doubt about your eligibility to vote, check with your state board of elections. There are a lot of myths about who isn't eligible. Don't be fooled.

2. Check Your Registration

If you are already registered to vote, make sure that your voter registration records are up-to-date and accurate. You can do this by contacting your elections officials to check your records. If you have moved since the last election, it is important to update your address.

3. Be Informed About the Candidates and Issues

Do research so you know who the candidates are and what their positions are on the issues. Understand who and what you are voting for.

4. Weigh Your Voting Options

There is more than one way to cast a ballot. Many states offer early and absentee voting opportunities. Find out your options by contacting your local election officials, or by checking the website of your state board of elections. Choose the option that works best for you.

5. Find Your Polling Place

If you are voting in-person on Election Day, make sure you confirm the location of your polling place and know how to get there ahead of time. In many

states your vote will not count if you cast your ballot in the wrong location.

On Election Day, leave plenty of time to vote. Don't be discouraged if there are long lines. If you are in line *before* the polls close, you are entitled to vote.



6. Know How to Vote

Many states have restrictive voter ID laws. Make sure you know the requirements and have the correct form of ID with you.

If you can, become familiar with the ballot and how to record your vote on it. In some places, you can get a sample ballot ahead of time from your local election officials.

7. Know Your Rights

Be informed about voting requirements in your state. Understand your rights as a voter so that you can assert those rights with confidence. Be respectful to poll workers, but don't be bullied by political operatives at the polls.

If your eligibility gets challenged at the polls you have the right to cast a provisional ballot, which will be counted if you are able to prove later that you are eligible to vote.

8. Help Your Friends and Neighbors

Now that you know how to make your vote count, make sure that your friends and neighbors have their votes count too. ■

VOTING RESOURCES

Nonprofit Vote:
www.nonprofitvote.org

Nonprofit Vote partners with nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote. They are the largest source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their basic activities and services. Their guide, *Nonprofits, Voting & Elections*, is an excellent all-around resource for nonprofits engaging in electoral work.

Fair Elections Legal Network (FELN):
www.fairelectionsnetwork.com

FELN is a national, nonpartisan voting rights and legal support organization that works to remove barriers to registration and voting for underrepresented people. FELN strives to improve overall election administration through administrative, legal, and legislative reform. FELN also provides legal and technical assistance to voter mobilization organizations. Their state-by-state resources provide information on voter engagement that is state-specific.

National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH): www.nationalhomeless.org

The NCH is a national network of people who are currently experiencing or who have experienced homelessness, activists and advocates, community-based and faith-based service providers, and others. NCH is committed preventing and ending homelessness while ensuring the immediate needs of those experiencing homelessness are met and their civil rights protected. NCH organizes the *You Don't Need a Home to Vote Campaign*, which specifically focuses on engaging homeless voters.

Vote 411: www.vote411.org

Vote 411 is a resource created by the League of Women Voters Education Fund as a “one-stop-shop” for election-related information. Vote411’s website allows users to enter their address and receive a range of location-specific information, such as absentee ballot rules, information on candidates, polling places, and ID requirements.

Alliance for Justice – Bolder Advocacy: www.bolderadvocacy.org

Bolder Advocacy is an initiative of the Alliance for Justice. The purpose is to promote active engagement in democratic processes and institutions by giving nonprofits and foundations the confidence to advocate effectively, and by protecting their right to do so. The webpage on nonprofit electoral activity will help you understand your organization’s permissible electoral activities based on its IRS tax status.

Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law:
www.brennancenter.org/issues/voting-rights-elections

The Brennan Center works on voting rights issues through policy proposals, litigation, and advocacy. Their website contains a range of news and information on voting rights issues from across the country. ■

TIPS FOR DISCUSSING VOTING

Talking to our neighbors and friends about the importance of voting can be difficult. There is a lot of doubt about whether voting actually makes a difference. Also, many people have bad information about whether they have the right to vote. These obstacles can be overcome by how you talk about voting.

Here are some tips:

- **Make it personal.** People are most likely to vote if you discuss a problem or issue that directly impacts their life.
- **Stay positive.** Talk about the potential for positive change in your community with more voices involved in choosing leadership.
- **Focus on values.** Emphasize how voting is each person’s duty as a citizen, and how it is essential to democracy.
- **Voting is impact.** Voting is a chance for individuals to take control in an environment where there are so few opportunities for low income people. Encourage people to stand up.
- **Look to the future.** Discuss the importance of change, even gradual change, as it will impact children and the next generation.
- **Have the best information.** Know exactly who can vote in your community by getting information from local election officials. For example, 17-year-olds can register to vote as long as they are 18 by Election Day. Ex-offenders who may have lost their right to vote due to a felony conviction can regain their right to vote in almost all states. For a state-by-state guide to ex-offender voting, see Nonprofit Vote’s website at <http://bit.ly/1vMTx1Y>. ■



VOTER REGISTRATION DEADLINES

Plus Polling Place Hours for the 2014 General Election

STATE	REGISTRATION DEADLINE	POLLING PLACE HOURS
Alabama	October 20th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Alaska	October 5th	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Arizona	October 6th	6:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Arkansas	October 6th	7:30 AM - 7:30 PM
California	October 20th	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Colorado	October 27th (EDR)**	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Connecticut	October 28th (EDR)**	6:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Delaware	October 11th	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
DC	October 14th (EDR)**	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Florida	October 6th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Georgia	October 6th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Hawaii	October 6th	7:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Idaho	October 10th (EDR)**	8:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Illinois	November 4th (EDR)**	6:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Indiana	October 6th	6:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Iowa	October 25th (EDR)**	7:00 AM - 9:00 PM
Kansas	October 14th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Kentucky	October 6th	6:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Louisiana	October 6th	6:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Maine	October 14th (EDR)**	6:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Maryland	October 14th	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Massachusetts	October 15th	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Michigan	October 6th	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Minnesota	October 14th (EDR)**	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Mississippi	October 4th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Missouri	October 8th	6:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Montana	October 6th (EDR)**	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM

STATE	REGISTRATION DEADLINE	POLLING PLACE HOURS
Nebraska	October 24th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM (MST) 8:00 AM - 8:00 PM (CST)
Nevada	October 14th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
New Hampshire	October 25th (EDR)**	Varies
New Jersey	October 14th	6:00 AM - 8:00 PM
New Mexico	October 7th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
New York	October 24th	6:00 AM - 9:00 PM
North Carolina	October 10th	6:30 AM - 7:30 PM
North Dakota	N/A	7:00 AM - 9:00 PM
Ohio	October 6th	6:30 AM - 7:30 PM
Oklahoma	October 10th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Oregon*	October 14th	N/A
Pennsylvania	October 6th	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Rhode Island	October 5th	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
South Carolina	October 4th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
South Dakota	October 20th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Tennessee	October 6th	8:00 AM - 7:00 PM (CST)
Texas	October 6th	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Utah	October 20th	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Vermont	October 29th	Open by 10:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Virginia	October 14th	6:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Washington*	October 27th	N/A
West Virginia	October 14th	6:30 AM - 7:30 PM
Wisconsin	October 31st (EDR)**	7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Wyoming	October 20th (EDR)**	7:00 AM - 7:00 PM

**Questions about voter registration or polling place hours?
Contact your local election office.**

* All elections in Oregon and Washington are conducted by mail ** Election Day Registration available
Data for this chart supplied by the National Association of Secretaries of State.

**MUMBLE. GRUMBLE.
COMPLAIN. WALLOW.
HOPE. DESPAIR. WORRY.
VOTE.**

— Campaign slogan of
former Senator Paul Wellstone

A hand is shown from the right side of the frame, holding a white ballot and placing it into a slot on top of a brown cardboard ballot box. The ballot has the following text printed on it:

727 15TH STREET NW, 6TH FLOOR
WASHINGTON, DC 20005
(Phone) 202.662.1530
(Fax) 202.393.1973