

NATIONAL TENANTS BILL OF RIGHTS

By Kayla Blackwell, Senior Housing Policy Analyst, NLIHC

In June 2024, NLIHC, National Housing Law Project (NHLP), and Tenant Union Federation (TUF) launched the National Tenants Bill of Rights, a policy agenda that would provide uniform protections for renter households nationwide, helping to ease the power imbalance between tenants and landlords that puts renters at risk of eviction. The proposal was written with input from tenant leaders, people with lived experience of housing instability, legal aid experts, and advocates across the country. When introduced and enacted as federal legislation, the National Tenants Bill of Rights will correct the power imbalance between tenants and landlords that fuels racial inequities and puts the 114 million people who rent their homes at greater risk of housing instability, harassment, eviction, and homelessness.

Since 2024, over 900 individual renters, homeowners, organizations, and elected officials have endorsed the National Tenants Bill of Rights. As tenant unions continue to build power in their local communities, the platform remains a useful tool for local and state level advocates to compare their landlord-tenant law to [a visionary platform](https://tr.ee/B65JfF) for tenants' rights (<https://tr.ee/B65JfF>).

Since the start of the second Trump administration in January 2025, there have been multiple attacks on the federal agencies tasked with enforcing tenant rights and protections, including HUD's Department of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. In the absence of national enforcement, state and local governments have taken action to enact new tenant protections; while this work is crucial, it leaves renters with a patchwork of protections that vary depending on where someone lives. Strong, enforceable federal tenant protections are required to prevent housing instability and homelessness, redress long-standing racial and social inequities, and advance housing justice across the country.

Renters Need a Federal Baseline of Rights and Protections

Everyone deserves a safe, stable, and affordable home. However, many of the 114 million renters in the United States lack basic rights. This lack of tenant protections perpetuates housing instability and, in the worst cases, leads to homelessness. When tenants have the rights they deserve, their lives and their communities improve. The typical tenant is [rent-burdened](http://www.nlihc.org/gap) (www.nlihc.org/gap), spending 30% or more of their income on rent. As of 2024, landlords have hiked rents [nearly 30% higher than they were before the pandemic](https://tr.ee/QpW7Bj) (<https://tr.ee/QpW7Bj>); though they have cooled slightly, rents remain [Out of Reach for millions of extremely low-income renters](http://www.nlihc.org/OOR) (www.nlihc.org/OOR). Millions of tenants are forced to make impossible choices between rent and other necessities, like medicine or food for their children. The systemic lack of protections paves the way for precarity that often results in barriers for tenants to access safe, stable, and affordable housing of their choice.

In most parts of the country, a landlord can evict a tenant for no reason and with only a few days' notice. Eviction courts provide only the thinnest veil of due process for tenants. Faced with threats of eviction and homelessness, unlivable living conditions and few avenues for recourse, tenants endure egregious rent increases and landlord harassment, with few options for recourse against their landlords. This precarity is amplified for tenants of color, disabled tenants, families with children, and older tenants, whose rental housing options are limited by historical segregation and present-day discrimination.

Institutional investors and corporate landlords have exploited the lack of tenant protections in the housing market to amass excessive profits and power, putting small landlords at a disadvantage and harming renters

and their communities. Treating tenants' homes as vehicles for profit, these bad actors have cultivated a predatory rental market with business models built on aggressive rent hikes and displacement. This market has thrived because of widespread industry capture of state legislatures, attacks on local tenant protections, and federal unwillingness to intervene in the tenant-landlord relationship. Even in states and localities where advocacy and organizing have resulted in vitally important tenant protections, this patchwork of safeguards leaves many renters behind. Tenants need a national solution to meet the scale of this problem.

NLIHC, NHLP, and TUF created the National Tenants Bill of Rights to correct the balance of power between tenants and landlords and advance racial and social equity. The National Tenants Bill of Rights is a practical policy agenda for renters that affirms the federal government's duty to provide all tenants with fundamental protections. Tenants, organizers, legal experts, and housing justice advocates from across the country helped craft this policy agenda. Designed to shape action at the federal level and provide a floor of basic protections for all tenants, the policy agenda's principles are also applicable at the state and local levels to strengthen and enforce tenants' rights.

The National Tenants Bill of Rights

LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

The National Tenants Bill of Rights sets out seven essential rights that establish a baseline of tenant protections in the rental housing market. These rights follow a tenant's experience applying for housing, signing a lease, and living in their home. The following 7 rights are an overview of the full policy platform, and don't encompass the full platform. Read the [complete National Tenants Bill of Rights](https://tr.ee/M4wMdl) at <https://tr.ee/M4wMdl>.

The National Tenants Bill of Rights includes seven essential rights:

- 1. The Right to A Fair Application** - Discriminatory screening practices by landlords and tenant screening companies prevent prospective tenants from being fairly considered when they apply for housing. To ensure fair opportunity for all, landlords should only consider information relevant to an applicant's ability to perform their obligations as a tenant.
- 2. The Right to A Fair Lease** - Leases shape the legal relationship between landlords and tenants, often reflecting their imbalance of power. To correct this imbalance, leases should clearly define the duties and rights of both landlords and tenants and avoid predatory and deceptive terms.
- 3. The Right to Freedom from Discrimination and Harassment** - Home should be a sanctuary for tenants. Currently, tenants are vulnerable to discrimination, violations of privacy, and harassment by their landlords. To ensure a basic level of privacy and quiet enjoyment, tenants should have the tools to prevent this behavior. Tenants also need the federal government to robustly enforce federal anti-discrimination laws to prevent landlord abuses.
- 4. The Right to A Habitable Home** - Tenants deserve to feel safe in their homes. Safe homes include working appliances and fixtures, reliable utilities, effective pest control, and prevention from deadly health hazards. When something is in need of repair, tenants should have a clear way to communicate their concerns to a landlord and the landlord should be obligated to fix habitability concerns promptly.
- 5. The Right to Reasonable Rent and Costs** - Rent is often the largest expense in a household's budget, and financial stability is largely absent in a system where landlords hike rents dramatically higher and at a faster rate than the growth of wages. To protect tenants from financial shocks that put them at risk of eviction and

further harm, safeguards are necessary to prevent rent gouging and excessive or hidden fees. Landlords should be limited to reasonable rent increases, and they should only be allowed to assess fees that have been clearly disclosed in the lease.

6. The Right to Organize – To correct the power imbalance between tenants and landlords, tenants must have the ability to organize without fear of retaliation or eviction from landlords, owners, and management.

7. The Right to Safeguards Against Eviction – Tenants should not have to risk losing their homes in eviction court in a manner of minutes. Tenants deserve a basic level of due process in eviction proceedings and have protections from illegal evictions and evictions without good cause.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL TENANTS BILL OF RIGHTS

Tenant organizers have worked tirelessly in their communities to improve safety and living conditions for decades. Organizations like the National Alliance of HUD Tenants (NAHT), Residents United Network (RUN) in California, Resident Action Project (RAP) in Washington, Residents Organizing for Change (ROC) in Oregon, Residents Organized for Housing Louisiana (ROHLA), Housing Justice for All in New York, Kents Tenants Union in Ohio, Autonomous Tenants Union in Chicago and many, many more have paved the way for tenants' rights. The COVID-19 pandemic drew much attention to the imbalance of power between landlords and renters, and the short-term policies enacted to protect millions from evictions helped both stabilize households and bring awareness to the need for improvements in tenants' rights. The National Tenants Bill of Rights is the result of decades of national and local organizing by tenants, advocates, and organizations to secure tenants' rights. This policy agenda was built on their historic and effective leadership.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, tenants across the country recognized the need for legislation to address the power imbalance with landlords and advocated fiercely to find safety in their own homes. However, the differences between local and state jurisdictions, combined with the barrier of state preemption laws, created a patchwork of tenant protection legislation. Now, too many renters are left without basic renter protections, and there is no standard of tenant protections for the nation's 114 million renters. In forming the National Tenants Bill of Rights, NLIHC, NHLP, and TUF drew inspiration from the over 300 tenant protections enacted since the COVID-19 pandemic began and worked with tenant leaders to build upon these policies. Leaning on NLIHC, NHLP, and TUF's respective tenant leader networks was pivotal, and having tenant leader support will be critical to the success of any tenant protection legislation. NLIHC urges advocates to work with tenant leaders in drafting similar policies at the state, local, and federal levels. Specifically, the National Tenants Bill of Rights was formed in consultation with NLIHC's Tenant Leader Collective, Tenant Talk Live, the ERASE Cohort, and the NHLP Housing Justice Network.

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S 2023 BLUEPRINT FOR A RENTERS BILL OF RIGHTS

In January 2023, the Biden-Harris administration released a "[White House Blueprint for a Renters Bill of Rights](https://tr.ee/94DPze)" (<https://tr.ee/94DPze>) prepared by the Domestic Policy Council and National Economic Council. The Blueprint was a statement of principles, and though it was not binding and did not establish new federal policy, the Blueprint signaled the Biden administration's support for policies and practices that would help strengthen and enforce critical renter protections. The commitments in the Blueprint are aligned with five principles for renter protections, including (1) access to safe, quality, accessible, and affordable housing; (2) clear and fair leases; (3) enforcement of renter rights and protection from unlawful discrimination and exclusion; (4) the right to organize without obstruction or harassment from landlords; and (5) eviction prevention, diversion, and relief.

The Blueprint required federal agencies implementing housing assistance to take new actions:

- The Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) held a public comment process on tenant protections for properties with federally backed mortgages.
- HUD advanced a rule requiring public housing authorities and owners of project-based rental assistance properties to provide at least 30 days' advanced notice before terminating a lease due to nonpayment of rent. The Trump administration in 2025 took steps to revoke the 30-Day Notification Requirement Prior to Termination of Lease for Nonpayment of Rent (<https://tr.ee/tUjtNo>). Advocates are encouraged to monitor the *Federal Register* for potential revocation of this rule.
- The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) collected information to identify unfair practices that prevent tenants from accessing or staying in housing.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) planned a pilot for independent inspection protocol across its housing portfolio.

Other agencies, like the Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Defense (DoD), and Department of the Treasury (Treasury) planned efforts to increase anticompetitive information sharing, the right to organize for military families, and reducing evictions in LIHTC properties, respectively.

FHFA TENANT PROTECTIONS STALL UNDER TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

As a part of the Biden administration's Blueprint for a Renter's Bill of Rights, FHFA held a public process to examine renter protections and anti-rent gouging measures for properties with new federally backed mortgages. In 2023, FHFA opened a Request for Input (RFI) concerning how the agency can create and enforce renter protections for households living in rental properties with federally backed mortgages. Over 3,500 comments were submitted in support of federal renter protections, including comments from NLIHC, the NLIHC Tenant Leader Collective, Partnership for

Just Housing, and a Congressional sign-on letter led by Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and joined by 17 senators (NLIHC's summary of comments is [here](https://tr.ee/okEfAS); <https://tr.ee/okEfAS>).

FHFA received over 3,500 public comments, and more than 3,500 additional comments submitted confidentially. NLIHC, the Revolving Door Project, and People's Action Homes Guarantee submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to make available the non-public comments submitted to FHFA. NLIHC and the Revolving Door Project sent a [letter](https://tr.ee/WtZKkN) (<https://tr.ee/WtZKkN>) on November 13, 2024 to former FHFA Director Sandra Thompson presenting conclusions from an analysis of the more than 3,500 publicly available comments and urging Director Thompson to make public the additional 3,500 comments submitted confidentially, as well as comments submitted after the deadline. The letter also urged Director Thompson to act swiftly to enact clear, strong, and enforceable renter protections for households living in properties with federally backed mortgages. In January 2024, FHFA released [a summary of the RFI comments](https://tr.ee/H8AazA) (<https://tr.ee/H8AazA>), but did not commit to further action.

On July 12, 2024, FHFA [announced](https://tr.ee/5ohuYS) (<https://tr.ee/5ohuYS>) the introduction of minimal new renter protections in properties receiving a federally backed mortgage, requiring covered housing providers to provide tenants with a) 30-day written notice of a rent increase, b) 30-day written notice of a lease expiration, and c) a 5-day grace period for rent payments. These policy changes would have done little to protect renters; nonetheless, the Trump administration's FHFA director, Bill Pulte [rescinded](https://tr.ee/mNp0MH) (<https://tr.ee/mNp0MH>) the requirements in March 2025.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION RESCINDS FAIR HOUSING FUNDING, STALLS HUD FAIR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT

As part of its efforts to dismantle foundational civil rights and fair housing protections, in February 2025 the Trump administration suddenly and unlawfully terminated Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) grants awarded to fair housing organizations. FHIP

grants are vital sources of funding that help advocates educate tenants on the rights under the Fair Housing Act, perform outreach to communities, and carry out enforcement activities, including investigating complaints of discrimination or harassment. Four fair housing organizations filed a [class action lawsuit](https://tr.ee/1P7e4a) (https://tr.ee/1P7e4a) on March 13, 2025, on behalf of 66 fair housing groups whose FHIP grants were “arbitrarily terminated without notice, reason, or sensible explanation” on February 27, 2025, jeopardizing \$30 million in congressionally authorized funding intended to counter housing discrimination and enforce fair housing laws. The funding was restored after a [Temporary Restraining Order](https://tr.ee/9SDvbi) (https://tr.ee/9SDvbi) was issued on March 26, 2025, reinstating the FHIP grants.

Whistleblowers from HUD’s Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO), responsible for upholding fair housing and federal civil rights protections, detailed in a September 2025 [New York Times article](https://tr.ee/B8vqeK) (https://tr.ee/B8vqeK) the efforts officials from the Trump administration have undertaken to undermine federal fair housing laws and directly impede implementation of the Fair Housing Act. The [whistleblowers’ accounts](https://tr.ee/E4K2WU) (https://tr.ee/E4K2WU) state:

1. The Trump administration views a well-staffed Office of Fair Housing (OFH) as an “optics problem” and has intentionally reduced the size of the office responsible for enforcing fair housing and civil rights laws by 70%.
2. HUD will no longer have the capacity to enforce the housing protections in the “Violence Against Women Act,” leaving domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking survivors without needed protections.
3. HUD officials are systemically undermining OFH’s civil rights enforcement and compliance obligations, including subjecting OFH attorneys to an unprecedented “gag order”—increasing the risk of waste, fraud, and abuse.
4. HUD has inappropriately closed or halted at least 115 housing discrimination cases by intercepting referrals to the Department of Justice and withdrawing legal charges.
5. Congressionally mandated FHIP funds are in limbo due to Trump administration delays.

Following the whistleblower report, Palmer Heenan and Paul Osedebe, two HUD civil rights lawyers who spoke out about the Trump administration’s efforts to limit enforcement of the Fair Housing Act, were [fired](https://tr.ee/1XsgH8) (https://tr.ee/1XsgH8).

While the Trump administration has targeted OFH employees for dismissal in particular, between January and June 2025 an estimated 2,300 staff—around [23% of HUD’s workforce](https://tr.ee/8VvQPd) (https://tr.ee/8VvQPd)—had either retired, been placed on administrative leave, or accepted an offer for the Deferred Resignation Program (https://www.opm.gov/about-us/fork/original-email-to-employees/), which allowed federal employees to leave their job but continue to receive their salary and benefits through September 2025. HUD’s staff are critical for implementing vital housing, homelessness, and fair housing programs, conducting safety inspections for HUD properties, and ensuring resources reach communities.

How Advocates Can Take Action

While the National Tenants Bill of Rights has not yet been formally introduced in Congress, there are many members of Congress who have introduced similar tenant protection legislation. Advocates at NLIHC, NHLP, and TUF will continue to identify Congressional champions and advocate for legislation to fully enact federal tenant protections.

- Endorse the National Tenants Bill of Rights at <https://nlihc.quorum.us/campaign/81461/>.
- Invite your neighbors and anyone in your local community to endorse and get involved, including your tenants’ union or homeowners’ association!
- Stay tuned with NLIHC, NHLP, and TUF at <https://nlihc.org/national-tenants-bill-rights>.

URGE LEGISLATORS TO:

- [Endorse](#) the National Tenants Bill of Rights!
- Introduce legislation modeled in the National Tenants Bill of Rights.
- Hold hearings on the need for national tenant protections and the power imbalance between landlords and renters.
- Meet with their local tenant organizers to understand the impact of a lack of tenant protections.
- Meet with community advocates, legal aid attorneys, housing and homeless service providers to better understand the housing needs of their communities.

For More Information

NLIHC's National Tenants Bill of Rights homepage:

<https://nlihc.org/national-tenants-bill-rights>

The National Tenants Bill of Rights full policy platform:

<https://bit.ly/4cc0VXa>

The National Tenants Bill of Rights fact sheet: <https://bit.ly/4bgqyES>

The National Tenants Bill of Rights section summaries:

<https://bit.ly/3zbmCI2>

Tenant Union Federation: <https://tenantfederation.org/>

Many links and resources may have been changed or removed from federal websites before this guide was finalized. As a response, this guide provides full URLs to support your web-based research. Please utilize a web archival tool like <https://archive.org> to view links that may not currently be working and research any recent changes and funding cuts to ensure that you have the most current information.

Please contact outreach@nlihc.org with any questions.