

2022 Event Series

Actualizing Equity in Housing at the State Legislature

For generations, an epidemic of housing injustice has targeted communities of color, but the COVID pandemic and statewide eviction moratorium created broader public attention and targeted policy-making to protect the life and dignity of our neighbors who do not own their homes. Recognizing the critical role of state legislators and leaders in not just mitigating the harm of this pandemic moment but uprooting entrenched inequities for long term systemic change, Equity in Place identified key priorities for housing policy during the 2022 legislative session — and shared insights at our February 2022 Actualizing Equity event.

Equity in Place is a diverse group of strategic partners from organizations led by people of color and housing advocacy organizations working to advance housing justice and equitable community development. We organize and advocate by leading with a race equity lens to understand and center how power inequities in our region and society shape inequitable outcomes for our communities.



Centering Renter Voices

Because of intentional and longstanding inequities in wealth, housing, and power, we must center the experiences of renters in housing policy decisions. We heard from tenant-focused and community-based organizations who shared:

“ I specifically remember a renter calling in the beginning of the pandemic and saying, “I lost a lot of family due to COVID. We have a Section 8 voucher, but we’re still unable to pay our portion of the rent, because all the money we have is going to burial expenses. Can you help us?” Unfortunately, I had to tell her “No,” because, at the time, rental assistance only covered people who weren’t getting any type of housing assistance. -Fadumo Mohamed, Housing Organizer, African Career, Education and Resource Inc (ACER)

“ I’ve spoken to lots of folks who have been shocked by how difficult it is to find or apply for assistance. It saps what little energy they may have left to attend to the other challenges that they have in their daily lives, especially during these challenging times. They’re not able to balance the time to call back their case manager, and find their bank information and send in three different forms. There are many, many people — extremely reasonably so —who are unable to balance that with the time needed to, for instance, find or interview for a new job. - Max Tsai, Attorney, Housing Justice Center

“ Our communities face retaliation and discrimination, because landlords can simply cancel a lease for no reason or put our families on month-to-month leases. I know a family who has lived in a rental home in Brooklyn Center for 11 years and one day got a month-to-month lease. Now they live in this precarious situation wondering every month if this is their last. When landlords have a valid reason to remove a tenant, they can file an eviction. When there has been no wrongdoing and they still want to displace folks, they cancel a lease. Fadumo Mohamed, Housing Organizer, ACER

“ I’ve had families that call, with kids in the background, who say I lost my job because my kid had to stay home from school. For a lot of people it’s still March 2020 but employers have moved on and the sympathy’s not there. It just shows how far removed people are from the daily lives of the poor and working class families. As everyone else moves on, we’re leaving behind those who have already been left behind time and time again. - Markanetta Smith, Rental Assistance Navigator, Housing Justice Center

“ My family has been fortunate that we’ve never received an eviction letter, but we have definitely chosen the option of self-evicting to avoid that mark on our record. There have been times when housing instability meant not having food in our fridge for a week or two because we had to come up with a security deposit. It meant not having adequate clothing or supplies for school because we had to make rent. It meant moving from our neighborhoods and leaving friends behind, leaving family behind. - Juan Luis Rivera-Reyes, Tenant Organizer, HOME Line

Strong tenant protections are not just possible but beneficial to all residents — and another paradigm is possible. We must adopt **new narratives and policy approaches** to move beyond temporary measures to lasting systems change that delivers justice and equity for renters.

Narrative Shifts

Housing is a fundamental **human right**, not a vehicle for profit. When people do not have housing, they lack the fundamental ability to keep themselves **healthy and safe**.

For thousands of Minnesota households, the **devastating impacts of COVID are ongoing** and elected officials must be accountable to their commitments to stop the cascading crisis of housing instability.

The government has **always played a role in the housing market** in ways that preference and subsidize property owners — including wealthy homeowners. It's time to re-balance the scales with **policies that address the needs of renters**.

Minnesota has some of the **weakest tenant protections in the nation**, giving excessive latitude to landlords. We need policies that ensure **tenants have the dignity, fairness and respect** we all deserve in our homes.

Evictions are a tool that is both **expensive for taxpayers** given the reliance on the court system and **fundamentally unfair to renters**, who, even when their case is resolved or dismissed, still bear the burden of their housing options being impacted potentially for the rest of their lives. This tool is **ineffective, costly and unjust, and must be reformed and ultimately eliminated**.

Download EIP's "Narrative shifts to end the epidemic of housing injustice" [here](#)

Policy Priorities

Pre-eviction notice would create a timeline between when landlords alert a tenant and when they can file an eviction. Eviction reporting would be prohibited until a court judgment is rendered in favor of the landlord. This gives tenants the opportunity to remedy the situation before it harms their record.

Source of income protection would end the discrimination that occurs when a landlord refuses to rent to a housing applicant because of that person's form of income: housing assistance.

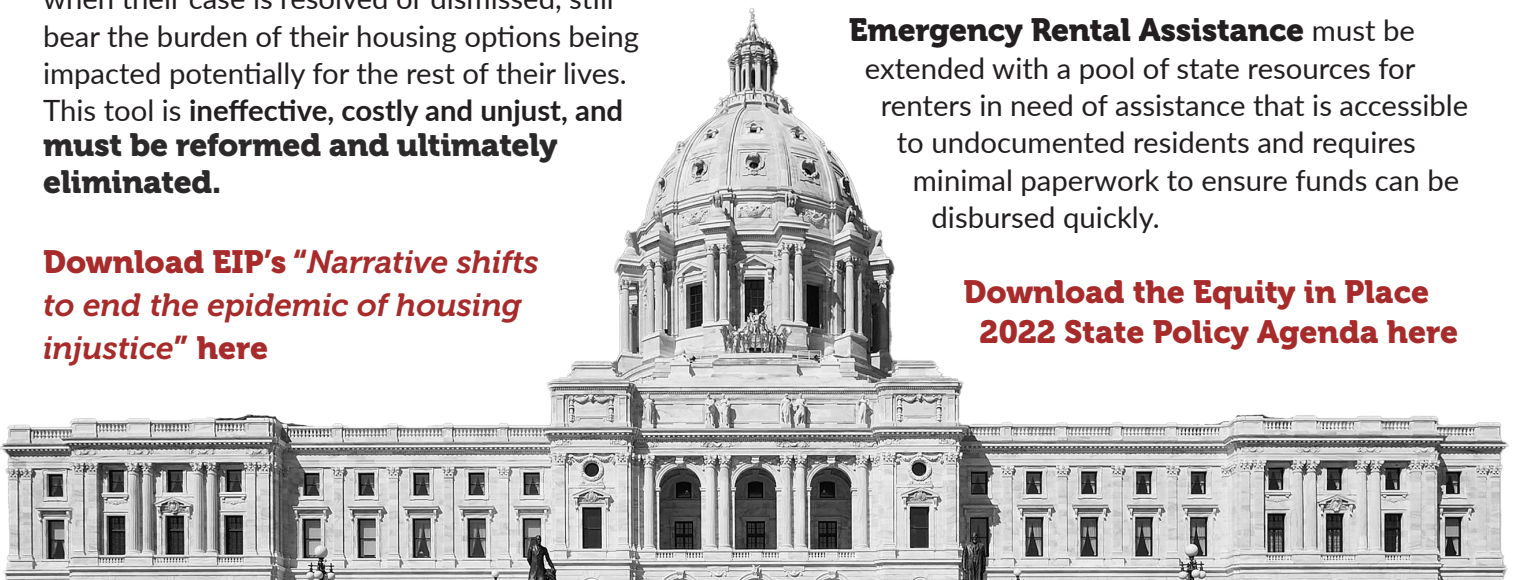
A statewide right to organize policy would guarantee tenants their rights to advocate for and defend dignified, well-maintained housing free from unlawful discrimination.

Just cause notice would require a tenant is notified of the reason why their lease is not renewed, which must be included in the state's list of just causes. This targets predatory behavior like ending leases to flip units.

Universal Rental Assistance Vouchers would allow low-income tenants to dedicate no more than 30% of their income to housing costs through a state-funded resource that acts as an entitlement program for all who qualify.

Emergency Rental Assistance must be extended with a pool of state resources for renters in need of assistance that is accessible to undocumented residents and requires minimal paperwork to ensure funds can be disbursed quickly.

Download the Equity in Place 2022 State Policy Agenda [here](#)



Read more and see additional resources from Equity in Place at thealliancetc.org/equity-in-place

Learn more about Actualizing Equity thealliancetc.org/actualizing-equity