

2022 Policy Agenda State Legislative Session

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.

In our communities renters faced a housing crisis long before the COVID pandemic — but the public health emergency underscored that state leaders and policymakers have the power to safeguard the lives of renters when there is the political will. The eviction moratorium provided evidence that strong tenant protections are not just possible but beneficial to all residents — and another paradigm is possible.

During the 2022 state legislative session, leaders and lawmakers must be accountable to the thousands of households that are still experiencing the impact of the COVID pandemic and adopt new policy approaches to move beyond temporary measures to lasting systems change that delivers justice and equity for renters and our communities.

From emergency measures to equitable outcomes

When people do not have housing, they lack the fundamental ability to keep themselves **healthy and safe**. For thousands of Minnesota households, the **COVID pandemic — and its devastating impacts — are ongoing** and elected officials must be accountable to their commitments to stop the cascading crisis of housing instability caused by this economic and public health emergency.

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 basic 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**.

Because of their financial resources, landlord and developer associations have more access to policymakers and can pay to shift public narratives. **Tenant-led and community-based organizations must be resourced** and have a seat at the table to ensure our housing solutions incorporate renters' realities.

Minnesota has some of the widest racial disparities in homeownership and housing stability nationwide. We need **bold policy making and real solutions NOW** to move toward racial equity.



Policy Priorities

Why do we need it?

What will it do?

Eviction and expungement reform	Source of income protection	Statewide right to organize	Just Cause protection
More than 13,000 residential evictions are filed in Minnesota by landlords each year – at great expense to families, our communities and ALL taxpayers. Reforms are needed to give people a fair chance at preventing eviction.	Right now, landlords can pick and choose tenants based on how they pay their rent. This means that many rent assistance voucher holders struggle to find homes that will accept them, and low wealth families are denied safe, stable and affordable homes in their chosen locations.	Residents who wish to assert their rights under Minnesota State Law often face retaliation and displacement. A statewide right to organize provides guarantees to tenants that their rights to defend dignified, well-maintained housing free from unlawful discrimination.	Too often, tenants who have paid in full and met all the terms in their leases are not renewed – with no reason given by their landlord. This allows landlords to cosmetically update and charge higher rents to remake the tenant population, leading to displacement and housing instability.
Pre-eviction notice creates 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. EXAMPLES: Minneapolis St. Louis Park	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. EXAMPLES: Source of Income Protection Policies by State, County and City	A strong policy must provide residents the right to organize without obstruction, harassment, or retaliation from property owners or management; use common space or meeting facilities to organize; meet without representatives or employees of the owner / management company present; have a voice in residential community affairs –and more. EXAMPLES: HUD Right to Organize Manufactured Home Parks	Just cause notice requires that a tenant is notified of the reason why their lease is not renewed. The reason must be included in the state's list of just causes. This targets predatory behavior like ending leases to flip units, as well as circumventing a tenant's right to defend themselves in case a material violation of the lease is alleged. EXAMPLES: Burlington Oregon Oakland Seattle San Francisco

SUPPORT: HOME Line Policy Agenda

Equity in Place endorses the Policy Agenda from HOME Line, which includes eviction and expungement reform, protections around heat and repairs, and provisions around lease fairness. Read more at homelinemn.org/public-policy



PROTECT: Local (rent) control

Cities have the right to address the affordable housing crisis as they see fit. State lawmakers must preserve the ability of municipalities to **implement rent stabilization measures by referendum.**





Budget Priorities

Why do we need it?

What will it do?

\$1.1 Billion for Universal Rental Vouchers	\$330 Million for Emergency Rental Assistance	First-time Home Buyer Grants (not Loans)	Resources for Community Ownership
Currently, many eligible families and individuals can wait years to get on housing assistance waiting lists, then years more to receive rental assistance for which they qualified long ago.	With the state's program to distribute federal rental assistance (RentHelp MN) ending abruptly in January, thousands of tenant households impacted by the pandemic continue to face overwhelming challenges paying their rent — and dire consequences if they are evicted.	Low-wealth Minnesotans lack access to down payment assistance and closing costs to purchase homes that are not tied to interest-bearing loans, excluding cultural and faith communities whose beliefs prohibit borrowing money with interest, and communities of color who have historically been excluded from homeownership.	Renters and communities are asking for the ability to form housing cooperatives or create community ownership of apartments and houses when they are put on the market. Resources are needed to support these renters and preservation buyers in matching the purchase price of buildings.
<p>Rental assistance vouchers which allow low-income tenants to dedicate no more than 30% of their income to housing would be a state-funded resource that acts as an entitlement program for all who qualify — funded at the level of need.</p> <p>EXAMPLES: Biden Housing Plan Bring it Home campaign (HF40/SF222)</p>	<p>Minnesota Housing made a commitment and must be accountable to renters who were given no notice or ability to plan before the closure of RentHelpMN. The state must create a pool of resources for renters in need of assistance that is accessible to undocumented residents and requires minimal paperwork to ensure funds can be disbursed quickly.</p> <p>EXAMPLES: RentHelpMN MN Families Homelessness Prevention & Assistance Program</p>	<p>The state must allocate ongoing resources for low-wealth homebuyers to access grants as down-payment assistance instead of loans. Immigrant and BIPOC communities deserve access to a resource that does not deepen disparities in relation to debt and honor diverse cultural needs.</p> <p>EXAMPLES: NeighborhoodLIFT Program</p>	<p>While multiple municipalities are considering Tenant Opportunity to Purchase policies, the state must allocate resources designated to be accessible to renters (and organizations supporting renters) in forming community ownership of their housing and / or create co-operative housing.</p> <p>EXAMPLES: USDA Cooperative Development Grant Program</p>

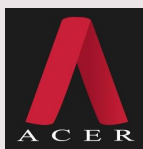
SHIFT: Resources must be directed to most-impacted communities

Because the legacies of injustice are ever present in shaping current inequities in wealth, housing, and power, we must intentionally shift public and philanthropic resources to support renters and communities of color in organizing for housing justice, wealth building opportunities, and healing. **Community investment** is a key component of the 2020 Equity in Place Policy Agenda. Download at thealliancetc.org/equity-in-place



Community Impact

African Career, Education and Resource, Inc



has been building renter power in the Northwest suburbs of Minneapolis for nearly a decade, including advancing Just Cause protections. As housing organizer Fadumo Mohamed, says:

“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. Having Just Cause non-renewals would mean that our community could think long term, establishing deeper roots and being more invested in our neighborhoods and schools. Just Cause is deeply needed if we want stable communities where people can be mentally, financially and socially healthy.”

HOME Line

In 2021, HOME Line’s



statewide tenant hotline saw a more than 10% increase in calls (over any previous year) from renters seeking legal information, with more than 25,000 total calls. In addition, the average time of calls doubled, from approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Evictions (2,302) and landlord notice (1,955) were among the top three reasons tenants called the hotline. As an HOME Line tenant organizer, Juan Luis Rivera-Reyes, says:

“From organizing with tenants, I see how evictions cause real financial, mental, and emotional damage to renting families who’s lives are so often devastated by this broken and deeply unfair process. Evictions are a leading cause of housing instability across the state and we need to create pathways to not just prevent evictions from happening now, but also craft solutions for past evictions to be expunged so renters aren’t limited in their housing options for many years to come. Eviction reform is a critical step to a more just and people centered housing landscape that can lead to sustainability and stability for renters statewide.”

Housing Justice Center



As a RentHelpMN

Field Partner, HJC has heard from thousands of renters across the state whose lives — and housing — have been upended by COVID. As Markanetta Smith, Rental Assistance Navigator, says:

“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. There are no more stimulus checks. There’s nothing for these families to hold on to. With all the federal and state programs ending so abruptly, the rug has been pulled out from under their feet. Now there’s nothing. When people start seeing homeless encampments popping up across the state, these are the consequences. If we don’t plan on the front end, we pay for it on the back end.”

Equity in Place member organizations

African Career Education and Resource (ACER) | Alliance for Metropolitan Stability | Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota | Community Stabilization Project | Frogtown Neighborhood Association | Harrison Neighborhood Association | Hope Community | Housing Justice Center | Jewish Community Action | Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers | MN STEP (Standing Together to End Poverty) | Native American Community Development Institute | New American Development Center | Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association | Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza | Urban Homeworks | West Side Community Organization

Learn more and download resources at thealliancet.org/equity-in-place