

2023 State Legislative Session **Policy Agenda**

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 with a race equity lens to understand and center how power inequities shape inequitable outcomes for our communities.

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

Regardless of our race, age or income, we know our communities are stronger when families, children and workers can put down roots in the neighborhoods they choose to call home. From the vibrant urban centers of the Twin Cities to increasingly diverse communities across Greater Minnesota, nearly 30% of residents in our state rent their homes, playing an essential role in our shared prosperity and potential every single day.

For generations, our state leaders have preferenced and subsidized property owners and big developers, stacking the deck against renters and giving landlords excessive power. Just like redlining locked out Black and brown, Indigenous and Jewish people from homeownership, Minnesota lawmakers have crafted some of the weakest tenant protections in the nation that actively and disproportionately harm people of color across the state. Now, a growing number of corporate and predatory landlords are spiking rents to make more money and forcing our neighbors who rent out of their homes – and legislators have stood aside and let it happen.

We aren't fooled by the landlord and developer lobby claiming they need free reign to exploit our neighbors without any reasonable regulations. Government has always played a role in the housing market. During the COVID pandemic, lawmakers took swift and impactful steps to safeguard the health and stability of renters across the state, even with a deeply divided legislature.

With a nearly \$18 billion budget surplus and united political will, there is no excuse for inaction in 2023. It's time to create policies that ensure tenants have dignity, fairness and respect in their homes.

Minnesota has some of the widest racial disparities in homeownership and housing stability nationwide, and delivering justice for renters is key to preventing homelessness and moving people to homeownership. Our 2023 legislative agenda includes solutions from tenant-led and community-based organizations that rebalance the scales to create lasting renter power and housing justice.

Our 2023 Policy Agenda

- Tenant right to organize
- Pre-eviction notice and expungement reform
- Source of income protection
- Good Neighbor eviction exemption
- Just Cause eviction protections
- Right to Counsel in public housing
- Curbing corporate speculation
- Repealing the state-wide preemption on rent control





Equity in Place Policy Agenda

Statewide tenant right to organize

[Championed by EIP coalition] There are more than 620,000 renter households in Minnesota and all too often they are exploited by their landlords. This policy would provide guarantees to tenants to defend their rights to dignified, well-maintained housing without facing retaliation and displacement.

Pre-eviction notice and expungement reform (HF319/SF429; HF647/SF690)

[Championed by EIP member HOME Line] In 2022, 22,000 evictions were filed in Minnesota at great expense to families, our communities and ALL taxpayers. Reforms are needed to give people a fair chance at preventing eviction.

Source of income protection (HF445/SF430)

[Championed by EIP member Housing Justice Center] 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.

Good Neighbor eviction exemption

[Championed by EIP member CloseKnit] A good neighbor exemption provides a grace period for a host who is in lease violation due to hosting a youth who would otherwise face homelessness to negotiate a solution without the property owner immediately starting the eviction process.

Just Cause eviction protections

Just Cause requires that landlords can only evict renters and non-renew leases for specific reasons, preventing tenants from arbitrary, retaliatory, or discriminatory evictions and non-renewals.

Repealing the state-wide preemption on rent control

State lawmakers must repeal Minnesota Statutes 2020, section 471.99 so all municipalities have the right to address the affordable housing crisis as they see fit, including rent stabilization.



Community Story: Katherine Banbury

We called it the Field of Dreams. Near our apartment in St. Paul, there was an empty lot that my partner and I walked through occasionally, finding small abandoned treasures left in the grass. When Dominion bought that land and started building affordable housing, we truly thought it was a dream come true.

After 12 years in an affordable but bare-bones converted carriage house, the aging roof caved in and – with housing costs skyrocketing regionwide – my partner and I couldn't find housing we could pay for on our modest incomes. The moment our names came up on the waiting list for Dominion's new Cambria Apartments in 2018, we were overcome with joy.

But, over the past four years, the Minnesota-based corporation whose business model relies on taking advantage of federal tax credits for affordable housing has spiked our rent by more than 30%, including mid-lease increases and an \$117 jump at the height of the pandemic. All the while, they neglect basic maintenance, like fixing garage doors, leaving tenants subject to theft and growing safety concerns.

Dominion renters, like me, are coming together, working toward a portfolio-wide coalition that now includes over 15 Dominion buildings. This year, we're pushing state leaders to place a 3% cap on rent increases in buildings that receive public funding. It's time for our state leaders to ensure our public dollars are keeping renters in their homes, not padding the pockets of a private corporation.

Right to Counsel in public housing (HF125 / SF98)

From 2014 to 2018, the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority filed the highest number of evictions in Hennepin County. This bill gives public housing tenants the right to a court-appointed attorney if they're facing eviction.

Curbing corporate speculation (HF685 / SF365)

Investor landlords from outside our communities are purchasing and converting single-family homes to rental housing and sticking tenants with high rents and unlivable conditions. This bill would curb corporate speculation.



Our Priority: Statewide Right to Organize

Why do we need it?

There are more than 620,000 renter households in Minnesota and all too often they are exploited by their landlords. Right now they don't have the affirmative right to come together and organize against unfair or illegal practices. For instance, during winter months, communal sidewalks and parking lots can become icy and dangerous without attentive management. Tenants who organize to bring shared requests to property owners to keep common areas clear are often met with resistance and seen as problem tenants.

A statewide right to organize policy would provide guarantees to tenants, non-resident organizers, and advocates to defend renters' rights to dignified, well-maintained housing without facing retaliation and displacement.

What does it do?

This is not a new or uncommon policy. Minnesota already ensures a right to organize in manufactured home communities and federal law requires this right in many types of subsidized affordable housing.

Based on our work with tenants across the state we are calling for a strong right to organize policy that provides residents the right to...

- organize without obstruction, harassment, or retaliation from property owners or management. This behavior may look like (but is not limited to) rent increases, stoppage of repairs, decrease in communications from management, and notices to vacate.
- use common space or meeting facilities to organize
- meet without representatives or employees of the owner or management company present
- have a voice in residential community affairs
- receive organizing assistance from non-resident tenant advocates

Community Stories



Since its inception, **New American Development Center** has been advocating for and improving the lives of the East African community, particularly Somali immigrants who are low-income and disenfranchised. Finding and retaining affordable and dignified housing is an urgent and ongoing challenge for many of the families NADC works with, says Sedia Omar, an advocate with NADC: "I recently worked with some townhome residents in Eden Prairie who simply wanted their landlord to complete basic maintenance, including fixing plumbing, HVAC, and water leaks. Some of the families were not able to cook food for weeks because their stove was not working. Instead of responding to their reasonable requests, the landlord sent them letters saying they had to leave. They didn't know it wasn't a legally binding eviction, so they moved out. Even then, the landlord hit them with thousands of dollars in fees for dubious repairs. We need a strong right to organize law in Minnesota, so families don't face these types of injustices."



In 2022, **HOME Line's** hotline received 485 calls related to landlord retaliation and its organizing team supported renters in 28 properties to tackle issues of mass rent increases and displacement, discrimination, and building-wide repair issues. "For every inquiry we receive, we have to address the tenant's concerns about how their landlord will react to renters organizing for their collective interests," says Regan Reeck, a tenant organizer at HOME Line. "From improving snow removal to repairing collapsed ceilings, renters have been intimidated from advocating for the dignified housing they deserve because they fear retaliation. We need to give tenants in Minnesota affirmative protections to organize without the fears of jeopardizing their housing weighing them down."