

Tenant Solidarity

News and Information from the Tenants Union of Washington

December 2015



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OP-ED: Tenants Must Know Their Rights, Then Fight For Them

Below is an excerpt from an article published in the South Seattle Emerald, written by TU Community Organizers Hana Alicic and Jose Camacho. Check out the link to read the whole article. <http://southseattleemerald.com/2015/11/27/op-ed-tenants-must-know-their-rights-then-fight-for-them/#more-4924>

“Only through the concerted efforts of renters, both in their individual buildings and across the city, can we shift the current power dynamics. Education is a crucial component of these efforts, but informing tenants of their rights must be coupled with encouraging tenants to organize in order to change the current landscape. Reforms are only as strong as their implementation, and tenants need to apply pressure to ensure that current laws are abided by and modified as needed. As more and more renters are displaced from Seattle due to increasing costs, organizing is needed outside of city limits as well. The work of the Tenants Union is driven by the needs of those we serve, and we will continue to advise all tenants in how to best assert their power.

One fight on the horizon is for the implementation of the “Carl Haglund” Law, which would make it illegal to raise the price of rent in buildings that are not up to code. This law would help end one of the ways in which unscrupulous landlords force tenants from their homes in order to avoid the relocation assistance fees required prior to major renovations. We encourage any tenants who are experiencing rent increases in uninhabitable or unsafe buildings to contact us at the Tenants Union and start organizing themselves now. Tenants from across the city will need to come together to apply pressure to City Council in order to ensure that they understand the need of this policy.”



Director's Corner

At the end of each year, we like to fall in line with holiday tradition and reflect on what made us thankful this year. This year has been rewarding in more ways than I have space to write about. From substandard housing to rent increases, lawsuits and doubled funding, we've experienced a whirlwind year in the housing justice movement.

A few victories include:

Triad Development: When tenants fight, they win. Tenants united from tenant associations sued a big developer and the city over preferential permitting structures and won! The Displaced Tenants for Accountability and Transparency settled with Triad Development for over \$5,000,000!

SHAG Tenants Together: Residents from the Senior Housing Assistance Group formed a 28-building wide tenant association to combat poor management practices, lack of representation, and poor maintenance. Together, tenants from one of the biggest senior housing providers in the area will continue working with the TU and SHAG staff to better their housing situation and end needless retaliation and poor communication.

Tenant Education Funding: Thank you all who testified, wrote letters, and signed onto our postcards calling for increases in tenant education funding. Due to your work, we've been approved for a \$100,000 increase in tenant education funding. This effectively doubles our tenant education budget, and will allow us to double our availability over the phone and in-person.

Check us out in 2016; we'll be bigger and better than ever! We'll expand our tenant education department and continue organizing for healthy housing, an end to gentrification, and tenant friendly housing policies and practices. We encourage you to join us in our quest for housing justice!

From our families to yours, Happy Holidays,

Liz Etta

Executive Director
Tenants Union of Washington



The fight is nothing if it's not intersectional

General Meetings Improvement

By Kate Dunphy:

A new year is approaching and with it we're improving our General Meetings! Instead of holding one hour meetings every month we will now come together once every quarter for two hour gatherings. This change will make it easier for members to regularly attend and will also give us more time together on the nights we meet. Never been to a General Meeting? Every meeting agenda varies, but in the past we've featured guest speakers, held discussions about key organizing tactics, shared the latest news in tenant education and more!

Do you have a topic you'd like to see addressed? Please let us know by emailing info@tenantsunion.org! And please stay tuned for more details on our first meeting of 2016 to be scheduled in February.

Say Hello to our new Staff!



Hana-Community Organizer began at the Tenants Union in August 2015. After immigrating from Bosnia at the age of 2, Hana grew up in Spokane before moving to Seattle to attend the University of Washington (UW). There, she studied Public Health, learned about the social determinants of health, and developed an interest in the factors that lead to inequality in our society. For 5 years, she worked with youth and adults experiencing homelessness in a number of capacities, most recently as the AmeriCorps member for the homeless health programs at Neighborcare Health. She also organizes with the Tent City Collective, a group of UW students and alumni and Tent City 3 residents working to bring the tent city encampment to UW's campus. She loves nothing more than working to empower disenfranchised people and is very excited to join the Tenants Union and help tenants realize their own strength. Outside of work, Hana enjoys riding her bike long distances, cuddling with her kitten, spending far too much time reading online articles, sitting in the sunshine, and eating long dinners with friends.

Kate-Intern began at the Tenants Union in October 2015. A current student at the University of Washington's School of Social Work, Kate witnessed rapid gentrification and displacement during her time in San Francisco, where she previously worked in human resources. As a former organizer with ACORN, Planned Parenthood Action Fund and MoveOn PAC and a current member of UW's Anti-Racism White Allyship Group and Seattle's Coalition of Anti-Racist Whites, Kate is passionate about racial justice and eager to use this lens while supporting the Tenants Union's work advocating for fair housing for all Washingtonians.



Sherrard Ewing vs Carl Haglund

By Violet Lavatai:

On December 4, 2015 we met with Sherrard Ewing and discussed the court case that he faced against the notorious "slumlord" Carl Haglund. Sherrard had written a Yelp review stating not to rent or buy from Haglund, so the "slumlord" took him to court for slander. The outcome was in favor of Sherrard E., check out the links below for more information. We will have more updates in the future on this story.

www.king5news/southseattletenants.com

<http://www.seattlepi.com/local/article/Judge-hammers-Seattle-Goliath-of-housing-6562124.php>



Photo courtesy of Sherrard Ewing's blog

The United Way FREE Tax Campaign!

Have your taxes prepared for FREE! The United Way Free Tax Campaign has been an active part of the community for over 13 years and has over 20 locations where people earning \$62,000 or less a year may be eligible to get their taxes prepared by IRS certified volunteers. For low- and middle-income families, this is an important way for them to keep more of what they earn and gain access to valuable tax credits - at absolutely no cost. Tax sites are open January through April, for more information visit: <https://www.uwkc.org/need-help/tax-help/>



Increasing Tenant Protections Outside the City of Seattle

The mission of the Tenants Union (TU) is not only to offer empowerment-based education services but to seek out housing justice through effective outreach, leadership development, organizing and advocacy.

As the year comes to an end, we have seen so much great work done by many people committed to the same vision that we at the TU hold, and we would like to acknowledge some of the work and victories from outside of the the city of Seattle. A considerable achievement by the Tenants Union of Washington has been the work done by [our office in the City of Spokane, WA](#), where we have two Community Organizers - Tenant Counselors, who most recently opened up a tenants' rights education clinic to better serve those living in the area. In Bellingham, WA, after many years of hard work by tenants, organizers and housing advocates, the Bellingham City Council approved and adopted their own [Rental Registration & Safety Inspection Program](#), which will offer a greater sense of relief for renters who expect a safe and healthy home. In Vancouver, WA after recommendations by the Affordable Housing Task Force, the city adopted 3 major ordinances to help vulnerable tenants, in short they are: [45 Day Notice of Rent Increase, 60 Day Notice to Vacate and Source of Income Protections](#). In addition as the year comes to an end people from Kent, WA are working towards stronger tenant protections in the form of a ['Just Cause' ordinance](#).

We at the TU are so encouraged by the work of tenant leaders, housing advocates and policy makers and wish to contribute in all the ways possible, and so we ask that people please visit our website, contact us and stay connected as we move towards housing justice.

José Camacho
Community Organizer - Tenant Counselor



Fair and Accessible Rentals for Everyone

By: Hana Alicic

*"When you have a criminal background, and yearn for a job and your own place to live, you feel so hopeless. I am responsible for my bad choices, but it seems like you never stop 'paying' for them. It never goes away."
"I have done some great work in preparing to reconnect with my family and the community, but I still have no place to go. No place to call home."*

-Anonymous participants of the IF Project from the Washington Corrections Center for Women

People exiting the criminal justice system need and want opportunities to restart their lives. An affordable, decent, and safe home is crucial to starting down a new path; without one, opportunities are limited and growth is stunted. We do not want individuals exiting the criminal justice system to live in a tent or run-down house, but, very often, those are the only choices offered. Criminal background checks on housing applications and landlords' unwillingness to rent to people who have been incarcerated makes it extremely difficult for people to find a home base and to move on with their lives.

The Tenants Union has partnered with Columbia Legal Services to form the Fair Access to Renting for Everyone (FARE) Campaign in order to spearhead an effort to implement one of the Seattle Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda recommendations: "Prohibit screening criteria that include an absolute exclusion of anyone with a criminal record or a broad category of criminal record, such as a felony." We launched our campaign with a Monday, December 14th forum attended by about 100 community members.

Currently, anyone with a criminal record faces a great deal of stigma when looking for housing. Some community members assume that anyone who is formerly incarcerated is threat to public safety or an unstable renter. The evidence shows that these concerns are unfounded: there is no empirical link between a criminal record and an unsuccessful tenancy. These assumptions hurt thousands of residents: today, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world. No country has ever imprisoned such a large share of its population. Since the burden of incarceration disproportionately affects people of color, they are especially limited by the lack of housing options. As determined in a 2015 Office of Civil Rights investigation, renters already experience different treatment based on race and national origin. Racism coupled with prejudice against those with criminal records means that the decks are stacked high against thousands of our own community members.

Were the current system of screening to change, many positive outcomes would result. As stated in the HALA recommendations, those who have stable housing are more likely to successfully reintegrate. Rates of recidivism decrease, families are able to live together, rates of homelessness decrease, and our community is strengthened as more people are able to fully contribute.

We believe that we have strong legal, economic, and sociological arguments to advocate for this policy, but we know that logic and numbers alone don't bring about change. They need to be coupled with something else: the human element. Seattle voters need to understand how this issue affects those in our community, and they need to see **you** advocating for this solution.

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Fair and Accessible Rentals for Everyone...continued

There are some who are scared by the idea of those with criminal records moving to their neighborhoods. To combat this stigma, we need those who care about this issue to go to their neighbors, community groups, workplaces, and places of worship and to tell their communities that they believe that people should be given the opportunity to restart their lives. We need them to discuss how they are scared by the fact that the 1 in 4 Americans who have a criminal record are being made to pay for it for the rest of their lives. We need them to tell city council members that giving those who are formerly incarcerated the ability to find housing will make all of us stronger.

The FARE Campaign will be forming a broad coalition of community groups and individuals interested in this issue in order to advocate for this policy. We will amplify the voice of any individual who would like to share their story and will support any organization that would like to join us. If you do want to support this campaign, please contact us through our FARE website, fareseattle.org.

If you do chose to support this issue and to spread the word, either as an individual or as a group, know that you are in good company. We have had many groups sign on already, and new groups are joining our coalition every few days. Thus far, we have commitments from: Washington Low Income Housing Alliance, Seattle Women's Commission, Post-Prison Education Program, Seattle/ King County Coalition on Homelessness, No New Jim Crow, King County Native American Leadership Council, ACLU of WA, Seattle Human Rights Commission, VOCAL-WA, and the Public Defender Association.

We hope to build up momentum over the next few months so that, by this time next year, anyone with a criminal record will have a fair chance at finding somewhere to call home.

FARE's Launch Party welcomed Jon Grant as moderator as well as a panel of speakers



We Love Workshops!

Steven Le, our Tenant Education Coordinator, is always seeking workshop opportunities.

If you work with renters, housing providers, or you're just interested in finding out about your tenant rights, please contact him at stevenl@tenantsunion.org for more information. Workshops are free, but we do request that a minimum of 10 interested folks be in attendance. Our workshops give a broad overview of your rights and cover topics such as tenant screening, repairs, deposits, and evictions. However, these workshops can be specifically catered to your community's needs. Remember that there is no governing body in Washington that enforces tenants' rights. Landlord-tenant laws in Washington are considered self-help, so it is up to tenants to assert their rights. Get scheduled for a workshop today!

TU & General Events Calendar

December 2015 & January 2016

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
20	21	22	23	24 Hanukkah Begins Christmas Eve	25 Christmas Day	26 Kwanzaa Begins
27	28	29	30	31 New Year's Eve	1 January Hanukkah Ends Kwanzaa Ends New Year's Day	2
3	4 Inauguration & Swearing-In Ceremony, Seattle City Council	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13 Have you registered to vote? Do it today!	14	15	16
17	18 Martin Luther King Jr. Day	19	20	21	22	23

Call for Submissions

Do you love housing and the written word? Are you looking for an audience for your social justice oriented artwork? Well, look no further! The Tenants Union continuously receives and publishes works from those in the housing community. Out of state submissions welcome!

To submit your work to the Tenants Union Tenant Solidarity newsletter, please email info@tenantsunion.org. You may also send your work to our physical address at:

Tenant Solidarity Newsletter Team
Tenants Union of Washington State
5425 Rainier Ave S., Ste. B
Seattle, WA 98118

Terms for submission: All written works must be sent in .doc, .docx, .rtf format. Please, limit your submissions to 750 words or less. Please understand that we may resize any artwork to fit within the allotted space within the newsletter.