

# Tenant Solidarity

News and Information from the Tenants Union of Washington

June 2016



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## Legislative Update

This has been one heck of a quarter in tenant legislation. The Seattle Mayor's HALA recommendations came flowing in this quarter with proposals for changes in income discrimination issues and rent hikes in slums. On the state level, changes to eviction coding by judges could allow tenants with evictions more access to housing while lengthening the amount of time landlords have to return security deposits to tenants. Also on the state level, ideas around more tax breaks for landlords to provide housing has gained traction with tenants and lawmakers on both sides of the currently dominant political parties occupying our state legislature.

- Just recently Mayor Murry and the Seattle Housing Authority entered into an agreement to provide energy assistance to more than 10,000 families. This will free up much needed income from tenants. This also increases tenants' peace of mind knowing that they will be less likely to have to make those tough sacrifices to feed their children, buy medicine, or pay their utility bills.
  - \* <http://q13fox.com/2016/05/04/city-agreement-with-seattle-housing-authority-would-automatically-enroll-tenants-in-utility-discount-program/>
  - \* <http://www.queenannnews.com/Content/News/News/Article/Mayor-kicks-off-HALA-implementation/26/337/38603>
- Mayor Murray's office also handed down legislation to the Seattle City Council which would bar landlords from discriminating against tenants with rental subsidies such as Section 8 or alternative income sources such as child support or rental assistance programs. The proposed legislation would also enhance protections for tenants who experience retaliation based on their source of income, bans harassment of tenants with subsidies or alternative income sources, and sets guidelines for the calculation of rent when the tenant has a subsidy or alternative source of income.
  - \* <http://seattlemedium.com/murray-proposes-legislation-to-protect-renters-against-discrimination-based-on-source-of-income/>
- The Seattle Office for Civil Rights has agreed that they will look at "preferred employer" discounts for rent, which is no more than discrimination with a positive spin, case by case because they may violate Fair Housing laws. This is a step...

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## Director's Corner



As we approach summer, the concepts of rebirth and newness always seems to consume my thoughts. I wonder how things can be done differently, and where we haven't looked for solutions. This spring, I've come to find my thoughts darken over the realization that we continue to look to the same people who have proven their preference for profit over the needs of humanity. For example, most of the tenant legislation which has been put forward by local officials throughout Washington since October 2015 has not been able to tackle the one thing displacing countless tenants – rent increases. From decreases in utility payments, to more tax breaks for already wealthy developers, to rules forcing landlords to treat the poor like humans – we're simply avoiding the big issue of rent increases, rent determination, and our ridiculous deference to those whose sole interest is profit by means of exploiting the human need for shelter.

Runaway rents are caused by people, developers, landlords, and stagnant/complicit enforcement bodies. I had a conversation with a well-known housing advocate last month who pushes for profitable and supply-based solutions to the City of Seattle's housing crisis. In this conversation, the advocate told me that I was idealistic to assume that we could forgo profit like we have many times in US history to think of the countless families languishing in poverty and/or homeless on the streets of the city. I reminded them that his solutions were as old as renting, yet we still have rampant poverty displacement and homelessness. After that conversation, I found myself incredibly sad for the state of housing policy. On one hand, we have profit-driven actors using poor and defeated economic theories to promote the idea that more housing will lead to affordable housing. On the other hand, we have a tired and hopeful mass of millions of tenants and advocates who have watched the increased supply simply raise rents and displace people in the name of 'renewal' and 'renovation'. **Try to argue this fact to the pro-profit supply-side housing advocates, and they gaslight the conversation and continue to invoking the same tired arguments used for centuries to push poor people into tighter and unsafe spaces.**

This quarter, I invite all readers to ask their landlords how they determine their rent. I invite all readers to ask their City officials what steps they are taking to increase the number of affordable housing units and reduce the median rent. I invite you all to think critically about renting as an economic force and why your right to shelter comes at such a high cost? Is it really demand? Or, is it a commitment to profit by a myriad of actors which leaves millions desperate, vulnerable, and fearful to resist?

*Elizabeth V. Ethel*

## Seattle Housing Levy

**The Seattle Housing Levy, a critical source of funding for affordable housing, is up for renewal this August.**

Levy funding will be used to build and preserve affordable units throughout the city, but it can only happen if we encourage people to vote! We ask Tenants Union members who are able to join Yes! For Homes at one of their phone banking events; come encourage your community to invest in housing for all! Full list of phone banking events here: <http://yesforhomes.com/events>



## Legislative Update...continued

- ...in the right direction for tenants who would otherwise have little recourse when turned away in favor of a wealthy rental applicant with steady income from local tech giants.  
\* <http://www.thestranger.com/slog/2016/04/19/23980033/the-city-has-finally-decided-what-to-do-about-those-special-move-in-deals-for-tech-workers>
- The Mayor's office also worked with Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant to introduce legislation which would bar landlords from raising rents in apartments with slum conditions. This spawns from the media frenzy around the all-too-common 6511 Rainier Ave. S. property with over 200 violations and 100% rent increases. This appalling situation happens frequently throughout Seattle, and the fear of retaliation and lack of resources of recourse has allowed slums to go unnoticed by the public eye. This legislation endeavors to end that. The proposed legislation would bar landlords from raising rents when operating slums, and would transfer enforcement for proper notice of rent increases of 10% or more and transfer enforcement from the Seattle Police Department to the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection.  
\* <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/bill-seeks-to-bar-seattle-rent-hikes-for-hazardous-units/>
- In January, a proposal giving more tax breaks to developers in exchange for affordable housing gained support on the state level by lawmakers in the two current political parties dominating our political sphere. New units built under this scheme could see almost 50% reductions in market rate rent. Housing advocates argue that this amounts to yet another subsidy for the landlord while ignoring the amount sheer mass of displaced and current residents who need housing yesterday.  
\* <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/tax-break-bill-aimed-at-keeping-rents-low/>



## View from Spokane

**By Terri Anderson:**

Spokane is heating up! And not just because of the record setting temperatures that approached triple digits before summer even started. The Spokane office of the Tenants Union is busy helping tenants, gaining voice in city policy, traveling, and getting together to have fun.

VISTA Organizer Amber continues to serve tenants at the walk-in clinics at the American Indian Community Center and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Family Resource Center. **We are seeking additional clinic locations in the northeast area of Spokane and in the city of Spokane Valley.** She is also working with the Seattle organizers to preserve HUD Section 8 based housing in Selah and Zillah located in Yakima County. We have identified one new building where tenants face the approaching end of its HUD contract that Amber will soon be door knocking.

Terri continues to serve on the stakeholder group for the city of Spokane that is currently addressing rental issues, resources, and gaps. The tenants made their presentation to the group on May 10 that included recommendations for a housing security ordinance that will prohibit no cause terminations and evictions, a rental registry and inspection ordinance, relocation assistance, and an office of tenant services in the city to assist tenants and collect data.

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*VISTA Organizer Amber speaks during a meeting*



## View from Spokane...continued

...Amber, Terri, and tenants Ron Toston, Lila Lopeman, and Bonnie Roberts represented the Tenants Union at the Emerging Advocates program and conference on Ending Homelessness that was held in Spokane May 11-13. This exciting event united TU tenants with tenants representing other organizations in Spokane to join forces to address housing justice and giving a voice to tenants in city and county policymaking.



A tenant leadership group is being formed at the TU in Spokane right now. The first meeting was held on Tuesday, May 31 at the Community Building. The tenants agreed that ending no cause evictions in Spokane is the most important issue and will work for enactment of an ordinance that will require just cause to terminate a rental agreement and put an end to 20 day notices in Spokane.

HUD tenant Mara Spitzer from Canterbury Court and Amber will be travelling to Washington, D.C. for the NAHT conference June 11-14. They will represent us well and we support them as they fight for the rights of HUD tenants.

## We Need Your Input! Policy Priorities & Satisfaction Survey

All of our program and policy decisions are directed by folks like you in the community. Please consider lending your voice to direct the Tenants Union in our goals for the upcoming year.

Click [here](https://liz276.typeform.com/to/PiEl3k) or go to <https://liz276.typeform.com/to/PiEl3k> to take a 10 question survey about the housing landscape in your town, the state, and share your opinion on the TU's work.

## The Risk of Losing Inclusionary Zoning

**By Hana Alicic:**

Much has been written about the recommendations of Mayor Ed Murray's Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) task force, but a considerable focus has been placed on the "Grand Bargain," which refers to a compromise made amongst committee members. For housing advocates, the end results were the requirement of a commercial linkage fee to fund affordable housing and mandatory inclusionary zoning (MIZ), where a small percentage of new units must be affordable to low-income people. The latter also allows for skirting of the MIZ requirement if fees are paid in lieu to an affordable housing fund. When the MIZ requirement is followed, it will result in [5-7% of new units](#) being affordable.

A recent [article](#) by Daniel Beekman of the Seattle Times suggests that this plan may not play out as presented. Many developers plan to take the route of paying the in lieu fees which means that, as Beekman writes, only about less than half of the 3,700 promised units will be created as part of market-rate buildings. Instead, the fees will be used by nonprofits to create buildings in other areas.



While increasing the amount of affordable housing is needed, moving away from the socioeconomic diversity that MIZ can provide raises concerns. When done correctly, MIZ can have a hugely beneficial role in communities.

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## Tenant Voices: Story of a Veteran

According to Veterans Inc.'s website, as of 2014 between 529,000 and 840,000 veterans are homeless at some time during the year. Additionally, veterans are twice as likely as other Americans to become chronically homeless. The following is a statement from TU Member Kristina Sawyckj about her struggles.



Image courtesy of www.getnavy.com

I am a homeless, disabled veteran. I live out of my car and my church watches over me. I am working on getting a Section 8 voucher through Seattle Housing Authority, but struggle with communication issues with them. I need at least a 2 bedroom, wheelchair accessible, private market home or town home to rent. I am not eligible for apartment complexes due to the 'low income tax credit' the complexes in Seattle receive.

I am a full time Seattle Central College student with a 4.0 GPA. I struggle with trying to get my homework done. I hope to attend UW and study Law and Social Justice with a minor in Disability Studies, then on to law school.

**I simply want a home.**

- Kristina Sawyckj

## The Risk of Losing Inclusionary Zoning...continued

...HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research [has stated](#) that "the ZIP code in which a child grows up all too often remains a strong predictor of that child's life course. There are communities that remain segregated by classes protected by the Fair Housing Act. Racially-concentrated areas of poverty exist in virtually every metropolitan area. Disparities in access to important community assets prevail in many instances."

Inclusionary zoning provides a tool by which all people can share in resources and experience positive outcomes.

**Economic integration would make it more likely that the development boom in Seattle stood a chance of benefitting all people, rather than just the wealthy.**

Attorney Thomas Silverstein [writes](#), "In-lieu fees sever the connection between the location of market rate and affordable housing that makes mandatory inclusionary zoning such a powerful tool for promoting integration. Communities should either withhold the in-lieu fee option or place very strict limits on the location of housing developed with funds from in-lieu fees." Recent developments in Seattle suggest that this connection is on its way to being severed, and we would all lose out on the more inclusive communities that it would foster.

## News from the Tenant Ed Hotline and Workshops

**By Steven Le:**

The number one complaint coming through the hotline remains that tenants are getting charged for excessive damages upon move out. Remember that your landlord can keep portions (or all) of your deposit due to "damages beyond normal wear and tear." However, the [14 day rule](#) (changing to 21 days due to ESB 6413) only applies to the deposit and DOES NOT prevent the landlord from charging for damages beyond normal wear and tear which can often exceed the deposit you paid. There is no limit to what a landlord can claim as damages. Take steps before you move out to document the condition of the unit. Tenants are responsible for restoring the unit to its original condition minus normal wear and tear, but normal wear and tear is never specifically defined. **Take proactive steps: put in requests for repairs, ask your landlord to do a move out walkthrough with you, and absolutely take pictures of the unit before you hand the keys over.**

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# Trying to Create a Living Wage in Washington State

**By Kate Dunphy:**

Many individuals and families in Washington State working full time at the current minimum wage of \$9.47/hour cannot meet their basic needs such as safe, healthy housing and food costs.

After the 2014 minimum wage victory won in Seattle, the fight for a living minimum wage that was started by community members in SeaTac grew into nationwide wins in San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles. And communities across Washington State are now working to put I-1433 on this November's ballot to better support workers and the economy across our entire state.

I-1433 would gradually raise the minimum wage in Washington State over a four year period, from \$11 in 2017 to \$13.50 in 2020. It would also allow workers to earn one hour of paid sick leave for every 40 hours worked. Employers already paying higher wages or offering more generous sick leave to their workers will be unaffected by these changes.

**Supporters of the initiative are in favor of its capacity to boost local economies in a way that both supports and values workers and their contributions by helping to shape an economy that works for everyone.**

While critics of similar initiatives have suggested that an increased minimum wage could have negative effects on local businesses, in fact no such outcomes have been seen in Seattle since the city minimum wage started to phase toward \$15 in 2015.

I-1433 is an Initiative to the People (ITP), meaning that when 246,372 valid signatures are collected by the community the initiative is placed on the next general election ballot November 8, 2016.

**The deadline to collect these signatures is July 8, 2016** – please spread the word and look for organizers from Raise Up Washington collecting signatures throughout the state! Support is needed across the entire state, including in cities where minimum wage victories have already been won.



## News from the Tenant Ed Hotline and Workshops...continued

...In other news, I recently did an education workshop at 1811 Eastlake Ave. Owned by DESC, 1811 is a supportive housing building. The workshop was for tenants looking to transition into non-supportive housing. They asked great questions, and I'm told they learned a lot of new information. I have another scheduled workshop for June 24<sup>th</sup> with DESC as part of their Keys to Home program. Following that, I have a workshop with Solid Ground on Saturday, June 26<sup>th</sup>. Hopefully, the Solid Ground workshop will be opened to the public—stay tuned.

As always, please contact me directly at [stevenl@tenantsunion.org](mailto:stevenl@tenantsunion.org) if you'd like to request a general tenants' rights presentation. Happy housing, everyone!



*Tenants participating in one of Steven's workshops*



# TU & General Events Calendar

June & July 2016

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
12	13	14	15	16	17	18 <a href="#">Beacon Hill Block Party</a> 12-8pm
19 Father's Day	20 First day of Summer	21	22	23	24	25
26	27 <a href="#">TU General Membership Mtg</a> 6:30-8:30pm	28	29	30	01 July	02
03	04 Independence Day <a href="#">Click</a> to see firework times	05	06	07	08	09
10	11 <a href="#">World Population Day</a>	12	13	14 <a href="#">King County Fair</a> July 14-17	15	16

## 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](mailto: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.