



What Is Rent Control?

To better understand what we're fighting against, we have to fully understand what we're fighting for. From a [PolicyLink report](#):

Rent control is a cornerstone of housing policy in our predominantly for-profit market, protecting and stabilizing households and entire communities.

It is effective at immediately improving housing stability and affordability for current tenants on a scale unrivaled by other policy options. Housing stability, in turn, promotes a cascade of economic, health, civic, and climate benefits for whole communities.

The report outlines the principles for designing strong policy and provides a brief history of rent control. A couple of highlights:

- Organizers should aim for vacancy control, maximum coverage, minimal loopholes and exemptions, and tenant-centered program design that incorporates strong implementation and enforcement mechanisms.
- The US has a century-long history of rent control. This is paired with an even longer history of associations seeking to protect the racial-capitalist functions of US property rights and reject tenants as deserving participants in the country's political and social systems.



Since this press conference in December 2025, more tenants have complained about high rent increases. Landlords have cited the pending rent stabilization bill as one reason.



Defending the Ballot Measure

How do we counter slick, well-funded opposition?

The stated purpose of the rent control ballot measure is "to provide housing stability for tenants, landlords, and communities across the commonwealth, and curb displacement as a result of the housing shortage and affordability crisis in Massachusetts."

Landlords would be limited to rent increases of 5% or the annual Consumer Price Index increase, whichever is lower. In most cases, increases would be based retroactively on the rental amount on January 1, 2026.

Certain properties would be exempt, including educational, religious, and nonprofit institutions, new buildings under 10 years old, and smaller owner-occupied buildings.

On their polished, cheery-looking website, Housing for Massachusetts says they're "a coalition of citizens, small property owners, family-owned real estate companies, affordable housing developers, and housing advocates."

Look deeper, and we find that they're a committee registered with the Office of Campaign and Political Finance and received more than \$400,000 in 2025.

They cite reports from prestigious institutions like MIT and Stanford, and from serious journals and analysts. They say rent control will lower property values and increase property taxes. That it will lead to reduced housing production and new house construction.

They say it will increase the tax burden on homeowners or lead to significant cuts in local services like schools, police and fire departments, and road maintenance. They say it is "control of the private rental market by the state government."

What they're saying is misleading and biased toward corporate interests. What do we say in response?

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Meetings Every Thursday
5:30 to 7:00 p.m.
City Council Chambers
Easthampton Municipal Building
50 Payson Avenue



Check Out Our Website
Info, Toolkits, Research & More
easthamptontenantsunion.org

Contact Us
easthamptontenantsunion@gmail.com
413-282-7427

Finding a New Sense of Community and Camaraderie

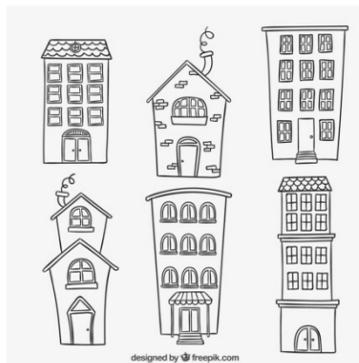
After Hurricane Properties bought our building, I remember being in despair. I was worried and angry. I knew we kind of had it “good” with our previous landlords because they mostly left us alone and kept rent increases low even though the building was in disrepair and the maintenance was lackluster.

I knew a corporate entity would be a different beast, having lived in a couple of slumlord housing situations already. Thankfully, Ilene was already ahead of the curve and made contact with Joel Feldman, and with Katie at Springfield No One Leaves. We began building a foundation of a strong union from there.

When we formed the 17 Adams Street Tenants Association it felt strange, but good. I’m generally an avoidant person and having to rely on other people is hard for me. However, once I allowed myself to know my neighbors have my back it felt so natural to just relax.

Admittedly, it was scary to not sign the lease they initially offered us. For me, the only other option was to sign it and try not to starve. I couldn’t afford to live anywhere else. The raise in rent was my grocery allowance plus a little more. I’ve survived starvation before and didn’t want to do it again.

We all worked together and collectively utilized our skills to get only a 7% raise in rent instead of 30–50%. It was terrifying and amazing to push back against something that feels so abstract, cold, and massive — and win.



Before we formed this union I mostly kept to myself. I would actively hide from my neighbors and community to avoid interaction. I have PTSD and that can make being around other people painful for me.

Being a part of this union and giving what I can to help has helped me to shift my fear of people into a desire to connect and help. Now I feel a deep connection to my neighbors and an ownership of my building that I haven’t experienced before. Treating my mental illness has only gotten easier with my new sense of community and camaraderie. It has given me a bloom of hope that we can fight back against people who are committing such violence toward us as tenants.

– Brigh Ross

Pine Valley Tenants Begin Collective Bargaining Process

The Pine Valley Tenants Association met with their landlord, Matthew Gawle, his wife, Donna, and their lawyer, Peter Vickery, on March 12. The purpose was to negotiate 2025 rent increases – some more than 60% higher than the prior rates – and address other concerns.

The collective bargaining meeting was arranged as part of a settlement reached during legal proceedings for the attempted eviction of two tenants. Although this group was a small fraction of Pine Valley tenants, they hope to bring positive change for everyone under Pine Valley management. Joel Feldman, their lawyer, stated that he hoped this meeting could be a model for future landlord-tenant relationships in Easthampton.

The list of demands, written by a small group of tenants during several meetings in February and March, included rent increases no more than 2.8% higher than previous levels, an after-hours emergency maintenance contact, regular tree and gutter maintenance, and reimbursement for tenants who had rents raised beyond their means.

After the Gawles and their lawyer stepped out of the conference room for a discussion, Donna went through the demands one by one, agreeing to some and bargaining on others. Notably, she put aside the three most important demands, those having to do with rent, for further negotiation.

Matthew expressed his concerns about finances, and made an unsubstantiated claim that Pine Valley has been operating at a loss for some time. He cited expensive repairs to fire escapes, costs that landlords are required to cover by law. It was not clear whether he included the costs for developing new properties when accounting for his operating losses.

The Gawles requested that another meeting be set in three weeks, giving them time to review their financials and determine what they could offer to satisfy the tenants’ demands. Pine Valley tenants remain optimistic and are excited to see how meetings such as these could benefit all parties in the long run.

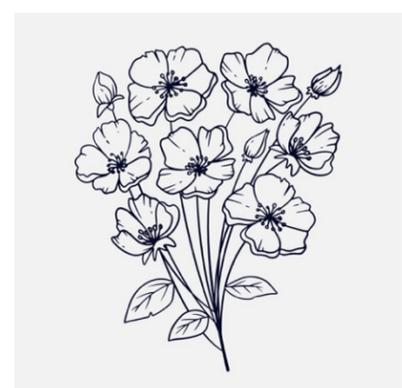
– reported by Rylee Kassirer

Spread the Word! Connect with Neighbors!

As the weather warms up, we’re going out more and engaging with residents and neighbors to let them know who we are, what we offer, and how the tenants union is building community.

Door-knocking is one way to share information and gauge people’s interest. It requires a positive attitude and, especially these days, sensitivity and patience. Tabling is another option. We’ve set up tables at the farmers market, Tandem Bagels, and community events to hand out fliers and info packets.

Anyone who’s interested in doing community outreach can team up with experienced organizers. To learn how, come to a meeting and talk to Amy, Mosha, or Natalia.



Landlords and Police Team Up in Westfield

We learned about the Westfield Police Department's monthly meetings for landlords when they posted on social media, promising advice on "how to keep problem tenants away," among other topics. Alex Tracy-D'Unger went to the February meeting, which featured two guest speakers: the Westfield electrical inspector and a lawyer who represents landlords in court. Here's his report.

The electrical inspector spoke on topics like the electrical code and new requirements that would be taking effect later this year. He also urged landlords to hire electricians to perform electrical work, and to make sure that anyone they hire has a current license and insurance. He also cautioned landlords that tenants may call the health department in response to substandard or inadequate repairs.

The lawyer was Peter Lane of Fierst Bloomberg Ohm in Northampton. One of the main focuses of his talk was tenant unions. Much of what he spoke about was familiar, like the pattern of tenant unions forming in response to large corporations purchasing apartment buildings and pushing large rent increases, as happened in Easthampton with Hurricane Properties.

He also covered topics that would be familiar to anyone who has attended a tenants' rights training with attorney Joel Feldman, including knowing the protections they have against retaliation in response to organizing, asking for negotiations around rent increases, or contacting the health department (these are covered by MA General Laws Chapter 186, Section 18).

During the Q&A, a landlord asked the lawyer if he was familiar with the Easthampton Tenants Union. He then revealed that he had attended an ETU meeting posing as a tenant. It was interesting to learn that the work of the ETU has gained enough notice by landlords that at least one felt compelled to do opposition research.

Personally, I found that hearing from a lawyer who represents landlords inspired confidence. Despite being on the opposing side, he did seem like a reasonable person. He emphasized the importance of working with tenant unions and only choosing to pursue legal action if the tenants' demands were unreasonable. No one could say objectively that tenants pushing back against 30%, 40%, even 50% rent increases are being unreasonable.

Rent Study Committee Explores Home Rule

Home rule is a mechanism for municipalities to petition the legislature for local authority beyond what state law provides. Boston's process is being used as the model in Easthampton.

The process involves educating the community to help draft local policy for ready implementation, as well as increasing pressure on the legislature.

The policy will include:

- Cap of 5%, CPI, or another metric
- Vacancy decontrol provisions (to be determined)
- Special cap exemptions for capital repairs and improvements
- Unit exemptions for small buildings, owner-occupied units, and new construction
- Enforcement structure and tenant outreach

(See page 4 for more on Rent Study Committee and Westfield PD meetings.)



GET THE FACTS

Rent Control Will Worsen the Housing Crisis

A proposed 2026 ballot question would overturn a law passed by Massachusetts voters and **impose the nation's most restrictive and damaging rent control agenda across ALL 351 cities and towns** in the Commonwealth.

[Learn More](#)

Playing into people's fear is one way corporate property investors try to gain support. (Screenshot from housingformass.com.)

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The Easthampton Rent Study Committee offers responses to three common misconceptions, backed by years of research:

"It reduces housing supply."

Studies in New Jersey and Massachusetts found no negative impact on construction rates due to rent control. Zoning and interest rates drive supply, not rent regulations.

"It hurts small mom-and-pop landlords."

Actually, 91% of buildings with 100+ units are owned by corporate structures/partnerships, not individuals. All businesses operate in regulated markets.

"It leads to neglected and dilapidated housing stock."

In Washington, DC, the share of deficient units actually declined after stabilization was introduced. When paired with strong code enforcement, rent control does not degrade quality.

Housing for Mass isn't the only group opposing the ballot measure. The Greater Boston Real Estate Board put out a report warning about the "untold threat" of rent control. The corporate press is having a field day with this report, giving it credibility without considering the tenant perspective. The Research & Policy section of our website has a full rebuttal, which we'll summarize next month.

Our defining values:

Resiliency: By developing networks and systems of mutual support and defense, we can adapt to changes and be prepared for challenges with flexibility and resiliency.

Solidarity: By consistently working together in solidarity with a commitment to serving the greater good, we can have significant leverage to catalyze change.

Inclusivity: By respecting our neighbors and accepting our differences, we can strengthen the community for everyone. The basis of inclusivity is unity, not uniformity.

Self-determination: By providing education and empowering people to stand up for their rights as residents of Massachusetts, we can foster housing self-determination.

Equity: By encouraging a leader-full organization with everyone on an equal footing, we can promote equity among members and throughout the community.

What guides us:

Consensus decision-making: Everyone's voice counts.

Transparency: Trust depends on open sharing of organizational operations.

Political imagination: Changing the status quo requires pushing boundaries.

Communication/outreach: Education is key, and knowledge is power.

News Bits, Other Meetings, Upcoming Activities

Alliances are being forged, the union is growing, and our reach is expanding



Our mission is to empower people to stand up for their legal rights and foster solidarity across the city of Easthampton and the surrounding community.

In the press:

We're making a name for ourselves at the national level. In a recent article in *The Shoestring*, Dusty Christensen compares ETU to KC Tenants in Kansas City, Missouri, noting that citywide unions are rare. A virtual meeting with KC Tenants is being planned.

Meetings in Easthampton:

The City Council usually meets on the first and third Wednesday of the month at 6 pm. However, in April, meetings are on the 8th and 22nd (second and fourth Wednesdays).

The Rent Study Committee meets monthly. They're also holding listening sessions in March and April, where residents can learn more about rent stabilization policy and review case studies from other states and cities, as well as share their housing stories, build union visibility, and provide direct input on policy design. Contact kmcquaid@easthamptonma.gov for more info.

Other meetings:

The monthly Westfield Police meeting for landlords is on April 7 at 5:45 at the Shaker Farms Country Club. Guest speakers from the Hampden County Sheriff's Department will be giving "valuable information and insights relevant to landlords and property managers." This info is also valuable for tenants.

"The question is not whether tenants will revolt, it's whether that revolt will be from a place of desperation or from a place of power."

Tara Raghuveer, KC Tenants

More connections:

In February, Mona and Ilene met with the tenant group at Windfield, a senior complex in Hadley. They're struggling with rising rents and poor property maintenance.

At the end of March, Kelley and Ilene are going to New York City to connect with National Mobilization Against Sweatshops, a workers collective in Chinatown. A core part of their work is protecting communities from displacement.

"Things will only improve when the people – all of us – say to authorities, 'I will hold you responsible.' We should all be showing up at city council meetings, lighting up every community with activism and mobilization." – Erin Brockovich