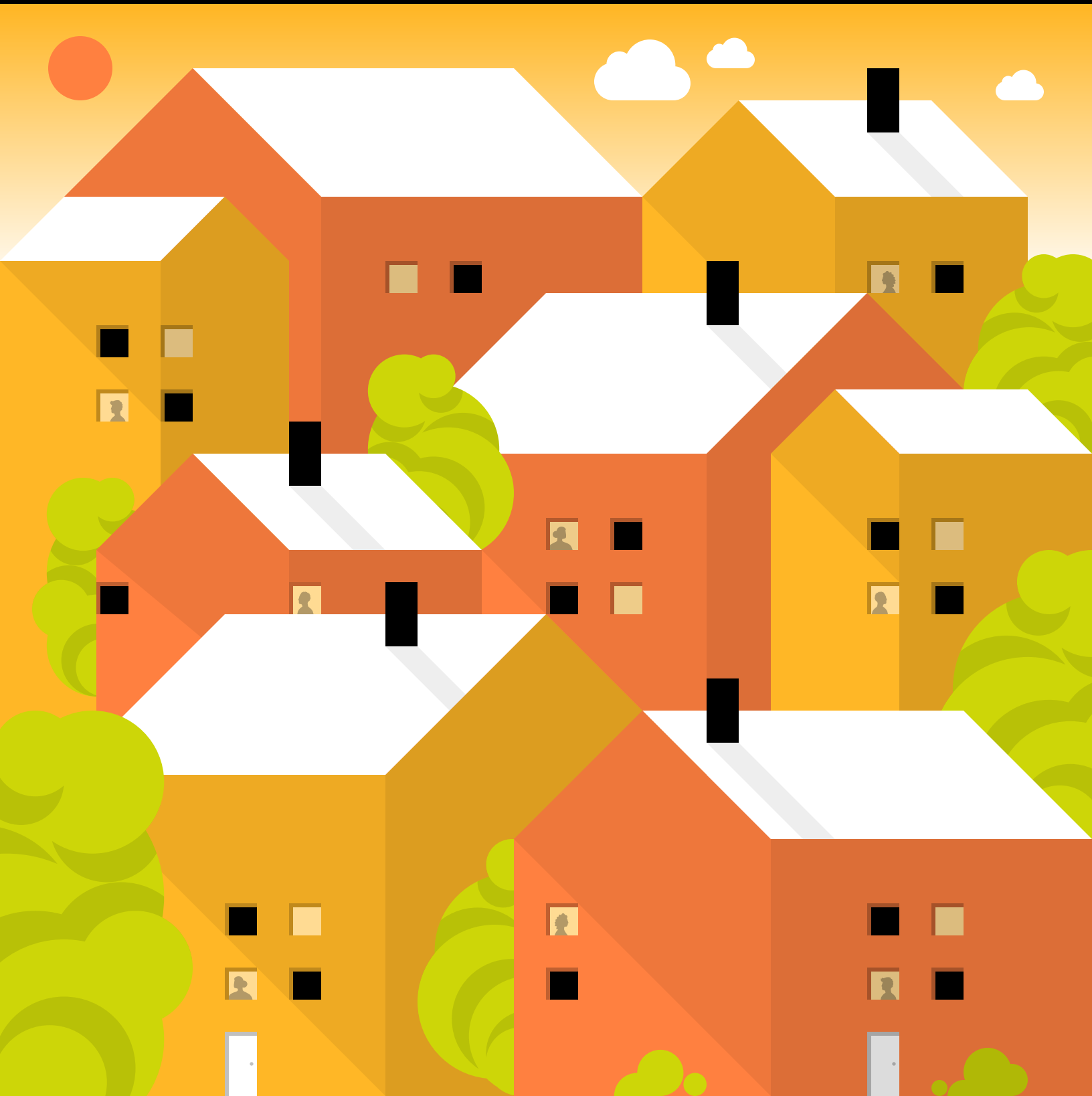


OUR HOMES, OUR FUTURE

Rent Control Explainer for Electeds

Tram Hoang and Amee Chew | July 2025



About This Report

This report was produced as a collaboration between PolicyLink, Popular Democracy in Action, and the Right to the City Alliance.

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Popular Democracy in Action and its affiliates know that everyday people have the power to change the world. We upend politics as usual to forge a representative, multiracial government and society where we all thrive, no exceptions.

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The Right to the City Alliance (RTTC) is a national alliance of more than 70 community-based racial, economic, gender, and environmental justice organizations growing grassroots power to halt gentrification and displacement, and build democratic, just, and sustainable communities.

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In recent months, deliberate attacks on democracy have reduced federal agencies' capacity to enforce laws critical to housing and human rights. The repeal of hard-fought consumer protections has made people across the US increasingly vulnerable to predatory and profit-seeking corporate tendencies. Yet in rural communities and cities in every corner of the country, housing justice movements and residents are calling for rent control to protect tenants from skyrocketing rents and combat the unchecked profiteering taking over communities.

Leveraging this powerful yet underutilized tool could have tremendous impact: **if rent control were to become a reality in the 45 states without existing policies, 31.5 million additional renter households would be stabilized.** Of the households who stand to benefit from expanding rent control, 19.7 million (or 60 percent) would be low-income, and 14.7 million (or 47 percent) would be households of color. Expanding rent control would not only empower tenants but lift up communities and help advance racial and economic justice.

Rent control is enormously popular among voters, across party affiliation and housing tenure.

From Arizona to Pennsylvania and New York to Washington, overwhelming majorities of both renters and homeowners are in favor of rent control; 78 percent of renters and 67 percent of homeowners registered to vote in swing states said they were more likely to vote for politicians who support it.¹ At the local and state levels, elected officials who back rent control are winning their elections.

Rent control helps boost local economies. In 2022, if all renters in the US had not experienced rent burden, they would have seen an additional \$173 billion in disposable income. And when renters thrive, so do their communities. Low-income households are more likely to spend added income, feeding money back into the local economy to generate business activity, employment, and tax revenue.

Rent control works: it improves stability and affordability for tenants. Over other policy options, it has the advantages of speed and scale: rent control has the potential to immediately reach large swaths of residents, especially marginalized residents. It also has far-ranging community-wide impacts because housing stability and affordability are directly linked to improved health, educational attainment, economic vitality, social safety nets, civic engagement, environmental benefits, and more.

Renter Nation

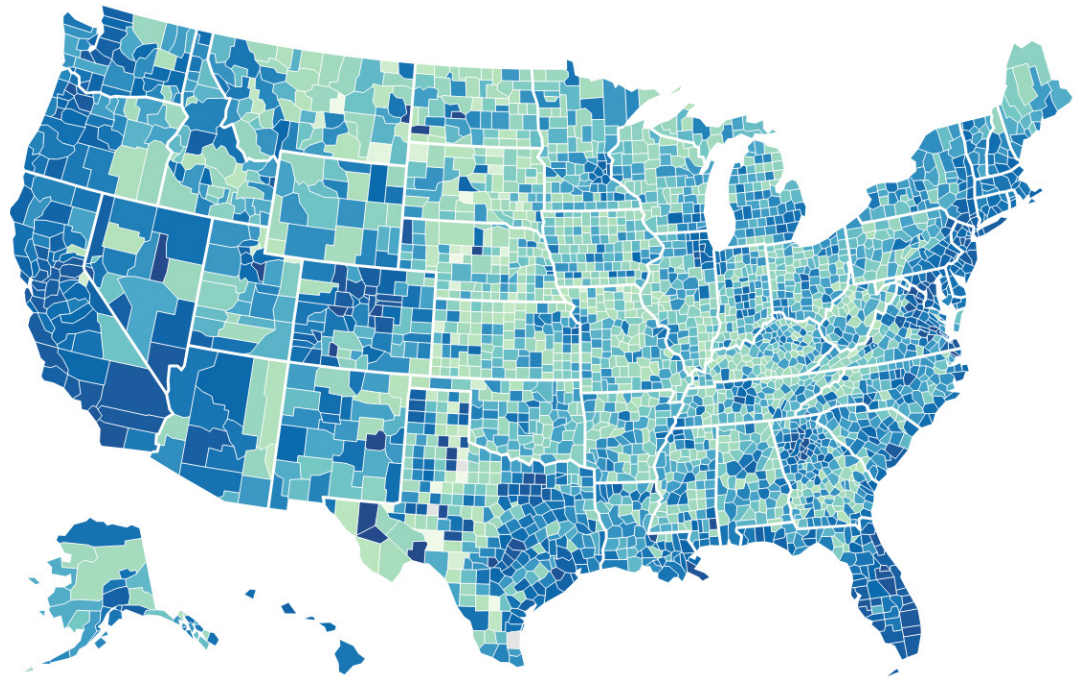
All over the country, renters are paying too much of their income on housing costs.

- In 2022, 21.3 million renter households, or half of all renter households, were forced to pay unaffordable rent.²
- Among low-income renter households, housing insecurity skyrockets. Fifteen million or 82 percent of renter households making below 200 percent of the federal poverty level were forced to pay over 30 percent of their income on rent. A staggering 55 percent of low-income renters were forced to dedicate the majority of their income to rent alone.³
- In 2021, 44 percent of rural renters were considered rent-burdened.⁴

FIGURE 1

Share of renter households earning < \$50,000/year that are rent-burdened (paying more than 30% of income on housing costs) by counties, 2023

Legend



Source: PolicyLink analysis of 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA; Created with Datawrapper.

Note: Data for 2023 represent a 2019 through 2023 average.

Key Terms

- **Rent control:** Though the term is sometimes used to refer to “first-generation rent regulation” policies (e.g., rent ceilings, rent freezes) implemented by the US Office of Price Administration during World War II, “rent control” is now often used interchangeably with “rent stabilization” to describe rent regulations more broadly.⁵
- **Rent stabilization:** Often used to describe “second-generation rent regulation” or “moderate rent control” policies that limit rent increases by implementing a predictable schedule restricting the maximum rent increase each year. To be effective, rent stabilization must be paired with “just cause” eviction laws and other tenant protections.
- **Vacancy control:** An element of policy design that ties rent control to the unit, so that even when tenants change, the maximum annual rent increase applies to that unit between tenancies.
- **Just cause (or “good cause”) eviction laws:** Tenant protections designed to prevent arbitrary, retaliatory, or discriminatory evictions by requiring that landlords can only evict renters for a “just cause,” such as nonpayment of rent, repeated lease violations, illegal activity (provable in a court of law), or plans for immediate owner-occupancy. Some just or good cause laws, such as in New York State, also aim to prevent evictions via unreasonable rent increases.

Throughout this report, the authors use the term “rent control” due to its broad recognition. It does not refer to a specific policy, but rather, rent regulation policies more broadly.

If Rent Control Expands Nationally, Who Gains?

Rent control regulations can have tremendous reach and impact, benefiting millions of renters across the nation—and especially households that are particularly vulnerable. Ambitious rent control policies without limitations on the type or age of housing stock have the potential to cover millions of US households. Notably, we estimate that if broad rent control policies were implemented in the 45 states without existing regulations, then 31.5 million renter households would be stabilized.⁶

BY THE NUMBERS

Who would benefit from expanding rent control?

31.5 million

renter households would be stabilized. Of those:

19.7 million

would be low-income

7.6 million

would be extremely low-income

14.7 million

would be households of color

Expanding rent control would disproportionately benefit low-income households and Black, Latinx, and multiracial households.

Source: PolicyLink analysis of 2023 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Data and Mapping Tool, Data Version AFFHT0007.

Low-income renter households would overwhelmingly benefit from this expansion of rent control. Specifically, 19.7 million or 60 percent, of renter households who would be covered are considered low-income, making below 80 percent of their state median household income. And 7.6 million, or 23 percent, of covered households are considered extremely low-income, meaning they earn below 30 percent of the state median household income. While nearly one-quarter of stabilized renter households are extremely low-income, these households only make up 10 percent of all households in the 45 states. Rent control policies would protect these renters from excessive rent increases that threaten their housing and financial security.

Rent control policies are more likely to benefit Black, Latinx, and multiracial renter households. With nationwide rent control, 14.7 million households of color would be covered, constituting 46 percent of the households covered. Thus, Black, Latinx, and multiracial renters would disproportionately benefit: over one in five eligible renter households have a Black householder, compared to only 13 percent of all households.

Rent Control is Popular

Rent stabilization is popular among both renters and homeowners, and polls show it is a critical issue for winning votes in election campaigns. Yet politicians have not fully harnessed the potential championing rent stabilization offers in winning over voters.

- A 2024 poll of 2,500 registered voters in the swing states of Arizona, California, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Michigan found that 70 percent—and 78 percent of renters who were registered to vote—said they were more likely to vote for a candidate who supports rent stabilization.⁷
- In the same poll, 67 percent of homeowners registered to vote stated they were more likely to vote for a candidate who supports rent stabilization. In fact, rent stabilization was the most popular policy—the most likely to attract voters—out of a variety of housing proposals ranging from affordable housing construction to vouchers and other tenant protections. Respondents expressed they were most likely to vote for a candidate supporting rent stabilization, compared to other housing policies.⁸
- Likewise, a 2024 survey commissioned by Redfin of over 1,800 US residents found that 82 percent support rent caps. It found that 86 percent of renters, 78 percent of homeowners, and 79 percent of Republicans agree with rent caps.⁹
- A 2023 poll of 1,000 registered voters nationwide revealed that a majority are concerned about housing affordability, and 69 percent have personally experienced housing instability, such as trouble paying rent or moving frequently due to cost. A majority of 79 percent supported federal limits on rent increases, and 71 percent supported federal rent control measures. Most, including most Republicans and Independents, said they were more likely to vote for a candidate who supported “policies to protect renters.”¹⁰
- In New York State, a 2024 survey of over 4,700 residents living in areas across the state that have *not* adopted rent stabilization found that the measure is wildly popular among diverse constituents: 81 percent of respondents, including 75 percent of Republicans and 89 percent of suburban residents, support implementing rent stabilization in their community.¹¹

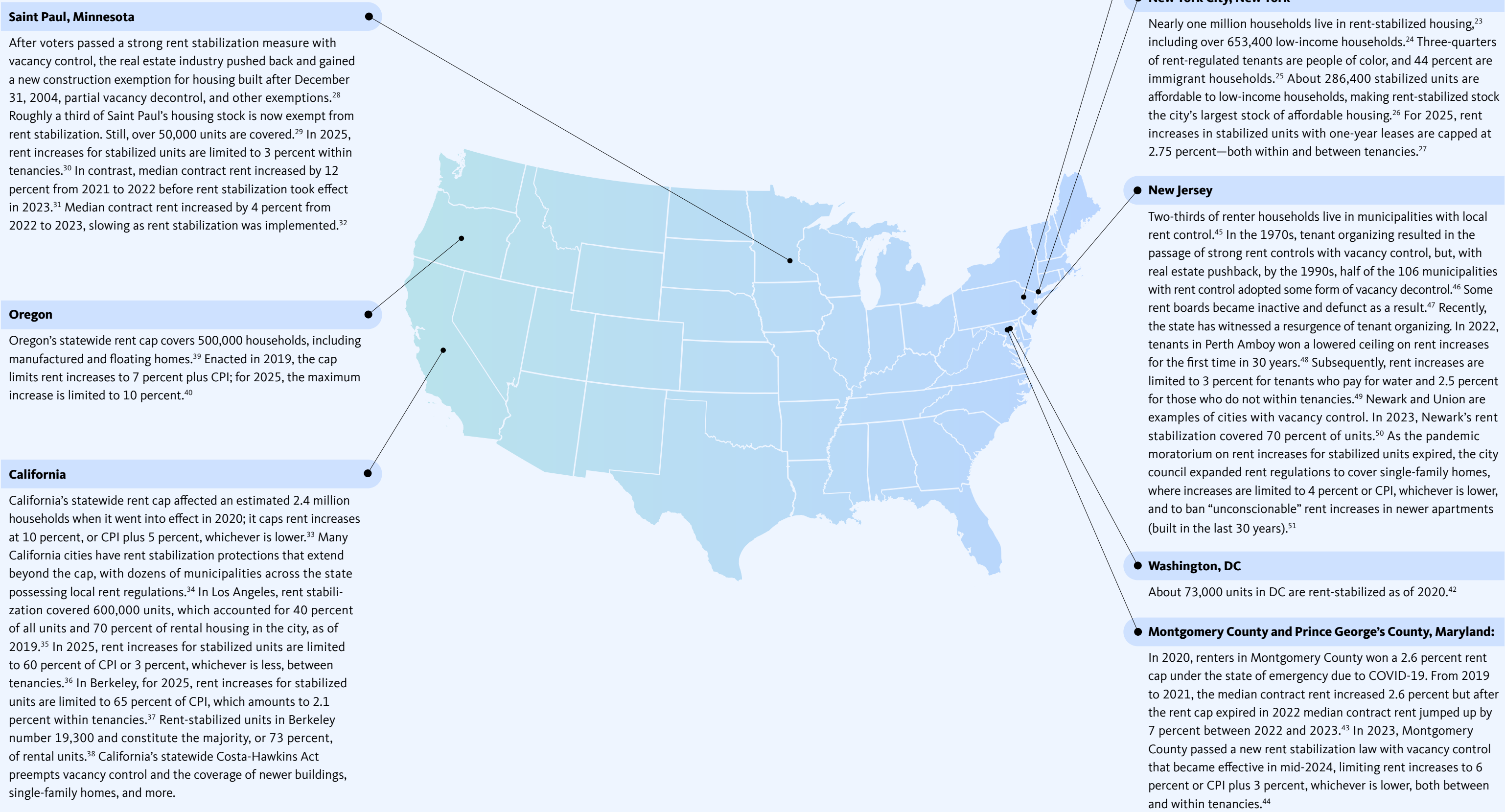
But while registered voters have ranked the cost of rent and housing as a top personal concern, most reported they had not been hearing politicians address this issue much, or at all, in the lead-up to the 2024 elections.¹² Currently, renters are less likely to vote than homeowners but, if politicians were to speak more to their issues, it could motivate more renters to come to the polls, with dramatic impacts on election results.

Politicians are successfully winning office by championing rent control.

- In 2024, New York State Assemblymember Sarahana Shrestha handily won reelection to a second term on two-thirds of the vote in her Hudson Valley district, running on a comprehensive housing platform that included bringing rent stabilization upstate.¹³
- In Brooklyn, tenant organizer Marcela Mitaynes won election to the New York State Assembly in 2020, narrowly defeating an incumbent in the primary by making housing issues central.¹⁴ She won reelection again in 2024 by a large majority. With a background as an immigrant and renter who personally suffered eviction from a rent-stabilized apartment, Mitaynes is committed to strengthening rent stabilization by eliminating a loophole for capital improvements and renovations and fully funding enforcement.¹⁵
- In Saint Paul, Minnesota, following a 2021 voter referendum that successfully approved rent stabilization, the 2023 elections flipped its city council to become the most diverse in history.¹⁶ Councilmember Mitra Jalali, an early champion of rent stabilization and the first renter elected to the city council in 2018, was reelected by her constituents and elected council president by her peers.¹⁷ Councilmember Nelsie Yang, who publicly supports rent stabilization, was also reelected, and new Councilmember Hwa Jeong Kim won election on a platform that included strengthening rent stabilization and eliminating vacancy decontrol.¹⁸
- In Boston, Michelle Wu became the first woman and first person of color to be elected mayor in 2021, winning two-thirds of the vote.¹⁹ A champion for affordable housing, she was the only candidate to support bringing rent stabilization back to Boston.²⁰ Massachusetts preempts rent control at the state level, and as mayor, Wu has advanced a home rule petition and proposal to cap rent at CPI plus 6 percent, or 10 percent total, whichever is lower.²¹
- In Maryland, renters organized to make rent stabilization a key issue in the 2022 elections. They succeeded in electing a wave of progressive candidates who supported rent stabilization and then helped successfully pass permanent rent regulations in Montgomery and Prince George's counties.
- In Pasadena, California, City Councilmember Felicia Williams became the voice of landlord opposition to implementing a rent stabilization measure that voters passed in 2022. Williams was soundly defeated in her 2024 reelection campaign.
- In New York City, Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani won the 2025 Democratic mayoral primary by centering the skyrocketing cost of living, including making a promise to freeze rents for four years for rent-stabilized tenants.²² The call for a rent freeze came from the New York State Tenant Bloc, a 501(c)(4) launched by the Housing Justice for All coalition, which mobilized tens of thousands of rent-stabilized tenants to come out to vote for candidates who have committed to freezing rent. This is a power that New York City mayors hold through their appointment of Rent Control Guidelines board members.

FIGURE 2

Rent control works



Tenants Gain Stability and Affordability

Rent control is a critical tool for alleviating our housing affordability emergency. It is a necessary policy to stop the bleeding—preventing homelessness and evictions—as longer-term solutions, like increasing the stock of social and truly affordable housing, are put in place. Rent control helps keep tenants in place and preserve existing lower-cost housing on a large scale.⁵²

Nationwide, since 2013, we have lost over 2.5 million lower-priced homes, renting for below \$600 per month—in large part due to landlords' rent increases.⁵³ Moreover, one in four renter households can only afford rents in this price bracket.⁵⁴ Yet we have not built enough affordable housing to compensate for this hemorrhage. In 2025, developers are projected to complete only 78,300 subsidized homes aimed at lower-income households.⁵⁵ Rent control is the largest source of housing for low-income people—housing more low-income families than other kinds of housing stock—in some cities where it exists.⁵⁶ Thus, it has the potential to be a significant source of affordable housing in these localities.⁵⁷ Rent control is a smart and pragmatic policy for safeguarding the currently lower-cost and affordable housing we do have.

Rent control works: it is effective at immediately improving housing stability and affordability for current tenants.⁵⁸ Tenants living in rent-controlled units move less frequently and are less likely to experience destabilizing forced moves. They pay substantially less than tenants in nonregulated units: e.g., \$3,650 less per year in Los Angeles, \$3,780 in San José, \$6,000 in New York City, over \$6,440 in Santa Monica, and \$18,000 in high-cost Manhattan.⁵⁹ The savings—and protection against eviction—are even greater when stabilized rents are compared to market-rate-asking rents advertised for vacant units.

Tenants living in rent-controlled units move less frequently and are less likely to be forced to move.⁶⁰ For instance, immediately after Los Angeles adopted rent control, the share of renters who moved in the last year decreased by 37 percent. What's more, moving rates dropped the most for Black and Latinx renters.⁶¹

Rent stabilization helps people stay in their homes longer.⁶² In New York City, tenants in rent-regulated units were three times as likely as those in market-rate units to have lived in their homes for 20 years or more (23 percent compared with 7 percent). In Manhattan, they were 10 times as likely to have that length of tenure (35 percent compared with 3 percent).⁶³

The stability created by rent regulations disproportionately benefits low-income households, people of color, seniors, and families with children, who are most at risk of displacement, forced moves, and their negative consequences.⁶⁴ Rent stabilization is a main factor allowing low-income households of color, from San Francisco to New York City, to continue living in their gentrifying neighborhoods.⁶⁵

Rent stabilization helps preserve affordability in gentrifying neighborhoods. During the late 1990s, rent for unregulated apartments in New York City's gentrifying neighborhoods increased by an average of 43 percent—compared to 11 percent for rent stabilized apartments in these neighborhoods.⁶⁶

The immediate savings that rent control provides tenants are critical. Rent control's predictable and more affordable rents help protect tenants against homelessness. In the longer-term, strong rent control has allowed tenants to afford healthcare and child-rearing costs, to save for retirement, to plan for the future—and to make important life choices for their long-term well-being, such as changing jobs or careers, going to school while working, choosing fulfilling but lower-paying work, or starting a small business.⁶⁷ Rent control can support tenants in achieving professional and economic mobility, for instance by completing schooling while working, or saving for opportunities.⁶⁸ Too often tenants are caught up simply trying to secure the present. Rent control provides tenants the financial flexibility to plan and pursue better futures.

Rent stabilization is most effective, however, when it is strong: with vacancy control, and permitted maximum increases below the rate of inflation. Vacancy control means rent increases are limited both between and within tenancies. In the 1970s, many localities initially adopted rent control with vacancy control, but in the 1990s, the real estate industry fought to roll this back through statewide pre-emptions that imposed vacancy *decontrol*. Under vacancy decontrol, landlords can increase rents without limit when tenants move out.

Numerous studies have tracked the benefits of vacancy control to renters, and the harms of decontrol.⁶⁹ For instance:

- In Springfield, New Jersey, rents increased an average of 56 percent after vacancy decontrol.⁷⁰
- In Santa Monica, with vacancy control, rents for 83 percent of controlled units were affordable to households that were low, very low, and extremely low-income. But after vacancy decontrol, less than 4 percent of stabilized rental units still remain affordable to these households.⁷¹
- In California, vacancy decontrol contributed to the displacement of Black renters. Before vacancy decontrol, the share of Black renters increased in California cities with strong rent control. But after vacancy deregulations, the share of Black renters decreased, as landlords priced out Black tenants.⁷²

Lack of vacancy control is linked to a higher eviction rate since rents are less affordable, and because landlords are incentivized to push tenants out so they can increase the rent without limit.⁷³

An appropriately low rent cap is also critical to ensuring rent stabilization is effective. Capping allowed rent increases below the rate of inflation better benefits precarious tenants, generally without hurting the returns of landlords:

- Landlord costs typically increase at less than the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI); studies have found that a third to half of landlord costs were unaffected by inflation. Thus, a rent increase equal to the CPI generally overcompensates landlords for their increased costs.⁷⁴
- A recent study in Minneapolis found that limiting rent increases to 75 percent of CPI would allow returns to landlords comparable to those of average and median rent increases in the uncontrolled market. Limiting rent increases to CPI plus 3 percent would allow returns comparable to high-end rent increases in the existing market; and a rent cap of CPI plus 7 percent would allow profits far in excess of what landlords actually achieved at the top of the market.⁷⁵

Rent Control Has Immediate, Widespread, and Cost-Effective Impacts

Rent control can take effect almost immediately with swift impact. Because rent regulations cover private rental housing, they have tremendous reach and can be implemented at a far lower cost than other affordable housing strategies.

Speed and Scale

Rent control's speed and scale are unrivaled by other policy options. Rent control has key practical advantages: it can take effect almost immediately, and, because rent regulations cover private rental housing, they have tremendous reach. Rent control is unmatched in its capacity to protect a vast swath of low-income renters at risk of eviction, displacement, and homelessness.⁷⁶

In U.S. cities where it exists, rent-stabilized stock can house more low-income people than public or subsidized housing projects. Where rent control is strong, it can serve as the largest source of affordable housing for low-income households.

- In New York City, rent-regulated stock is home to nearly one million families.⁷⁷ Over triple the number of low-income households live in rent-regulated stock, compared to the number in public and subsidized housing projects combined, and roughly twice as many extremely low-income households live in rent-regulated stock, than in public and other subsidized projects.⁷⁸ While most New York City renter households pay unaffordable rents, according to 2023 data, most rent-stabilized households are *not* rent-burdened.⁷⁹ Moreover, approximately 286,400 low-income households in rent-stabilized housing spend an affordable share of their income on rent. These affordably housed, low-income families in rent-stabilized housing exceed the number of low-income households (205,300) in public and subsidized rental housing projects.⁸⁰
- In San Francisco, the number of homes stabilized by rent regulation—173,000 units—is three times the number of affordable units provided through all other rental housing programs combined.⁸¹

Expanding rent control would also benefit the increasing number of renters living in suburbs, small cities, and rural communities. In 2017, single-family rental homes represented nearly three-quarters of the rural rental stock nationwide, while mobile homes represented another 20 percent.⁸² Both types of properties are typically lacking or are exempted from any rent regulations, while increasingly falling victim to real estate speculation. Low-income Black and Brown people often reside in single-family rental and manufactured housing, targeted by corporate landlords for price gouging and eviction, making rent regulations all the more necessary.⁸³ Many localities in California and New Jersey limit rent increases for manufactured homes, and these protections can be strengthened.⁸⁴

Cost-Effectiveness

In the wake of federal housing cuts, state and local governments are cash-strapped and in need of additional resources for affordable housing and other services. Rent control is an excellent tool because it can be implemented at little cost—and at far lower cost than other affordable housing strategies.⁸⁵

Rent control regulations are administered by rent boards (sometimes alongside state-level agencies, as in New York). Rent boards are fully or largely financially self-sufficient. The rent boards in Berkeley and Santa Monica, for example, do not draw from their cities' general funds; instead, they cover all operating costs from per-unit fees (shared by landlords and tenants) that are set yearly to match projected expenses. Santa Monica raised its rent board budget of over \$5 million in 2018 by charging landlords a monthly registration fee of \$16.50 per unit; with this capacity, the board employs 26 full-time staff and oversees over 27,000 units.⁸⁶ In the short term, rent boards may have limited startup costs, such as in Richmond, California, which totaled roughly \$1.1 million for its first year.⁸⁷

Other affordable housing policies are far more expensive than rent control. For example, in 2013, Berkeley's program stabilized 19,000 units for \$4 million. In comparison, it would have cost \$20 million to provide housing vouchers to 2,200 low-income renter households or \$220 million to build or rehabilitate 2,200 affordable units through a housing trust fund.⁸⁸ While the construction of deeply affordable housing is direly needed, by preserving affordability on a widespread basis, rent control helps local governments stretch limited funds for subsidized housing much further.

The costs of rent stabilization programs are offset by the relief they offer to city budgets strained by homelessness and the housing crisis. The cost of leaving a person out on the street is over \$35,000 per year—money spent mainly on publicly funded crisis services such as emergency medical treatment.⁸⁹ The Urban Institute estimated that housing insecurity and eviction cost cities millions annually in homeless services, unpaid utilities, and more—up to \$157 million of Chicago's total budget of \$7.7 billion, for example.⁹⁰

Rent regulation is not only a short-term, stopgap measure—it provides vital, long-term benefits. When renters thrive, they lift up their communities.

Community Wealth Building and Stronger Local Economies

Rent control supports more inclusive prosperity. While landlords continue to profit, rent control supports the financial security of renters, channeling resources toward forms of economic growth that are more likely to create jobs and bolster small businesses compared to real estate speculation. Employers also benefit from these effects since stable housing increases employee productivity and retention.

Widespread rent control would have the following impacts:

- **Fighting speculation on our homes.** Rent stabilization helps to counter profiteering and predatory profit-seeking, such as that by corporate landlords which target low-income communities of color for rent hikes and evictions.⁹¹ By curbing bad actors and dampening their expansion in the real estate market, it helps level the playing field for landlords, developers, and investors who are good actors.
- **More money in renters' pockets, boosting local economies.** In 2022, if all renters paid 30 percent of their income or less on housing, they would have an additional \$173 billion—approximately \$8,100 per rent-burdened household.⁹² The greatest gains would go to renters of color, reducing racial inequity. Moreover, when low-income households gain income, they are more likely than higher-income households to spend these extra funds, stimulating local business activity, employment, and tax revenues.⁹³
- **Decreased inflation as rent increases slow.** Rising rents and housing costs are a significant driver to inflation.⁹⁴ The cost of rent is a component of inflation, or consumer spending, that hits lower-income households the hardest. By slowing the increase of rents, rent control can help dampen inflation, particularly as it matters most for working-class and lower-income people.
- **Low-wage workers can continue to live in higher-cost cities and benefit from wage increases.** Although 22 states and over 40 cities [raised](#) their [minimum wages](#) in 2024, rising rents and resident displacement (often to outlying areas with lower minimum wages) prohibit workers from realizing these hard-fought gains. Rent control is an essential complement to economic justice policies that “raise the floor” for low-wage workers, such as measures for living wages, paid leave, and wage theft prevention. In addition, rent control helps those who perform undervalued care labor—such as social workers, teachers, nurses, childcare providers, and low-wage service workers—continue to live in high-cost cities.

- **Small businesses can remain in neighborhoods threatened by gentrification.** Small local businesses that rely on lower-income clientele often struggle to stay in business when neighborhoods gentrify and their customer base dwindles.⁹⁵ Yet, these small businesses are at the frontlines of hiring local, low-income people of color who often face discrimination from larger chains. Rent control helps to keep their customer base and workforce in place while boosting their spending power.
- **Improved employee performance and retention.** The largest metro areas are responsible for most of the country's economic growth, but unchecked housing costs limit their potential.⁹⁶ Housing instability can make it challenging to find and retain employment: people who experience eviction, for example, are up to 22 percent more likely to be laid off, even with a stable employment history.⁹⁷ Displacement and the negative health impacts of housing instability lead to absenteeism, reduced productivity, and higher turnover—significant costs for employers. Unaffordable rents also hamper firms from attracting and retaining employees.

Healthier People and Communities

Homes should be places of shelter and refuge and are the foundation of health. Access to stable, safe, and affordable housing has a profound impact on mental and physical health.⁹⁸ Stable housing enables people to nourish themselves and loved ones and be part of the social, economic, and political fabric of communities.

Rent control helps create conditions for better health. When complemented by a broader set of health-protective housing policies, including just cause eviction and enforceable habitability laws, rent control can ensure that our families, neighbors, and communities can access housing and health that benefits all of us. Research indicates that rent control lowers housing costs and increases housing stability—conditions that support health:⁹⁹

- **Reduced financial strain relating to unaffordable rent, which harms health.** A 2018 study of more than 22,000 low-income renter households in five cities found that, controlling for other factors, just being behind in rent was associated with poor caregiver health, maternal depressive symptoms, and increased child lifetime hospitalizations.¹⁰⁰ National research has found that a 10-point increase in rent burden was associated with an 8 percent higher risk of death.¹⁰¹ People who struggle to pay rent are twice as likely to take sick days, and their children are at risk of developmental delays.¹⁰² Furthermore, people plagued by worries about affording their housing are three times more likely to be in frequent mental distress compared to those with stable housing.¹⁰³
- **Fewer unhealthy trade-offs due to unaffordability.** Rent-burdened families suffer worse health outcomes due to a lack of funds for nutritious food, medicine, and health care.¹⁰⁴ When low-income families instead pay rents they can afford, they are able to spend four times as much on health care and 50 percent more on food compared to their severely cost-burdened peers—making them more likely to obtain health care and necessary medication.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, rent control helps protect domestic violence survivors since access to affordable independent housing is a decisive factor in helping women leave abusive situations, recover from PTSD, and avoid revictimization and homelessness.¹⁰⁶

- **Reduced catastrophic health impacts from displacement and homelessness.** Displacement is a public health crisis; even the threat of displacement harms health, and the health consequences of forced moves are long-term.¹⁰⁷ A study of 12,882 New York City residents found that, controlling for other factors, those displaced from gentrifying neighborhoods had higher rates of emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and mental health-related visits compared to their counterparts who remained—or who lived in low-income neighborhoods that were not gentrifying.¹⁰⁸ Other studies have found that forced moves are linked to nutritional deficiency, low birth weight and other health challenges for children; they can prove fatal for seniors and those with a disability or chronic illness.¹⁰⁹ Homelessness catastrophically erodes health and increases mortality.¹¹⁰ In contrast, housing stability is linked to better self-rated health, decreased depression and anxiety, and improved conditions for people with mental illness, chronic diseases like HIV/AIDS and diabetes, and substance abuse problems.¹¹¹ Rent increases are a key driver of homelessness. For example, a 5 percent increase in rent could mean 3,000 people becoming homeless in a place like New York City,¹¹² while nationally, a \$100 increase in median rent was associated with a 9 percent increase in homelessness.¹¹³ Because rent control helps prevent evictions and homelessness,¹¹⁴ it helps prevent their harms to public health.
- **Reduced environmental health risks through better-maintained buildings.** When accompanied by mechanisms for tenants to hold landlords accountable for maintenance, rent control can help enforce critical health and safety standards, thus reducing hazards like lead and mold, which are linked to asthma and other illnesses.¹¹⁵
- **Community-level health benefits from housing stability,** including community cohesion, which is associated with improved mental and physical health.¹¹⁶ Stability promotes health for children and seniors aging in place.¹¹⁷ Stable housing also allows tenants to build organizing power to improve overall living conditions.¹¹⁸
- **Greater health equity.** Black and immigrant communities, single mothers, and people with disabilities are disproportionately affected by rent burden and evictions, making rent control a critical policy for promoting health equity.¹¹⁹ Additionally, rent control discourages corporate profiteering, which could otherwise drive up housing costs, evictions, and poor housing quality, exacerbating health inequities.¹²⁰

Improved Educational Outcomes

- **Increased school attendance, promoting educational attainment.** Children who move frequently have more absences, a lower likelihood of finishing school, lower test scores, and educational delays.¹²¹ With every move, a student loses an estimated three to six months of education, resulting in delayed literacy and skills.¹²² In contrast, students who experienced zero moves are over 10 percent more likely to graduate than those who moved three times during their childhood.¹²³
- **Teacher retention.** Rent control can also help teachers who are increasingly underpaid and rent-burdened to continue in their profession. A national survey found that one in four former teachers would consider returning to teaching if offered housing incentives.¹²⁴

Climate-Friendly Development

- **Equitable transit-oriented development.** Anti-displacement policies, including rent control, are necessary to realize the equity and environmental benefits of transit-oriented development. Low-income households use transit more frequently than wealthier households. When transit-rich areas gentrify and low-income households are replaced by higher-income households, transit ridership decreases, while car usage increases.¹²⁵ Those same displaced low-income workers often commute longer distances, typically by car, because they remain tied to jobs and services located in the urban centers from which they were displaced.¹²⁶
- **Disaster-response and climate resilience without displacement.** Solid rent regulations are necessary for preventing displacement after disasters when landlords and speculative investors may take advantage of the lack of housing to price gouge. Rent control also helps prevent the costs of green upgrades from burdening renters by ensuring landlords pay their fair share.¹²⁷

A Stronger and More Inclusive Democracy

- **Stronger civic engagement.** Stable, affordable housing allows renters additional time and resources to participate politically, volunteer, and give back to their communities. A study in Atlanta found that gentrification is linked to decreased voter turnout among historically disenfranchised groups.¹²⁸ A national study in 2023 also links evictions to decreased voter turnout.¹²⁹
- **More resilient communities of color.** Rent control can anchor communities of color in place, guarding their political representation, cultural and civic institutions, and small businesses. When allowed to build wealth that stays in their communities, historically Black neighborhoods have been vibrant cultural centers and bulwarks against job discrimination. Immigrant enclaves connect new migrants to culturally and linguistically specific supports, services, and job opportunities.¹³⁰
- **Healthier safety nets.** Rent control brings stability, which helps renters establish long-term roots. When renters can stay in their homes, they deepen social ties with their neighbors and local communities. They develop safety networks they can rely on, such as nearby friends who can support them with health care, childcare, or other needs.¹³¹

Rent control's main purposes are to stabilize rents, combat rampant speculation in the rental market, and balance the power relationship between landlords and tenants. It is also the subject of a great deal of public debate, most of which does not focus on what the policy is designed to do: stabilize rents. In a parallel example, we would not assess minimum wage as a policy by how many jobs it creates so why would we assess rent control by how many units it builds? Informed by empirical evidence, we already know that rent control works to increase housing stability for tenants who live in regulated units and improve overall neighborhood stability.¹³² Below, we address the misinformation and distractions that interfere with moving people who are newer to the issue.

Rent Control Does Not Decrease Housing Production

The real estate industry pushes an anti-rent control narrative focused on its potential indirect effects. Using the “Economics 101” theory, opponents suggest that any limit on prices will dampen incentives to build more housing, which reduces supply and increases rents.¹³³

- An equally valid economic theory noted by economist Gary Painter says that rent control can *increase* supply in tight rental markets (where developers and landlords have market power). Why? Because, if housing developers cannot generate extra profit through rent increases, they have an incentive to build more units.¹³⁴
- In general, other factors—including overall market conditions and zoning—have far more influence over new housing supply than the presence of rent regulations.¹³⁵ Multiple longitudinal studies of rent control in New Jersey, as well as other studies nationwide, have found no negative impact on construction rates.¹³⁶

Rent Control Allows Landlords Fair Returns on Their Investments

Rather than causing landlords undue hardship, even strong rent controls allow landlords fair profits.

- Scenario modeling of rental housing in Minneapolis over a 10-year investment horizon used measures of cash-on-cash return, average annual increase in value, total increase in value, and internal rate of return. It found that rent caps *at and even below* the consumer price index would have allowed industry-standard returns on investment.¹³⁷ This demonstrates that, even in the absence of rent control, landlords were able to increase rents enough to cover operating costs and profit without exceeding theoretical rent caps.

Rent Control Can Help Uphold Habitability Standards When Paired with Effective Code Enforcement

Rent control does not lead to physical distress in buildings, but loopholes can. When strengthened by effective code enforcement and accountability mechanisms, rent control and rent boards can help uphold habitability standards and empower tenants to organize against unhealthy conditions.¹³⁸

- Rent control can provide tenants with leverage to attain improved conditions. In Washington, DC, the share of physically deficient units quickly declined after rent stabilization, and 61 percent of tenants reported an increased willingness to insist on repairs.¹³⁹
- In Boston, the loosening of rent control fueled gentrification and building improvements that were largely cosmetic.¹⁴⁰
- In New Jersey, rent control resulted in no negative impact on plumbing, a critical public health and safety issue.¹⁴¹
- Deferred maintenance and habitability are issues that tenants face across the country, regardless of whether they live in jurisdictions with rent control.

Small Landlords Do Not Need to be Exempt from Rent Control

The anti-rent control narrative often weaponizes the vague concept of “mom-and-pop” landlords to exempt large swaths of housing from tenant protections—or not pass them at all. Opponents make claims that “mom-and-pop” landlords are unable to absorb risk or lost rental income, cannot bear the burden of regulation, and are more likely to leave the rental market.¹⁴² But, to be clear: all landlords, regardless of size, operate their businesses in a regulated market. The purpose of rent control is to prevent predatory profit-seeking behavior, and no business entity, regardless of size, should be allowed to operate outside of reasonable regulations.

- In 2018, 10.3 million individual US tax filers reported owning rental property, representing 6.7 percent of filers. Collectively, they reported over \$350 billion in rental income.¹⁴³
- An analysis of almost 4,000 landlords in Seattle, Washington, found no evidence that tenant protection laws drove small landlords out of the rental market. (In this study, landlords were categorized as “small” if they owned or managed one to four units.) Furthermore, the research suggested that those smaller landlords utilize management practices that are broadly similar to those employed by landlords with larger rental portfolios.¹⁴⁴
- Small landlords often house extremely vulnerable tenants who should not be denied protection.¹⁴⁵
- Even landlords with small portfolios are profitable. A case study on Bay Area elected officials analyzed Form 700 tax disclosures filed in 2020, revealing that electeds who owned two to seven rental properties reported receiving rental income amounts ranging from \$10,000–\$650,000.¹⁴⁶

Supply Alone cannot Solve Our Affordable Housing Crisis

The anti-rent control narrative imagines that simply deregulating the housing market will create a surge of housing production that will produce trickle-down affordability for even the lowest-income renters. Such an over-simplification of the housing crisis fails to recognize many realities of our housing system, including the inability of for-profit development to meet our true level of need for affordable housing, as well as the increasingly distorting role of wealthy investors in the housing market.¹⁴⁷

- The overall supply of housing does not guarantee that affordable units will be created, nor does it ensure that low-income households will occupy those units.¹⁴⁸ Investors and developers have no incentive to build affordable housing when they instead profit more from building more expensive housing. Thus, the for-profit market will not and cannot build deeply affordable housing at the scale our communities need. Comprehensive housing strategies must incentivize and finance the construction of deeply affordable housing while leveraging rent control and other policies to protect their affordability in the long term, ultimately working in tandem to increase and maintain an inventory of affordable housing.
- Evidence challenges the assumption that relaxing regulatory constraints would substantially lower housing prices and meaningfully expand housing supply. Examining local housing markets over 40 years using a general demand-and-supply framework, economists concluded that constrained housing supply was relatively unimportant in explaining differences in rising housing prices among US cities.¹⁴⁹
- More and more economists agree: any plan to overhaul the housing market must confront the power that landlords have to raise rents.¹⁵⁰ Increasingly, who owns and operates housing is more important than what is being built. This phenomenon is best demonstrated by the nationwide use of rent-fixing software algorithms that enable landlords to drive up rents, withhold units to create housing scarcity, and maximize profits.¹⁵¹

Removing Rent Control in Massachusetts Harmed Communities

The cities of Boston, Brookline, and Cambridge had rent control until 1994 when it was abolished through a public referendum. After rent control ended, the costs of both rent-controlled and nonregulated units rose dramatically. Between 1991 and 2001, median rents for a two-bedroom apartment doubled, with homelessness nearly doubling as well. Despite the claims of real estate groups that ending rent control would increase construction, the vacancy rate dropped from 4 percent under rent control to 2.9 percent four years after the regulations were abolished.¹⁵²

Principles for Good Policymaking

Designing the most effective rent control policy requires aiming for the North Star goal of universal protections. Whether communities are looking to adopt rent control or strengthen preexisting ordinances, a policy that offers the strongest protections for the maximum coverage of renters is characterized by:

1. The lowest possible annual rent cap to promote long-term housing affordability, preferably at CPI or less.
2. Maximum coverage of homes with a minimal number of policy exemptions allowed based on building-type and new construction status.
3. Vacancy control to protect tenants across tenancies, with a ban on allowing market-rate increases whenever tenants move out.
4. Minimizing loopholes that allow property owners to remove their units from the rent-controlled housing stock, such as condominium conversions and [Ellis Act](#)-type evictions (which permits landlords to evict tenants in order to withdraw their units from the rental market).
5. Minimizing capital improvement charges and other pass-through costs that can push tenants' total rent-burden above the annual legal caps.
6. Just cause eviction to prevent landlords from evicting tenants in order to raise rents. When combined with rent control, just cause protections offer tenants the strongest possible defense from economic displacement and no cause evictions.
7. Tenant-centered program design and implementation.
8. Strong enforcement and implementation mechanisms that do not depend on underresourced tenants initiating legal action to assert their rights.

The skyrocketing cost of rent is a driver of income inequality across the U.S. There is not a state where a minimum wage worker can afford to pay the median rent. The stakes are enormous, and so is the upside: right now, 31.5 million renter households stand to benefit if policymakers say “yes” to rent control in the 45 states without existing policies.

Tenants make up a growing share of the electorate, and are having a meaningful impact on electoral politics.¹⁵³ Renters’ needs have largely been ignored because of the power that landlords have wielded in U.S. state capitols and municipal halls. With multimillion-dollar coffers and control over millions of renters’ homes, landlord lobby industry groups exert enormous influence over housing policy. They leverage their extensive geographic footprints, vast wealth, relationships and capacity to undermine and vilify any efforts to regulate rent increases.¹⁵⁴

At the same time, overwhelming public and political support for rent control continues to grow from the urgency of the crisis, persistent on-the-ground organizing by tenants and allies, and shifting tides in conventional economic thinking. Across the nation, renters are rising up and calling for rent control as an urgent solution to alleviate the housing crisis—and it is time for policy-makers to heed their call to action.

Appendix A

Renter Households Potentially Stabilized with Rent Control Expansion

FIGURE 3
Estimated number and share of renter households stabilized with rent control by rent burden and income

State	Number of renter households stabilized	Number rent burdened	Share rent burdened	Number Low-Income (Household Income <= 80% of state median)	Share Low-Income (Household Income <= 80% of state median)	Number Very Low-Income (Household Income <= 50% of state median)	Share Very Low-Income (Household Income <= 50% of state median)	Number Extremely Low-Income (Household Income <= 30% of state median)	Share Extremely Low-Income (Household Income <= 30% of state median)
All Included States	31,534,161	14,827,824	47%	19,701,923	62%	12,998,001	41%	7,578,680	24%
Alabama	568,846	252,344	44%	361,019	63%	244,684	43%	141,456	25%
Alaska	86,771	35,490	41%	51,787	60%	33,039	38%	18,428	21%
Arizona	921,112	446,092	48%	538,389	58%	332,737	36%	187,678	20%
Arkansas	393,755	161,608	41%	240,860	61%	154,853	39%	87,895	22%
Colorado	777,762	389,151	50%	474,285	61%	304,185	39%	175,352	23%
Connecticut	469,309	233,734	50%	318,014	68%	223,805	48%	139,546	30%
Delaware	108,983	51,706	47%	70,440	65%	46,916	43%	25,918	24%
Florida	2,784,435	1,577,830	57%	1,597,599	57%	1,013,039	36%	566,415	20%
Georgia	1,368,767	671,814	49%	843,545	62%	559,129	41%	318,873	23%
Hawaii	179,060	95,008	53%	102,610	57%	64,716	36%	36,521	20%
Idaho	192,257	84,183	44%	119,821	62%	75,812	39%	39,786	21%
Illinois	1,627,006	745,272	46%	1,032,165	63%	713,062	44%	431,162	27%
Indiana	786,062	354,942	45%	521,012	66%	349,688	44%	206,104	26%
Iowa	366,389	151,697	41%	250,202	68%	169,267	46%	97,347	27%
Kansas	378,116	156,987	42%	243,862	64%	158,856	42%	87,975	23%
Kentucky	549,339	226,029	41%	340,004	62%	229,373	42%	137,029	25%
Louisiana	571,016	283,112	50%	370,882	65%	262,077	46%	160,451	28%
Maine	148,689	65,342	44%	96,975	65%	64,988	44%	39,063	26%
Maryland	752,970	372,036	49%	491,836	65%	330,991	44%	199,281	26%
Massachusetts	1,007,836	496,205	49%	646,807	64%	458,648	46%	301,550	30%
Michigan	1,080,611	516,246	48%	716,248	66%	492,874	46%	297,905	28%

State	Number of renter households stabilized	Number rent burdened	Share rent burdened	Number Low-Income (Household Income <= 80% of state median)	Share Low-Income (Household Income <= 80% of state median)	Number Very Low-Income (Household Income <= 50% of state median)	Share Very Low-Income (Household Income <= 50% of state median)	Number Extremely Low-Income (Household Income <= 30% of state median)	Share Extremely Low-Income (Household Income <= 30% of state median)
Minnesota	613,940	277,225	45%	419,545	68%	277,985	45%	162,332	26%
Mississippi	340,171	154,391	45%	215,020	63%	146,036	43%	86,484	25%
Missouri	786,257	334,653	43%	502,974	64%	333,915	42%	190,331	24%
Montana	137,398	55,809	41%	84,072	61%	53,109	39%	30,440	22%
Nebraska	257,241	103,925	40%	165,100	64%	105,478	41%	54,031	21%
Nevada	479,094	254,797	53%	278,443	58%	177,021	37%	99,890	21%
New Hampshire	149,880	66,232	44%	97,170	65%	62,928	42%	36,050	24%
New Mexico	249,373	114,304	46%	150,588	60%	105,756	42%	62,840	25%
North Carolina	1,393,967	628,207	45%	849,162	61%	543,118	39%	315,833	23%
North Dakota	118,407	44,523	38%	77,739	66%	49,714	42%	29,254	25%
Ohio	1,573,384	678,241	43%	1,028,273	65%	686,268	44%	416,576	26%
Oklahoma	520,115	222,188	43%	321,870	62%	209,074	40%	118,325	23%
Pennsylvania	1,556,681	703,928	45%	986,879	63%	666,979	43%	393,902	25%
Rhode Island	151,457	67,680	45%	98,761	65%	68,424	45%	42,043	28%
South Carolina	585,628	276,860	47%	370,243	63%	241,942	41%	145,312	25%
South Dakota	109,075	39,443	36%	72,889	67%	47,583	44%	25,869	24%
Tennessee	897,276	400,975	45%	545,105	61%	345,916	39%	200,920	22%
Texas	3,996,735	1,944,686	49%	2,415,726	60%	1,545,169	39%	865,576	22%
Utah	322,900	142,033	44%	211,426	65%	130,446	40%	69,735	22%
Vermont	73,127	34,966	48%	485,37	66%	32,386	44%	19,548	27%
Virginia	1,081,578	494,998	46%	665,983	62%	447,041	41%	263,745	24%
West Virginia	181,188	76,253	42%	120,267	66%	84,338	47%	53,326	29%
Wisconsin	774,770	318,562	41%	504,370	65%	325,512	42%	182,689	24%
Wyoming	65,428	26,118	40%	43,419	66%	29,124	45%	17,894	27%

Estimates exclude states with existing rent control policies (CA, DC, NJ, NY, OR, and WA). Rent burdened is defined as spending more than 30% of income on housing costs. Low-income is defined as earning less than 80% of the national median household income, very low-income is defined as less than 50%, and extremely low-income is defined as less than 30%.

Source: PolicyLink analysis of 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA, Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Data and Mapping Tool, Data Version AFFHT0007, and Characteristics of HUD-Assisted Renters and Their Units in 2021.

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