

Housing Justice on the Ballot: Growing the Movement Through Electoral Wins (A Deep Dive)

March 21, 2023

Moderated by:

Tram Hoang, PolicyLink

Amanda Insalaco, National Coalition for a
Civil Right to Counsel

Jasmine Rangel, PolicyLink



Welcome!



Agenda

1. State of the Renter, Ballot Initiative Campaigns, and Looking to the Future
2. Ballot Initiative Guide Review
3. Hearing from Organizers
 - a. Jack O'Brien and Anna Laguna (Portland, Maine)
 - b. Colleen Carroll (ERA)
4. Q & A

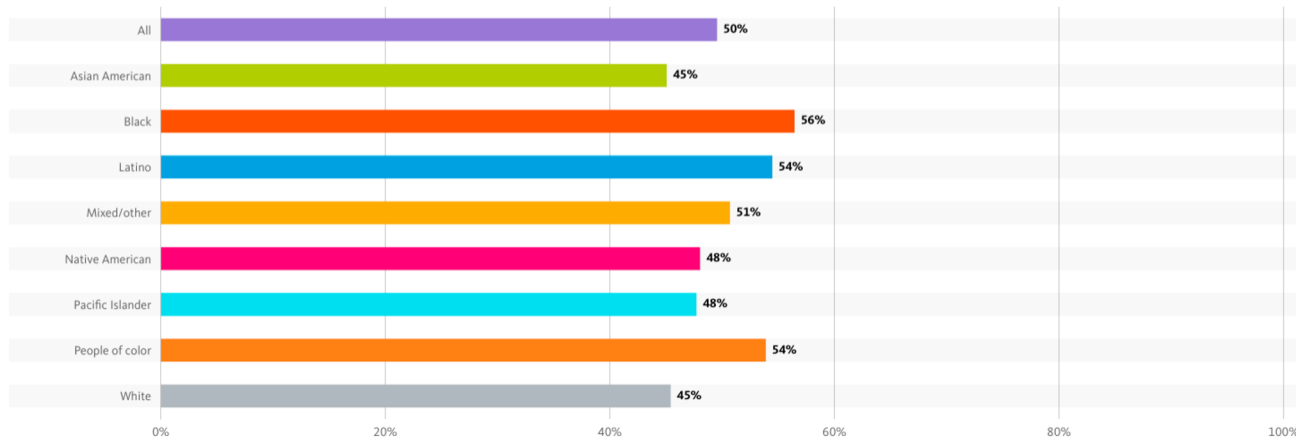


State of the Renter

Housing burden 📍 United States

Housing burden by tenure, severity, and race/ethnicity: United States; **Tenure:** Renters; **Severity:** Burdened; **Poverty:** All income levels; **Year:** 2020

SELECT BREAKDOWN ▾ **FILTERS:** **TENURE** ▾ **SEVERITY** ▾ **POVERTY** ▾ **YEAR** ▾  ▾  ▾ 



- Tenants face higher housing cost-burdens than homeowners
- Housing cost-burdens force families to choose where to invest their limited resources

State of the Renter

Housing burden 🇺🇸 United States

Housing burden by tenure, severity, race/ethnicity, and gender: United States; **Tenure:** Renters; **Severity:** Burdened; **Poverty:** All income levels; **Year:** 2020

Female Male

SELECT BREAKDOWN ▾

FILTERS:

TENURE ▾

SEVERITY ▾

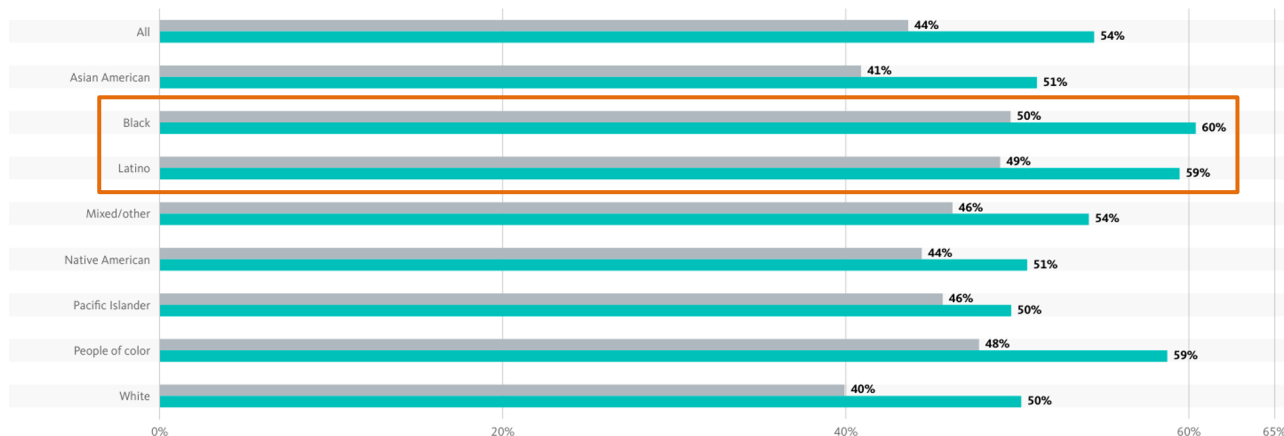
POVERTY ▾

YEAR ▾

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- Black and Latinx female renters are filed against at disproportionate rates compared to their male counterparts.

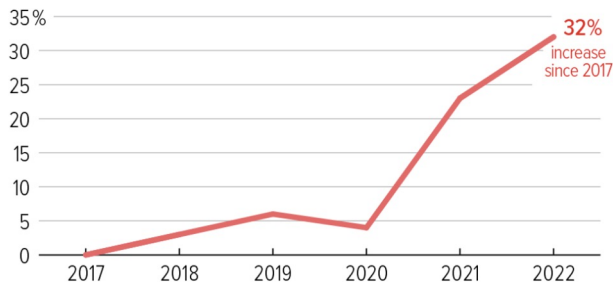
State of the Renter

FIGURE 1



Rents Still Rising Swiftly in 2022 After Surging in 2021

Percent change in Apartment List Rent Estimates since 2017



Note: Percent change in Apartment List Rent Estimates for 2018 to 2021 is calculated using the percent change between the median rent estimate for rental units of all bedroom sizes for December of each year from December 2017. Percent change for 2022 is calculated using the percent change between the median rent estimate for September 2022 from December 2017. Median rent estimates are not adjusted for inflation. For more details on the Apartment List Rent Estimates methodology, see: <https://www.apartmentlist.com/research/rent-estimate-methodology>

Source: Apartment List Rent Estimates

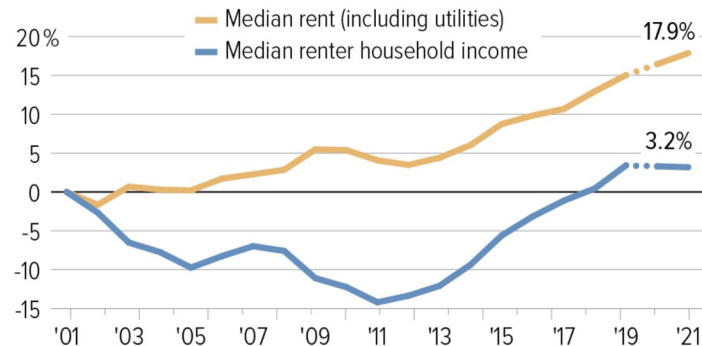
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FIGURE 2



Housing Costs Climbed During Pandemic While Renters' Incomes Stagnated

Percent change since 2001, adjusted for inflation



Note: Dashed line indicates missing 2020 1-year ACS data due to pandemic-related data collection issues.

Source: CBPP tabulations of the Census Bureau's American Community Survey

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Housing is a Pressing Topic for Most People Across the US



- Affordable housing is a concern for people across the country
- People understand housing as a basic human need, with more emphasizing that housing is a human right

Last Year's Housing Justice Wins

Location	Ballot Measure	Voting Results	
		Yes	No
Pasadena, California	Measure H: rent stabilization, eviction protections, and a rental registry	54%	46%
Portland Maine	Question C: strengthens 2020 rent stabilization ordinance	55%	45%
Santa Monica, California	Measure RC & Measure EM: strengthens rent stabilization measures	58% / 59%	42% / 41%
Orange County, Florida	Rent Stabilization Ordinance: one-year cap on rent increases	59%	41%
Richmond, California	Measure P: strengthen existing rent stabilization measures	57%	43%
Oakland, California	Measure V: expands coverage of eviction protections for tenants	68%	32%
Los Angeles, California	Measure ULA: homelessness reduction, affordable housing, and legal aid	58%	42%

Housing Justice Policies – Rent Stabilization

- Creates a predictable schedule for the maximum rent increase allowable each year, while ensuring a fair return for landlords.
- These policies can immediately stabilize prices, halt rent gouging, and reduce the risk of displacement and homelessness, while increasing long-term housing security and affordability.
- Principles for effective policy:
 - Maximize coverage of rental homes
 - Pair rent stabilization with robust tenant protections
 - Maximize long-term affordability
 - Tenants should play a central role in program design

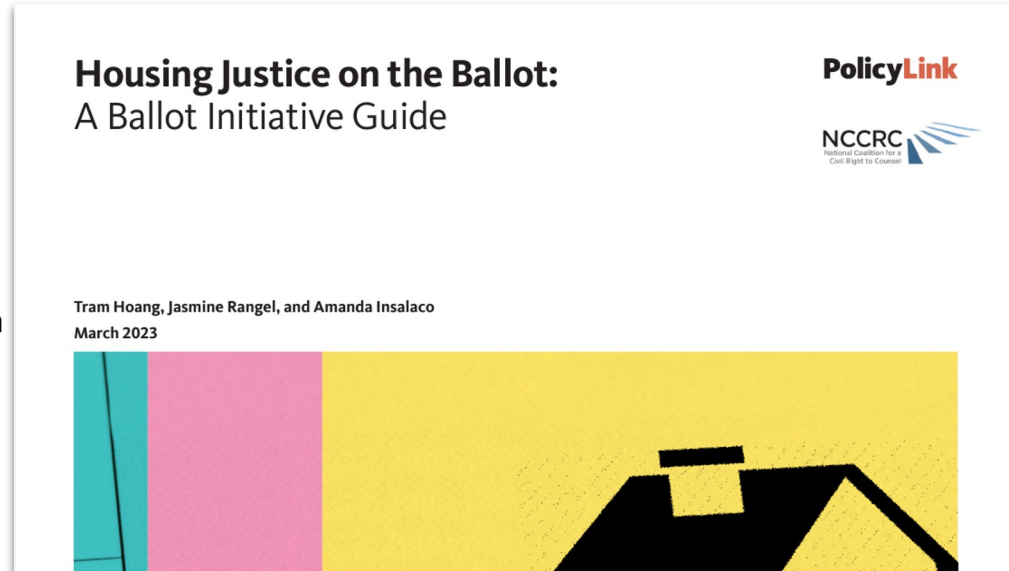
Housing Justice Policies – Right to Counsel (RTC)

1. **Enacted** in law.
2. **Publicly Funded**.
3. **Ensures an attorney** for all [eligible] tenants.
 - a. Eligibility may be tied to income, but increasingly, there's a push for *universal* representation.
 - i. **Four of the 18 jurisdictions** with a RTC have a universal right.
4. Right to **full representation**.
 - a. Not triage.



Check out our latest resource!

- Ballot Initiatives as Effective Pathways to Housing Justice
- Running an Initiative Campaign
- Building a Housing Justice Narrative
- The Hangover: Post-Election Day
- The Future Movement: Leveraging Wins for a Just Housing System



Ballot Initiatives as Effective Pathways to Housing Justice

Ballot Initiative (Community-Led)

A process that allows voters to introduce a new law (or an amended law), either by sending the law to the city or county legislature or to voters after enough valid signatures are collected.

Ballot initiatives availability:

26 states with statewide processes.

48 states have at least one city that allows citywide initiatives.

39 states require citywide initiatives in at least some of their cities!

	Direct Initiated Ordinance	Indirect Initiated Ordinance	Initiated Charter Amendment
Upon finding that enough valid signatures were collected	Initiative goes directly to voters	Initiative goes to the legislative body first	Initiative goes directly to voters
Pros	Does not have to go through legislature before getting to voters	Forces legislature to consider the ordinance	Likely more difficult for the legislature to alter than an initiated ordinance
Cons	Legislature may still be able to alter after voters adopt, depending on the jurisdiction, though there may be restrictions on legislative alteration (e.g., heightened voting requirements or time restrictions)	Legislature may amend and sometimes introduce a competing ordinance to voters for consideration Depending on jurisdiction, canvassers may need to collect a second round of signatures if the legislature does not adopt or rejects	Usually requires more signatures than an initiated ordinance May not be an appropriate “vehicle” for all types of housing justice policies

Determining Whether Authority Exists to Enact the Ballot Initiative

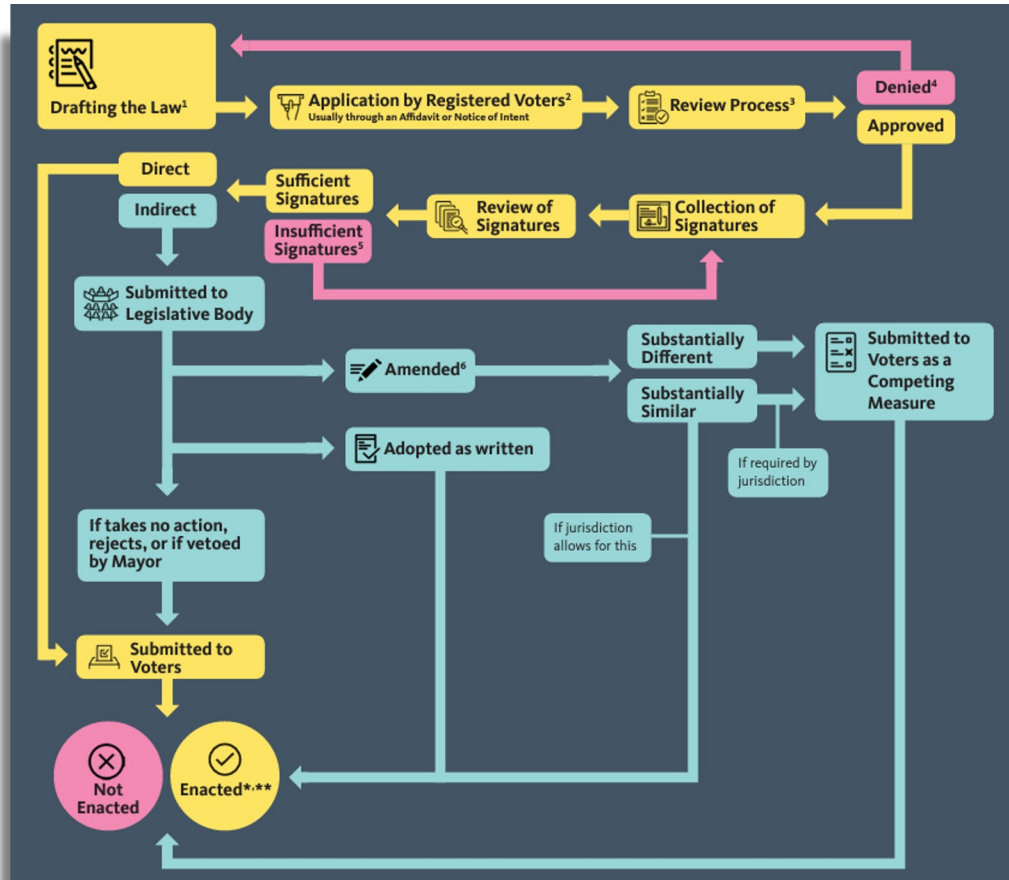
Subject Matter
Restrictions

Local Municipal
Authority

Availability

Preemption

Pathway to the Ballot: Direct v. Indirect Ballot Initiatives



Running a Ballot Initiative Campaign

- Building a Campaign Coalition
 - Coalition Agreements
 - Power-Mapping
- Campaign Structure & Strategies
 - Levels of Engagement
 - Tactics/Activities
- Campaign Finance
 - Registration
 - Reporting
- Case Studies: Denver, CO & Multnomah County, OR



You can sink a whole campaign with an accounting mistake - and even if it doesn't sink you legally, it could be a huge fine or your opposition could make a big deal about how you did not comply with state and local laws.

Ryan Bell,
Pasadena Tenants Union

Work Group	Potential Members	Tactics/Activities	Other Considerations
Core Decision-Making or Steering Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant leaders • Organizations who built the foundation for the campaign • Base-building organizations close to the issue • Legal partners who are values-aligned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide campaign strategy through high-level decision-making • Provide direction to other work groups • Create campaign and fundraising budget 	<p>Try to have a balanced set of expertise on this committee in terms of geographical diversity of base, policy and legal expertise, and experience with tenant and electoral organizing. Furthermore, take careful notes on all decision-making. This will be key in maintaining transparency and trust in the long run.</p>
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant leaders • Campaign spokespeople • Communications staff from partner organizations • People who are social media savvy • People who enjoy writing • Artists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a narrative strategy for the campaign • Create a communications plan for the campaign • Write op-eds for local media outlets • Collect tenant stories for a story bank • Conduct press trainings for campaign spokespeople • Manage campaign website • Create and design content for web and print distribution, murals, etc. 	<p>Narrative, narrative, narrative! Have a deep sense of campaign messaging and have it show up in all campaign materials. There are too many traps to fall into when being reactive with housing messages. See the <i>Building a Housing Justice Narrative</i> section for more.</p>

Running a Ballot Initiative Campaign

- Facing Opposition
 - Identifying the Opposition
 - Tracking the Opposition (and their money)
- Case Studies:
 - Pasadena, CA
 - Portland, ME



Building a Housing Justice Narrative

- Who We Speak To
 - 23% base
 - 59% persuadable
 - 18% opposition
- Housing Justice Narrative Story Platform
- Additional Resources



The Hangover: Post-Election Day

- Claim the Narrative
- Prepare the Coalition
- Litigation
- Implementation & Enforcement
- Case Studies:
 - St. Paul, MN
 - Orange County, FL



The opposition began to sow disaster narratives pretty much immediately... Their story was that because our policy put in reasonable rules on how much they could increase rent, their sky was falling. This felt like a clear attempt to instill fear in our city leaders and shape the terms on how the policy was implemented, discussed, and changed.

Meghan Daly,
Minnesota Youth Collective

Anna Laguna
Jack O'Brien
Portland, Maine Residents

Colleen Carroll

Eviction Representation for All Multnomah County, Oregon

Questions?



Thank you for joining us!

Don't forget:

- ☐ Fill out our survey
- ☐ Check out our resource!

