

# FIGHT YOUR RENT HIKE!



An Organizing Toolkit  
by Housing Justice for All

Fall 2022

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A Directory of NY  
Housing Organizations



# So your landlord raised your rent.

Are you angry? Do you want to do something about it? **Good! You've come to the right place.**

Rents have exploded in the last year. This is true for both lease renewals and for first rents in homes people are trying to move into, and it is true upstate and downstate, in cities, towns and villages. This first question you may be asking is: "Is this even legal? Can a landlord just raise the rent to whatever they want?"

The best answer to this question is an unsatisfying, "it's complicated – read on." But the short answer is, "In a lot of cases, yeah, it is." In most housing in New York, the law says the rent is what the landlord says it is. Rent stabilized tenants have more protections against arbitrary rent hikes, but landlords often ignore those laws and it's up to tenants to catch them. And this year the NYC Rent Guidelines Board approved rent increases – during an ongoing pandemic and economic downturn – that most rent stabilized tenants can't afford.

Does that seem wrong to you? **It does to us too!**

Do you think massive rent hikes should be illegal? **We do too!**

To change anything, we have to organize – as tenants, as neighbors, as people fighting for not just ourselves but for our communities and beyond. Alone, we are vulnerable, isolated, easy to pick on and hard to defend. Together, we are strong, supported, bold and – in a word – unbeatable.

This toolkit will help you take the anger you feel about your rent hike and channel it toward collective, political action. We'll show you how to organize your building, how to negotiate collectively, and how to fight for a political program that will address the issues facing all tenants across the state.

**If you think it should be illegal for landlords to get away with the kinds of rent hikes we're seeing now, then join us to fight back.** The only way to shrink the landlords' power is to build tenant power.

**Let's get started!**

# Step 1: Know Your Rights!

## Rights of ALL Tenants:

- **Livable Conditions**

Landlord must provide repairs. Landlord must maintain your apartment and provide adequate services, as outlined in the Warranty of Habitability

Steps to get a repair: 1) Inform your landlord in writing, 2) Call 311, and 3) Take your Landlord to court with an HP (Housing Part) action

Landlords cannot **harass** tenants or otherwise **interfere** with tenant's "quiet enjoyment" of home

- **Evictions**

You cannot be evicted without notice; the landlord must receive a **warrant of eviction** to evict you, which can be challenged in court. You cannot be removed by anyone but a marshal

- **Organizing**

Landlords cannot **interfere** with tenant organizing within the building (tenant associations), or tenant complaints to the city/state. Landlords cannot **retaliate** against tenants for organizing

## Rent Owed During COVID

- Tenant Safe Harbor Act means you cannot be evicted for rent owed between March 7, 2020 to January 15, 2022
- Applying for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) puts your eviction case on hold
- If you received ERAP (Emergency Rental Assistance Program), you get a **rent freeze** for one (1) year and your landlord **CANNOT** evict you without good cause for one (1) year.

# Step 2: Share Your Story!

When our landlords raise our rent, they don't want us to speak up about what's going on. The real estate industry wants to control the narrative and maintain the status quo.

That's because our stories are powerful. When we speak up about how rent hikes are impacting our lives and when we call for change, we can inspire other tenants to fight back, pressure elected officials to take action, and change the narrative.

You can share your story with Housing Justice for All at <https://hj4a.org/story>.

There's three main steps to turn your experience into a story: challenge, choice and outcome. By using these elements, we can tell meaningful stories that move people into action.

**What is the most recent rent hike you've received?**

Sharing one particular incident can draw attention to the specific challenge, choice, and outcome you were faced with, creating a concise yet powerful example of why political action is necessary.

**CHALLENGE:** How will this rent hike affect your life? Be specific. What decisions will it impact? How will it impact your family or your household? Your community as a whole? >

**CHOICE:** What are choices you know you will have to make to deal with this rent hike? Do you have to decide between rent and other necessities? Do you have to look for a new place to live? Are you worried about entering the shelter because of the rent prices across your area?

**OUTCOME:** What action do we need to take to change this situation and stop this rent hike? What do you want your neighbors, your landlord, your community, or elected officials to do so that we can stop these rent hikes?

You can share your story on social media, to local media, and/or with local elected officials.

# Step 3: Talk to Your Neighbors!

The laws **aren't** on our side right now when it comes to fighting rent hikes. We're fighting for statewide legislation to stop the rent hikes and take housing out of the real estate industry's control but in the meantime, the best way to stop your rent hike is to organize with your neighbors so that you can collectively negotiate lower rents for your building. Negotiating by yourself can be disempowering but when you have power in numbers, more things become possible!

The first step to building a powerful negotiating team is talking to your neighbors. Here is a guide on how to have an organizing conversation around anything from rent hikes to long standing repairs:

## Steps of a one-on-one:

1. Introduce yourself and set the tone
2. Ask questions & actively listen
3. Agitate
4. Talk about the plan to win
5. Call the question/ask for a commitment
6. Inoculate
7. Next steps
8. Follow up



Use the space below to write out some of the questions you might ask, and the conversation you plan to have. In organizing this is referred to as your “rap.”

Introduce yourself and set the tone. Include the name of the organization and why you are there talking to people:

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Open questions that help you understand the person’s motivation to get involved (it can be helpful to think of follow-up questions to help you get more information):

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Agitate. Provide information about the problem and the proposed solution (our plan to win). It can be helpful to talk about what the group has accomplished through organizing:

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Use the space below to write out some of the questions you might ask, and the conversation you plan to have. In organizing this is referred to as your “rap.”

Call the question / ask for a commitment:

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Get contact information so that you can stay in touch!

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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Thank you and follow up (make a plan to talk to the person again).

Quick notes and assessment of the person's interest in getting involved:

- Do you think they will get more involved?
- What did they commit to do and how can you support them in doing it?
- What is this person's worldview? How sharp is their analysis of the problem?
- Does the issue affect them personally? What is their self-interest?
- Do they see beyond their own immediate circumstances?
- How much time and desire do they have to work on the issue as a group?
- How well do they listen? Will they work with others?
- What are their skills? What are they already good at and what do they want to learn?
- What networks and connections do they have?
- What sustains them? How can they keep going for the long haul?

# Step 4: Find Out if You're Rent Stabilized!

There are many different kinds of housing in New York. Depending on whether you are rent regulated or not, your rent hike could look different and the way you go about fighting your rent hike will also be different. Read on to figure out what kind of rent hike you're facing and how to start organizing your neighbors to fight back.

## Are you a rent stabilized tenant?

- Most are in 6+ unit buildings built before 1974, or have a J51 or 421a tax abatement, and was not deregulated prior to June 2019
- Entitled to a **renewal lease**
- **Limited rent increases** set by the Rent Guideline Board each June.
  - **Rent Guidelines Board Increases** October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023
  - **NYC:** One Year Lease: 3.25% Increase, Two Year Lease: 5% Increase
  - **Nassau County:** One Year Lease: 2% Increase, Two Year Lease: 3.5% Increase
  - **Rockland County:** One Year Lease: 0.5% Increase, Two Year Lease: 0.75% Increase
  - **Westchester County:** One Year Lease: 2%, Two Year Lease: 3% Increase

### **Do you know your rent history?**

If you are rent-stabilized or suspect you are, get your apts rent history.

- **Text "RENT HISTORY" to (855) 610-2450**

If you find you are rent-stabilized, apply online for a DHCR overcharge complaint so your apartment can return to its legal price. If you need help, get connected with a local tenant organizing group by **filling out this form or visiting [hj4a.org/getinvolved](http://hj4a.org/getinvolved)**

These rent hikes are unaffordable to many rent stabilized tenants. We can fight back by coming together as a tenant union to negotiate lower rent hikes and better living conditions. Talk to your neighbors about the rent hikes to see if they're willing to fight back with you!

# Door knocking guide for Rent Stabilized Tenants:

- Is your rent too high? Can you afford a 5% increase?
- Many of our neighbors are rent stabilized. Do you know if your apartment is rent stabilized? (Yes or no)  
Let's text right now to get your rent history and find out.  
Text "RENT HISTORY" to (855) 610-2450)
- Have you heard about this year's rent guidelines board increases? (Yes or no). If no, Rent Guidelines Board Increases October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023:

NYC: One Year  
Lease: 3.25%  
Increase, Two Year  
Lease: 5% Increase

Nassau County:  
One Year Lease: 2%, Two Year  
Lease: 3.5%

Westchester County:  
One Year Lease: 2%,  
Two Year Lease: 3%

Rockland County:  
One Year Lease:  
0.5%, Two Year  
Lease: 0.75%

I'm your neighbor, I live in Apartment \_\_\_\_\_. I'm also part of Housing Justice for All, a coalition of tenants all across NYS. We are fighting large rent increases. Just because our landlord can raise our rent by 5% doesn't mean we should accept that. Together we can fight back. I've been talking to our other neighbors in the building and they also can't afford this rent increase. Would you be interested in meeting up with us at a meeting in the lobby?

Our next meeting is \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ and we'll be talking about how we can fight rent increases and get more repairs in the building.

If Yes:

That's great. Can I get your number to remind you and let you know if anything changes?

If No:

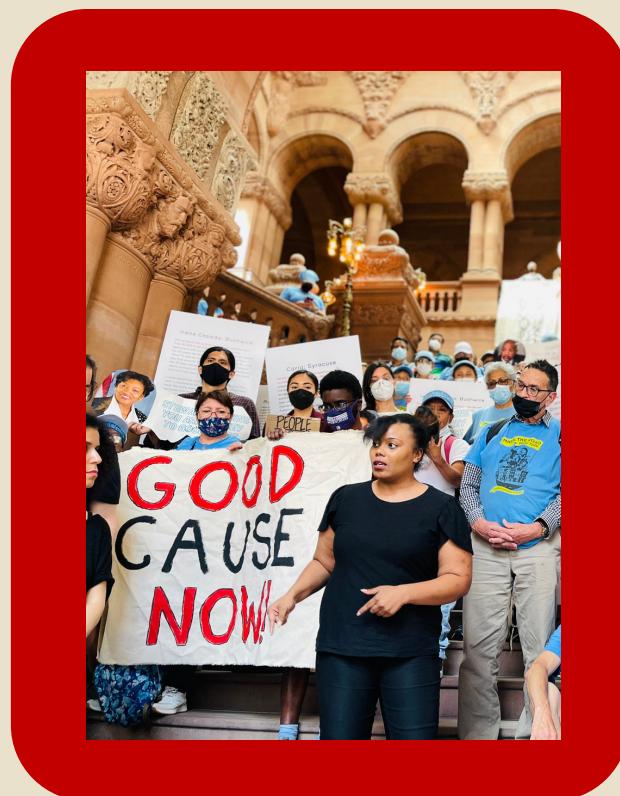
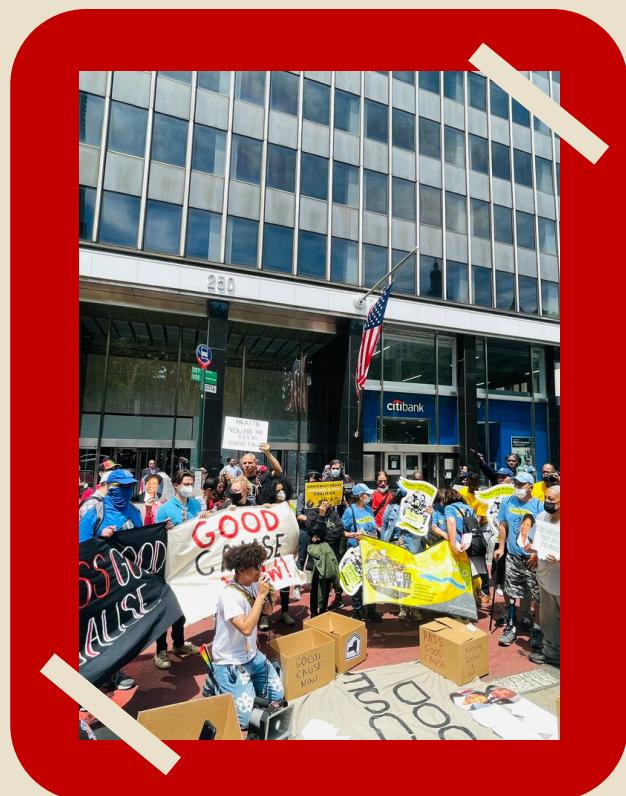
That's too bad. Can I get your number to let you know about the next one?

Thanks so much! I'll be in touch about the meeting and see you soon!

## Are you an unregulated tenant?

If you live in a building less than 6 units or built after 1974, or in an area outside of NYC, Nassau County, Rockland County and Westchester County, you are likely living in **unregulated housing**. You might have additional tenant protections if you live in a subsidized building, public housing, or a Section 8 building.

**Unregulated renters have no additional protections or rights** other than the universal rights listed at the top of this toolkit. Unregulated renters are getting hit with unconscionable rent hikes across New York State. Unfortunately there are currently no laws to protect most renters from unreasonable rent hikes. But we can fight back by coming together as a tenant union to negotiate lower rent hikes and better conditions. **There is power in numbers!**



# Door knocking guide for Unregulated Renters:

- Is your rent going up? How much?
- Does your apartment need any repairs right now?
- Do you feel like you can complain to the landlord or call 311 when you're having problems in your apartment?
- Are you currently eligible for a housing voucher or rental assistance program to pay for rent?

If yes:

How has your experience with the program been?

If no:

Existing rent assistance and voucher programs are unfortunately very difficult to access! Most are short-term, not fully funded, leave many folks out, have extremely long waitlists, and some waitlists are closed to new applicants which is frustrating considering how necessary rental assistance and voucher programs are.

I'm your neighbor and I just got a huge rent increase of \_\_\_\_\_. I want to fight back but I can't do it alone. Would you be interested in coming to a meeting with other tenants in the building to figure out how to fight back?

We don't have all the protections that regulated renters have but we can still fight back if enough of us get organized. I'm also part of Housing Justice for All, a coalition of tenants all across NYS fighting for Good Cause Eviction which would limit rent increases for everyone, not just regulated renters.

Our next meeting is \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ and we'll be talking about how we can fight these rent hikes and win better repairs. Can you make it?

If Yes:

That's great. Can I get your number to remind you and let you know if anything changes?

If No:

That's too bad. Can I get your number to let you know about the next one?

Thanks so much! I'll be in touch about the meeting and see you soon!

## Sample Flyer:

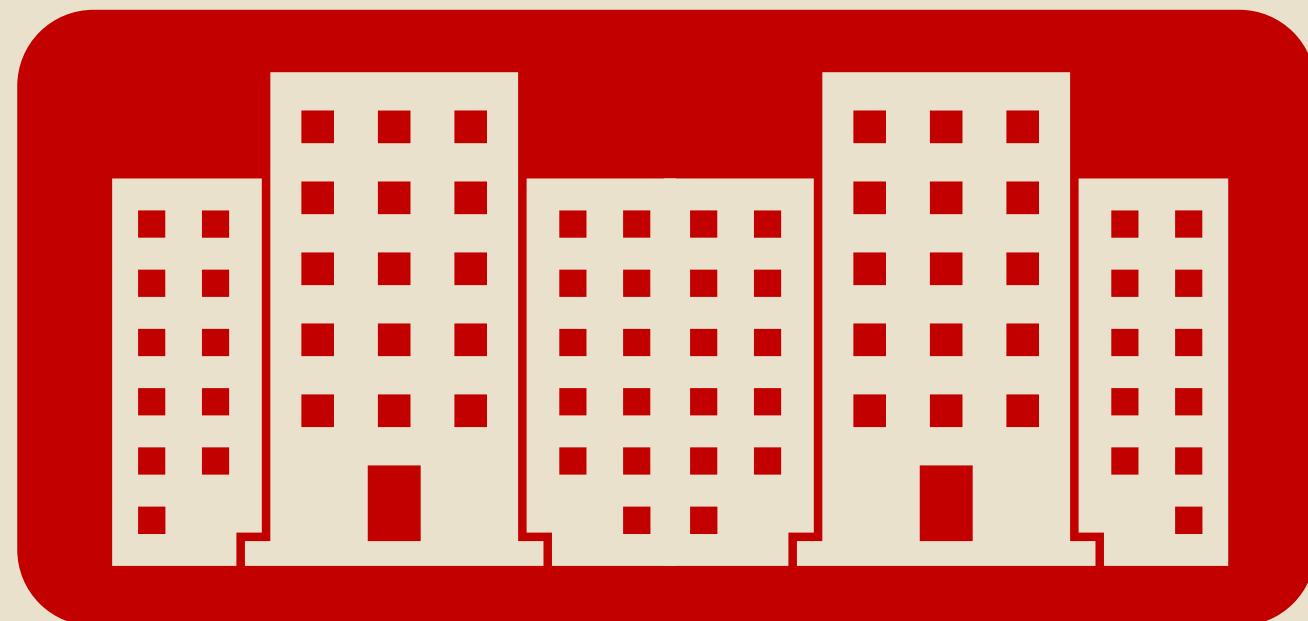


You can download  
this template [HERE](#)

## Step 5: Open negotiations with your landlord as a tenant union!

Now that you have spoken with your neighbors and identified people interested in organizing with you, the next step is to start communicating with your landlord as a group. The best way to start this process is through a written communication that shows the power in numbers you've built as a tenant union.

Make a copy of the letter on the next page. Print it out and gather signatures. When you've gathered signatures from more than 50% of your building, send it to your landlord to open negotiations. You can also send a copy of the letter to your local elected officials to make sure they're aware of the situation in your building.



To Whom It May Concern,

We, the tenants living at \_\_\_\_\_ are coming together in response to the rent hikes we are facing as a building. We are a part of Housing Justice for All, a statewide coalition of tenants and homeless New Yorkers fighting for stronger tenant rights. As the cost of living rises astronomically, our wages have stayed stagnant and the conditions of our homes have either deteriorated or stayed the same.

[list building conditions or needed repairs here to strengthen your argument]

Under these circumstances, we cannot accept these rent increases and request a meeting with the property owner or manager to begin negotiating more reasonable rent increases for this building.

Please respond within five days of receiving this letter with possible dates and times for a meeting between the tenant union and management.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

The tenants of \_\_\_\_\_

**Signatures Below:**



Your petition is the first step in creating pressure on your landlord to lower the rents. **There are many other ways to create pressure after you send your petition!**

- Ask your elected officials to send a letter of their own to your landlord
- Have a rally at your building and invite press and local elected officials to shame your landlord
- Find other buildings that your landlord owns and reach out to them to get organized
  - A bigger group will help you gain more leverage!
- Rally in front of your landlord's office or home to shame him publicly
- Invite reporters and elected officials to walk through of your building to highlight how your living conditions don't justify this rent increase
- Talk to your neighbors about going on rent strike
  - Withholding your rent money puts monetary pressure on your landlord to accept your demands
  - To find more information on how to go on rent strike, click [here](#).

For support on negotiating lower rent increases as a tenant union and escalating pressure on your landlord, get connected with a local tenant organizing group by [filling out this form](#).

It can be terrifying to receive a rent hike right now, especially with prices going up everywhere and wages staying stagnant. But you are not alone. By joining together as tenants across New York State, we can fight these rent hikes in our buildings AND fight for stronger tenant protections from the state legislature. With more and more people getting organized everyday, we can win a world without rent hikes and evictions, where everyone has a safe, stable and affordable place to call home.

## Can't organize your building? Here are other ways that you can still fight your rent hike:

Not everyone can gather a majority of their neighbors to fight their rent hikes with them. You can send this individual letter to your landlord to begin negotiating a lower rent increase. CC your local elected officials to add pressure to your landlord and get in touch with a local organizing group to get more support in your fight.

You can find your local elected officials by [clicking here](#). And you can get in contact with a local organizing group by [filling out this form](#).

### Sample letter to landlord:

To Whom It May Concern,

I live in Apartment \_\_\_ at \_(Address)\_\_\_ . I recently received a rent increase from you that I find unconscionable given the skyrocketing cost of living increases in our area, coupled with stagnant wages and unsafe conditions in my own apartment.

[List conditions or needed repairs here to strengthen your argument]

I'm not alone. I am part of Housing Justice for All, a statewide coalition of tenants and homeless New Yorkers fighting for stronger tenant rights. We are made up of 80 organizations and thousands of tenants.

Under these circumstances, I cannot accept these rent increases. I am proposing a rent increase of \_\_\_\_\_. This seems reasonable to me and would ensure that I can remain a paying tenant in this building. Please respond within 5 days of receiving this letter with next steps for finalizing this year's rent increase.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

The housing movement in New York State is growing and we are taking our fight to the landlords AND the politicians to win stronger tenants rights and deeper investment in housing for people not profit. Join our movement today!

## Get support from your local tenant organization!

### New York State Tenant Organizing Groups:

Organization/ Organización	Region/Región	Phone/Teléfono	Website/Página de Web
Citizen Action of NY	Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, Utica, Binghamton, Albany, Kingston	518-465-4600	<a href="http://citizenactionny.org">citizenactionny.org</a>
Community Voices Heard	New York City, Hudson Valley	914-514-7632 (Newburgh) 845-541-1122 (Poughkeepsie) 914-314-2018 (Westchester)	<a href="http://cvhaction.org">cvhaction.org</a>
Make the Road NY	New York City, Long Island, Westchester County	631-231-2220 (Long Island) 914-948-8466 (Westchester) 718-418- 7690 (New York City)	<a href="http://maketheroadny.org">maketheroadny.org</a>
New York Communities for Change	New York City, Nassau County	347-410-6919	<a href="http://nycommunities.org">nycommunities.org</a>
United Tenants of Albany / Housing For All	Albany and some surrounding areas	518-436-8997	<a href="http://utalbany.org">utalbany.org</a>
Binghamton Tenants	Binghamton, NY	1 (607) 288-3844	<a href="http://stakeholdersofbroome.wixsite.com/broome_tenants">stakeholdersofbroome.wixsite.com/broome_tenants</a>
PUSH Buffalo	Buffalo	716 884-0356	<a href="http://pushbuffalo.org">pushbuffalo.org</a>
For the Many	Hudson Valley	(845) 481-0703	<a href="http://forthemany.org">forthemany.org</a>
Ithaca Tenants Union	Ithaca	(607) 358-5048	<a href="http://ithacatu.org/get-help">ithacatu.org/get-help</a>
Mount Vernon United Tenants	Mt Vernon	(914) 699-1114	<a href="http://mvut.org">mvut.org</a>
New Paltz Tenants Union	New Paltz	No Phone Yet	<a href="http://newpaltztenantunion.com">newpaltztenantunion.com</a>
City-wide Tenant Union	Rochester	(585) 210-0705	<a href="http://roctenantunion.org">roctenantunion.org</a>
Syracuse Tenants Organizing for Power	Syracuse	(315) 308-0130	<a href="http://syracusetenantsunion.com/stop-coalition">syracusetenantsunion.com/stop-coalition</a>
Troy DSA	Troy	Troy@capitaldistrictDSA.org (no phone number available yet)	<a href="http://capitaldistrictdsa.org">capitaldistrictdsa.org</a>
Legal Services of Central NY	Utica, NY	(315) 703-6500	<a href="http://lscny.org">lscny.org</a>

## NYC, Neighborhood Specific/NYC, Según los Vecindarios

This isn't an exhaustive list, for more resources go to [evictionfreenyc.org](http://evictionfreenyc.org).  
 Esta no es una lista completa, para más recursos visite: [evictionfreenyc.org/es](http://evictionfreenyc.org/es).

Organization/ Organización	Borough/ Condado	Neighborhoods/ Vecindarios	Phone/ Teléfono	Website/ Pagina de Web
Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC)	Bronx	Norwood, Fordham, Northwest Bronx, Mount Hope, Morris Heights, Tremont	718-584-0515	<a href="http://northwestbronx.org">northwestbronx.org</a>
Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA)	Bronx	Southwest Bronx	718-716-8000	<a href="http://casapower.org">casapower.org</a>
Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association	Bronx	Longwood, Hunts Point, Morrisania, Mott Haven, Melrose	718-328-1064	<a href="http://bkciayc.org">bkciayc.org</a>
Los Sures	Brooklyn	South of Williamsburg	718-387-3600	<a href="http://southsideunit.edhdfc.org">southsideunit.edhdfc.org</a>
Crown Heights Tenants Union	Brooklyn	Crown Heights	212-479-3358	<a href="http://crownheightstenantunion.org">crownheightstenantunion.org</a>
Neighbors Helping Neighbors	Brooklyn	South Brooklyn, Sunset Park, Bay Ridge, Park Slope Borough Park	718-686-7946	<a href="http://nhnhome.org">nhnhome.org</a>
Carroll Gardens Association, Inc./ Southwest Brooklyn Tenant Union	Brooklyn	Red Hook, Gowanus, Columbia Waterfront, Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, Brooklyn Heights	718-243-9301	<a href="http://cgany.org">cgany.org</a> <a href="http://swbtu.org">swbtu.org</a>
Churches United for Fair Housing	Brooklyn	Sunset Park, South Williamsburg	(718) 360-2906	<a href="http://cuffh.org">cuffh.org</a>
HOPE Tenants	Brooklyn	Brownsville	(212) 479-3300	<a href="http://facebook.com/HOPEhousingorganizers">facebook.com/HOPEhousingorganizers</a>

Organization/ Organización	Borough/ Condado	Neighborhoods/ Vecindarios	Phone/ Teléfono	Website/ Pagina de Web
St. Nicks Alliance	Brooklyn	Williamsburg, Greenpoint, Bushwick	718- 388- 9190	<a href="http://stnicksalliance.org">stnicksalliance.org</a>
UHAB	Brooklyn	East Harlem, Inwood, Crown Heights	212- 479- 3389	<a href="http://uhab.org">uhab.org</a>
Flatbush Tenant Coalition	Brooklyn	South Crown Heights, Flatbush, East Flatbush	718- 635- 2623	<a href="http://flatbushpower.org">flatbushpower.org</a>
CAAAV	Manhattan	Chinatown	212- 473- 6485	<a href="http://caaav.org">caaav.org</a>
Cooper Square Committee	Manhattan	East Village, Stuyvesant Town, Lower East Side	212- 228- 8210	<a href="http://coopersquare.org">coopersquare.org</a>
Goddard Riverside Law Project	Manhattan	SRO-Westside of Manhattan from 14th Street to the tip of Manhattan. Apartments from 91st-116th Street	212- 799- 9638	<a href="http://goddard.org/grcc/programs/goddardlawproject">goddard.org/grcc/programs/goddardlawproject</a>
Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES)	Manhattan	East Village, Lower East Side, Chinatown, Two Bridges	212- 533- 2541	<a href="http://goles.org">goles.org</a>
Housing Committee of Riverside Edgecombe Neighborhood Association (RENA)	Manhattan	Harlem, Washington Heights	212- 234- 2285	<a href="http://facebook.com/RENAorganization">facebook.com/RENAorganization</a>
Tenants & Neighbors	Manhattan	Inwood, Washington Heights, Harlem, East Harlem	212- 608- 4320	<a href="http://tandn.org">tandn.org</a>

Organization/ Organización	Borough/ Condado	Neighborhoods/ Vecindarios	Phone/ Teléfono	Website/ Pagina de Web
Housing Conservation Coordinators	Manhattan	Hell's Kitchen, Chelsea, Manhattan Valley, Parts of Harlem	212-541-5996	<a href="http://hcc-nyc.org">hcc-nyc.org</a>
Met Council on Housing	Manhattan/ Citywide	Inwood and Washington Heights, Other large complex Citywide	212-979-0611	<a href="http://metcouncilonhousing.org">metcouncilonhousing.org</a>
Woodside on the Move, Inc. - Western Queens	Queens	Jackson Heights, Maspeth, Rego Park, Kew Gardens, Elmhurst, Corona, Flushing, Forest Hills, Kew Gardens Hills	718-476-8449	<a href="http://woodsideontmove.org">woodsideontmove.org</a>
Desis Rising Up and Moving	Queens	Parkchester, Flatbush, Jackson Heights	718-205-3036	<a href="http://drumnyc.org">drumnyc.org</a>
Catholic Migration Services	Queens	Long Island City, Sunnyside, Woodside, Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, Corona and Jamaica	347-472-3500	<a href="http://catholicmigration.org">catholicmigration.org</a>
Chhaya CDC	Queens	Jackson Heights, Jamaica, Richmond Hill	718-478-3848	<a href="http://chhayacdc.org">chhayacdc.org</a>
Ridgewood Tenants Union	Queens	Ridgewood	@RidgewoodTenantsUnion Twitter	<a href="http://ridgewoodtenantsunion.org">ridgewoodtenantsunion.org</a>

## Notes:

Fight Your Rent Hike!



HJ4A - Fall 2022