



INQUILINXS
UNIDXS
POR JUSTICIA

A guide to stopping landlord intimidation and fighting for dignified housing and beyond

Here we will discuss a small introduction to tenant organizing concerning the themes below

[Inquilinx Unidxs \(United Renters for Justice\)](#) has helped return more than \$13,000,000 to tenants' pockets, stopped displacement across the city of Minneapolis and empowered hundreds of tenants to fight for dignified housing and beyond. Tenants came together and organized, causing their landlord to sell five buildings, which are now stewarded by the Twin Cities Land Bank. The Sky Without Limits / Cielo Sin Límites was established, a tenant-managed housing cooperative in the Corcoran Neighborhood of Minneapolis. We have helped tenants purchase their homes in North Minneapolis and have changed City policies. This small guide is to help encourage and inform residents all across the United States how to fight for dignified housing and beyond. This is our introduction and some small lessons from organizing in diverse neighborhoods in Minneapolis.

- **Racism** - We live in a deeply racist country and landlords use this oppressive tool to separate and isolate tenants for profit. We have seen landlords make 70% profit margins without repairing their buildings. We understand that when people are organizing in their buildings and coming together you are going to have to confront this topic to build with one another.
- **Interpretation** - Many people living in affordable housing speak a myriad of languages. You must find a way to communicate between you all.
- **Isolation** - Many buildings suffering from landlord abuse thrive on isolation. When tenants are not speaking to one another the landlord can use this tactic against them. You must connect, you must create community.
- **Landlord abuse** - Landlords have WAY too much power in the United States. The only way to fight back is by renters banding together to stop it. Power only exists with demands, and numbers and unity.
- **Cis women, trans, and nonbinary individuals in the movement** - Our tenant movement has consisted mainly of trans, nonbinary, and cis female individuals. They have been more consistent in meetings and taking risks for their families. This is a fact. We all need to be willing to invest social and emotional energy in order to win our fights.
- **Time of the struggle** - We have had fights with landlords that have continued for more than two years. This fight will not go away just as the landlord abuse will not. We must be patient and realize that when you fight for your home and family it will take time. There is support and you are not alone.
- **Winning the purchase of your building** - In a few of our campaigns tenants have been able to purchase their building from their landlord to create a cooperative. City-wide Tenant Opportunity to Purchase policies allow the purchase of your building with the option to run it yourselves, but also grant many rights to tenants.

It's **not your fault** if you don't have money to make rent right now. The most important thing to be worrying about now is the protection of human life, yours and your family's.

No one should EVER have to choose between housing and food, or housing and health. We are all in this together and we can move big things if we have each others' backs and act powerfully together. We can't leave anyone behind!

This guide isn't meant to be legal advice.

1. **Talk to your neighbors, get contact information**

- a. Assess your building, is there anyone else in your building that you trust who can help reach all your neighbors with you? Have a conversation with them first and map out a plan.
- b. **Language justice:** Everyone has the right to communicate in the language they feel most comfortable in. If your building is multilingual, figure out interpretation so you can communicate across all languages. If you speak different languages in your building use Google Translate as best as you are able.
- c. Doorknocking conversations are the most effective:
 - i. Learn the patterns of abuse of the landlord
 - ii. Find out how the landlord is treating everyone else
 - iii. Figure out what everyone wants to do
 - iv. Keep track of people you can't reach so you can circle back later
- d. Leaflet individual doors and/or put a flyer up at the entrances and in community spaces like the laundry room.

“Hi I’m _____, your neighbor in Unit ____ at xxx-xxx-xxxx. I’m starting up a group text so that everyone in the building can stay connected safely during this time for anything that people need right now. If you text me with your name and Unit # I can either keep you up to date about what’s happening or add you to the building group communication.”

2. **Create a method of communication with everyone in your building**

- a. Text Group (Text, Whatsapp, Signal)
- b. Facebook group
- c. Email or listserv
- d. Video chats (Zoom, Google Hangouts, Jitsi, Houseparty)
- e. **FIND A WAY TO KEEP EVERYONE TOGETHER**
- f. **Figure out interpretation so you can communicate across all languages**

3. **The importance of building unity**

- a. Relationships are key to organizing: If you are to win a battle against your landlord the building **has to be united.**
- b. Start to connect across problems in your building or through sharing resources and information. Share out if you are having issues with repairs or with paying rent. If you have experienced something it usually means that **some of your neighbors or everyone** has too. People often feel embarrassed and scared when they think they are alone, keep connecting by sharing your story and your experience.
- c. **Trust is key.** You need to know your neighbors, your neighbors need to know you, and your neighbors need to know each other. Talk about your past repair issues and other problems with your landlord.
- d. Be open, honest, vulnerable, wholehearted, and truthful. If you're not, how will people connect with you? Relationships are the key to successfully organizing and inviting people to take risks together. They are the foundation that everything is built off of. Offer help and explain that you are there to help. Be there to actually help.
- e. **A note on disagreements:** Not everyone is going to agree, but what is important is that you **do not disagree** in front of your landlord. Encourage healthy disagreements in meetings and take time to come to alignment around maintaining a united front.

- f. If possible, **don't leave people behind**. If one person can't pay the rent and 12 can then that leaves the one person isolated and at risk. Be real about difference and oppression and know that some people might be less likely to engage with you based on their experiences of racism, sexism, and class. Don't close the door on someone's involvement. It is worth it to take 5 steps towards someone to invite them into your group. If you expect them to take 5 steps towards you it won't work. You might have resources and access that other people don't. How will you act in solidarity with each other?

4. Host a building meeting without the landlord

- a. Figure out where/how you're hosting -- it can be over Zoom or Google Hangouts, etc.
- b. Prep: create an agenda
 - i. Ask people to share a little about themselves.
 - ii. Encourage people to share as well how the housing crisis is impacting their housing -- are they struggling to make rent?
 - iii. Discuss what the group's biggest **collective issues are** and your building's demands.
 1. Use the [repair request form](#) for individual apartment demands (send all the forms together in one envelope or one email)
 2. Use the letter below for collective buildings demands
 3. Draft and send a group non-payment letter together.

5. Send a letter to the landlord together with all your demands

- a. Sample demand letter below
- b. Ask for a meeting with your landlord and all your fellow neighbors

6. Always track your conversations and problems about the building/interactions in a journal or notebook

- a. It's best to communicate with your landlord in writing
- b. Use [REPAIR request forms](#) (sample below) to ask for repairs. If repair request form is not responded to in 14 days you can [put your money into court](#) until it's fixed
 - i. **NOTE:** Putting your rent money into an escrow account is **most effective** when it's done together!!
 - ii. Repair request forms are powerful in court, especially if they did not fix what you asked. This may or may not allow the tenant to get rent money based on habitability. It will also protect from eviction.
- c. Track and document the repair (if it's shoddy or not).

7. HAVE ALL YOUR NEIGHBORS CALL 311, city inspection in Minneapolis, to report the issue(s). Find out your city inspection line and report it.

- a. REQUEST your inspection report once finished
- b. Landlords HATE getting inspected by the city
- c. This can be used in court against the landlord, and it's really powerful

8. Report your landlord to the Attorney General

- a. In Minnesota, report your landlord to the [Attorney General](#) Keith Ellison

9. Catch the landlord in their mistakes

- Landlords are going to make mistakes when they are angry or trying to intimidate you (for example by entering without a 24 hour notice or sending intimidating letters)
- Don't get into a face to face with your landlord-- you won't win anything
- Your landlord cannot evict you by changing your locks and/or removing your belongings from your home. **Evictions are a court process.** If your landlord tries to unlawfully evict you, you can [send in a complaint](#) to the Attorney General. This is also considered an *illegal lockout* and you can take the landlord to court for this.

10. Negotiating/confronting your landlord

- NOTE:** We have had to organize against a landlord for more than a year, this could be a lengthy process, but worthwhile in the end.
- Come to a consensus with your neighbors about what needs to be handled at the meeting
- Show up with your demands and make the landlord respond to your demands
- Bring each individual demand to the meeting with repair request forms that you turn into the landlord. (you can also send this prior to the meeting)
- Never talk to your landlord alone -- ALWAYS IN A GROUP. It's important to have a majority of 50% of your building at these meetings.*



- Management will try to retaliate.** Unstable relationships will lead to people backing down fast. Weak relationships may result in people being more willing to take individual meetings with landlords to negotiate instead of collective bargaining. Everyone is weaker as an individual and stronger as a collective.

11. Find a housing lawyer that can advise the group in the situation.

- [Legal Aid](#) - Provides Free **Legal Aid** to people with Low Income, Disabilities, and Seniors in 20 central **Minnesota** counties.
- [Volunteer Lawyers Network](#) - non-profit organization dedicated to connecting Minnesotans experiencing poverty with some of the top private lawyers in the state at no cost.
- [HOME Line MN](#) - Provides free and low-cost legal, organizing, education, and advocacy services so that tenants throughout Minnesota can solve their own rental housing problems. Legal hotline.

12. Reach out to Inquilinx Unidxs to be connected with a member who has gone on rent strike and won money because of repair issues

- Hear from our members:*

- i. What it's like to engage in a rent strike
- ii. What it's like to send your money into court with your neighbors
- iii. What it's like to engage in a protest against your landlord
- iv. What it's like to organize against intimidation
- v. What it's like to take your landlord to court
- vi. What it's like to organize in an unlicensed building
- vii. What it's like to talk in the paper and press about building issues
- viii. What it's like to hold a tenant union meeting
- ix. What it's like to live in your building after you win money from your landlord

13. ABC's OF COURT LISTED HERE

- a. Find out where your housing court is located in your city and see if there are lawyers that can offer advice
- b. Everyone has the right to a hearing in Minnesota
- c. First notice of eviction: The landlord has to provide a notice 7 days prior to your court date.
 - i. Find a lawyer to take your case before court
 - ii. Connect with a mentor at Inquilinxs Unidxs to get specifics on the situation
- d. First day of court
 - i. **Show up to court.** Make sure you appear, it's SUPER urgent. If you do not appear they can rule against you quickly
 - ii. Here you can come to a settlement with your landlord, if parties agree
- e. Court trial
 - i. This could take many days to finish if you get into trial
- f. [504b law and tenant remedies action](#)

14. Reach out to national and local organizations to learn basics of organizing

Request for Repair

Landlord

Street Address

City, State, Zip

I, _____, reside at your property located at
(print tenant's name)

(Address, city, state, zip)

I wish to inform you that Minnesota Statute § 504B.161 requires that every landlord of residential premises, whether the lease is in writing or oral, do the following:

- (1) keep the premises and all common areas fit for the use intended by the parties;
- (2) keep the premises in reasonable repair during the term of the lease or license;
- (3) maintain the premises in compliance with the applicable health and safety laws of the state.

Since parties to the lease or license of residential premises may not waive or modify the "covenants of habitability" imposed by this statute, the landlord must do these things regardless of any contrary lease terms (unless the tenant caused the disrepair by his or her willful, malicious, or irresponsible conduct).

I am requesting repairs within 14 days to the following items or conditions:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____

(Signature)

(Date)

Pedido de Reparaciones

Dueño

Dirección

Ciudad, estado, código de zip

Yo, _____, vivo en su propiedad ubicada en la
(Nombre y apellido del inquilino)

(Dirección, ciudad, estado, código de zip)

Intento informarle que la ley de Minnesota Statute § 504B.161 requiere que todos dueños de lugares residenciales, sin importar si la el contrato está en escrito o verbal, haga lo siguiente:

- (1) mantener el lugar y todos áreas comunes en un estado debido en concordancia de uso;
- (2) mantener el lugar en reparación razonable durante los términos del contrato o licencia;
- (3) mantener el lugar de acuerdo con leyes aplicables de salud y seguridad del estado.

Como partidario al contrato o la licencia de un lugar residencial no puede ceder ni modificar los “pactos de habitabilidad” impuestos por esta ley, el dueño necesita hacer estas cosas independientemente de términos del contrato contrarios (menos que el inquilino causó el mal estado por su conducta irresponsable, maliciosa o intencional).

Estoy pidiendo reparaciones dentro de 14 días a las siguientes cosas o condiciones:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

(Firma)

(Fecha)

This is an example letter. Please make any edits as necessary.

To the attention of _____

We are writing to you as tenants residing at _____

We understand that you have lost your rental licenses and that you intend to vacate all of your buildings in order to renovate all the apartments. We feel that two months notice to find a new home is not sufficient. We need more flexible options to ease the stress of suddenly being displaced.

We, the tenants of these five buildings, hereby request the following:

1. That you not evict anyone from any of our buildings and stop all displacement on this block until all families have a solid relocation plan
2. Carry out all repairs necessary for habitable apartments. We will be sending detailed repair requests for each apartment.
3. Clean the buildings and clear out the trash from the parking lots
4. Meet with us to discuss these points and whether we as tenants can purchase our buildings in order to stop all displacement

We invite you to come listen to our experiences and discuss with us how we can reach our goals at an event we will be holding with our families and neighbors on [DATE].

Alternatively, please respond by email to [_____] or by letter to [_____] by [DATE].

Sincerely,

Your tenants from [_____]

Esta es una carta de ejemplo. Por favor realice los cambios necesarios.

Dirigido a _____

Le escribimos en nuestra calidad de inquilinos residiendo en las instalaciones de su propiedad ubicadas en

Tenemos entendido que usted ha perdido su licencia de arrendamiento y que su intención es que sus edificios sean desocupados para hacer renovaciones en todos los apartamentos. Para nosotros dos meses de aviso para encontrar otra vivienda no es suficiente, necesitamos más opciones que sean flexibles para calmar el estrés de ser desplazados repentinamente.

Nosotros, los inquilinos de estos cinco edificios, por este medio pedimos lo siguiente:

1. Que usted no desaloje a nadie de nuestros edificios y ponga un alto a todos los desplazamientos de esta cuadra, hasta que todas las familias tengan un plan sólido de reubicación.
2. Que haga todas las reparaciones necesarias para que los apartamentos sean habitables. Estaremos enviándole las peticiones detalladas para que haga las reparaciones de cada apartamento.
3. Que limpie los edificios y recoja toda la basura en las áreas de estacionamiento.
4. Que se reúna con nosotros para discutir estos asuntos y para hablar si nosotros sus inquilinos podemos comprarle los edificios para ponerle un alto a todos los desplazamientos.

Lo invitamos a que venga y escuche nuestras experiencias y que discutamos cómo podemos cumplir nuestros objetivos en el evento que tendremos con nuestras familias y vecinos en [FECHA].

Alternativamente, por favor respóndanos por correo electrónico a [_____] o por carta dirigida a [_____] a más tardar [FECHA].

Sinceramente,

Sus inquilinos de [_____]