

EDUCATION UPDATE

By Steven Haagsma

As New York continues to open up and return to something resembling “normal,” it seems appropriate to look back at how HOME’s education and outreach initiatives have changed and adapted over the past year-plus while also looking forward with cautious optimism.

NEW MODES FOR EDUCATION

Before the pandemic, HOME’s education initiatives relied primarily on in-person contact. As the Education Specialist, I would partner with other organizations to provide fair housing information to their clients, meeting them in person to do so. We also hosted monthly landlord training courses in the office. As COVID began to shut the world down last year, it quickly became apparent that these types of events would not be able to happen again for some time and that HOME would have to adapt. Fortunately, we had already targeted 2020 as the year to begin offering a virtual landlord training option, so we were able to accelerate that timeline and begin offering our monthly training in a webinar format by April. In doing so, we actually increased the number of landlords we were able to reach, as people could attend the trainings from the comfort of their home or office without needing to travel to HOME’s office on a weekday afternoon. Soon, we began offering an on-demand version of the landlord training webinar, creating the opportunity for landlords too busy to attend in-person to complete the training on their own time. By mid-July 2021, nearly 50 people had taken advantage of this opportunity, including landlords who live in rural areas of WNY and those who own property in the area but live elsewhere. These clients would never have had the opportunity to attend one of our in-person trainings, making the move to virtual landlord trainings a major pandemic success story for HOME.

As HOME had previously relied primarily on our partner organizations to reach tenants, it was a bit more of a challenge to continue reaching them as we had before. Fortunately, early in the summer of 2020 we were able to partner with the Old First Ward Community Center to conduct a tenants’ rights training on Facebook Live that was well-attended. After the live event, the recording stayed

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Specifically, dwellings are exempt if they have four or fewer units and the owner or their immediate family members intend to use it as a primary residence, but the enforceability of that clause seems somewhat improbable. If the property owner decides they want to evict a tenant who received ERAP relief within a year, they could still choose to do so as long as they or their family take up residence there. There is no requirement that the landlord or landlord’s family continue using it as a primary residence for any length of time, allowing landlords to potentially work their way around this requirement.



on HOME’s Facebook page, allowing people to access fair housing information at anytime. Later, we created an on-demand tenants’ rights training like the one available for landlords.

LOOKING FORWARD

While things have not yet (and may never) returned to the way they were before March of 2020, HOME’s education staff have been able to attend several in-person events for the first time in over a year! So far, all events have been outdoor to

increase the safety of attendees, but it has nonetheless been a great development to once again be out in the community and seeing people face-to-face. While we may be able to reach a greater number of people virtually (and will continue to offer those options), nothing can replace the ability to relate to someone in person and answer their questions face-to-face. We hold out hope that, despite small upticks in COVID cases, we will be able to continue having

“...nothing can replace the ability to relate to someone in person and answer their questions face-to-face.”

in-person events and have the best of both worlds—creating access for clients across the region through virtual events and also being able to meet with people face-to-face. ▲▲▲▲

While New York has done quite a good job of protecting tenants during the pandemic, they could certainly do better when it comes to the end of the eviction moratorium. While the laws in place will provide protection to tenants with well-meaning landlords (and the well-meaning landlords themselves), there are loopholes that landlords acting in bad faith could exploit, and closing them would be an important step to protect the most vulnerable New York residents. ▲▲▲▲



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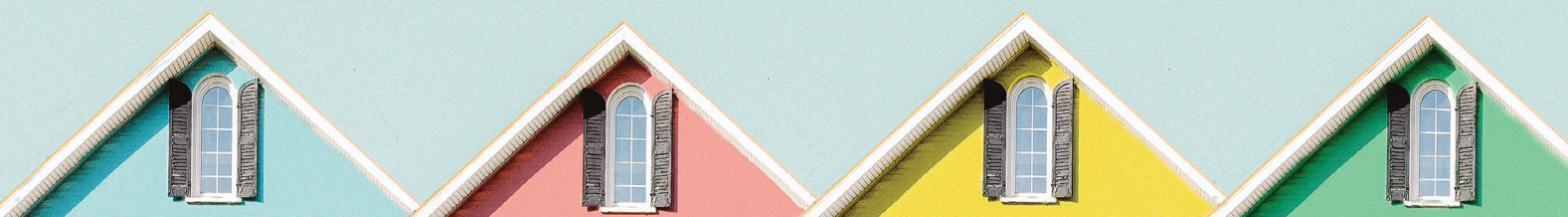
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INSIGHT



Housing Opportunities Made Equal



OPINION: TRYING TO PREVENT CATASTROPHE AS THE EVICTION MORATORIUM ENDS

By Steven Haagsma

New Yorkers who have been unable to pay rent during the COVID-19 pandemic have been fortunate to have some of the strongest protections in the country, as the state legislature and the governor have repeatedly extended the eviction moratorium, most recently to August 31. Additionally, both tenants and landlords have been able to apply for payment of back rent through the state’s Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) since the beginning of June. While these are important steps that will certainly prevent thousands of people from losing their homes, there is still more the state could do to protect tenants.

ERAP was created this year with \$2 billion of funding to help pay back rent and utilities and will certainly prevent many evictions. Importantly, the program requires that landlords receiving the funds neither raise rent nor evict tenants for a year following

receipt of the funds. Unfortunately, there are two glaring problems with this provision which the state could solve if they chose to.

The first problem is that landlords can simply choose not to apply for or accept ERAP payments. While the motivation of receiving back rent will certainly be enough for the majority of landlords, there will just as certainly be some who choose to eat the missed rent in order to be rid of tenants, whether out of malice, frustration, or other reasons. Perversely, this could lead to tenants owing less rent being more likely to be evicted. Landlords would be more able to accept a loss of one or two months of rent in exchange for evicting a tenant than they would ten months or more. As ERAP covers up to twelve months of missed rent, landlords are more incentivized to accept the payments and the conditions that come with

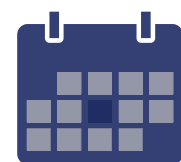
it for tenants who owe them more money.

This problem does not have to exist. Washington, DC recently passed a law requiring landlords to have applied for rent relief in order to file for eviction. There is no such requirement in New York, so landlords are welcome to choose eviction over reimbursement if they desire. Additionally, DC’s law opens evictions initially only to cases where tenants owe more than \$600 in rent. A similar provision in New York could help tenants who have done their best to stay current on rent but come up just short.

The second problem is that the no-eviction clause in ERAP only applies to dwellings with more than four units. This is a glaring loophole that could be exploited.

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HOME’S UPCOMING EVENTS AUGUST AND OCTOBER 2021

Back to School
DRIVE THRU BBQ
BACKPACK AND SCHOOL SUPPLY GIVEAWAY
SATURDAY, AUGUST 28
12:00PM - 3:00PM • FREE FOOD
HOME, Inc. Parking Lot
(@ Oxford and West Ferry Street)

Give me SHELTER
ONLINE AUCTION
BIDDING BEGINS OCTOBER 11 @ 9AM
LIVE AUCTION BEGINS OCTOBER 15TH @ 6PM
AUCTION ENDS OCTOBER 16TH @ 5PM
ZOOM info will be found at:
www.homeny.org and Facebook

NEW YORK'S EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

By Hannah Luterek

While the eviction moratorium is set to expire on August 31, tenants at risk of housing displacement can seek aid through New York's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). Stand Up Buffalo has partnered with the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to help manage the statewide program.

For Erie County alone, there is \$35 million available in rental assistance for residents. A household who is approved for the program may receive the following:

Up to 12 months of rental arrears for rents accrued on or after March 13, 2020.

Up to 3 months of additional rental assistance if the household is expected to spend 30 percent of their gross monthly income on rent.

Up to 12 months of utility arrears for arrears that have accrued on or after March 13, 2020.

In order to receive assistance, households must meet income qualifications and have experienced a loss in income due to the coronavirus pandemic. Priority is given to low-income residents.

If a household is granted assistance, payments will be made directly to landlords, and tenants will be notified that the payment has been made. Landlords are also able to apply on behalf of their tenants.

To learn more about the program and application requirements, visit otda.ny.gov/ERAP or call the help center at 1-844-NY1-RENT. For more COVID-19 assistance programs, visit standupbuffalo.com.



BUFFALO TENANT BILL OF RIGHTS

By Steven Haagsma

While Buffalo, Erie County, and New York State have strong tenant protections compared to most of the country, that doesn't mean they can't be strengthened further. To that end, in 2020 People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH Buffalo) and Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) released a plan for a Buffalo Tenant Bill of Rights, a list of 10 policies that would strengthen tenant protections in the city and increase opportunity and housing stability for all

Buffalo residents. While the plan was released over a year ago, the Democratic nominee for Mayor of Buffalo, India Walton, recently signaled her support for the plan on Twitter, re-inserting the Tenant Bill of Rights into the conversation and significantly increasing the likelihood of it (or part of it) passing at some point. With the plan back in the conversation, we wanted to briefly outline it for you. The whole plan can be found on PUSH's or PPG's website.



1. RIGHT TO JUST CAUSE EVICTION

This would require landlords to give a reason for refusing to renew a rental agreement, meaning tenants could no longer be forced out of their home with a simple notice of as little as 30 days.

2. RIGHT TO TIMELY REPAIRS

Tenants should be able to have repairs made quickly, without having their landlord retaliate by forcing them out or raising the rent.

3. RIGHT TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

Many languages are spoken in Buffalo, and anyone who finds themselves in housing court should be able to learn what is happening to them and advocate for themselves in a language they understand.

4. RIGHT TO KNOW WHO OWNS THE BUILDING

There needs to be transparency in building ownership so tenants know who their landlord is, which can be especially important when applying to rent relief programs such as New York's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).

5. RIGHT TO LEGAL COUNSEL IN HOUSING COURT

No one should be forced to represent themselves when losing their home is on the line. Other cities have established the right to representation in housing court and Buffalo should, too.

6. RIGHT TO HOUSING STABILITY

The most vulnerable tenants should receive assistance to ensure they have a stable housing situation.

7. RIGHT TO FIRST REFUSAL AND RIGHT TO RETURN

If the house a tenant rents is going up for sale, they should be given the first opportunity to buy it. Washington, D.C. has implemented this policy successfully for years. Additionally, when affordable housing is created in a gentrifying neighborhood, tenants who had previously lived there and been forced out by rising prices should be given the first opportunity to move back in.

8. RIGHT TO RENT STABILIZATION

Rising rents are pricing many Buffalo tenants out of quality housing. The 2019 Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act passed by the NY State Legislature created the opportunity for municipalities to opt into rent control, which is something Buffalo should do.

9. RIGHT TO REPRESENTATION THROUGH AN ADVOCATE

The City of Buffalo should create an office of "Tenant Advocate" who would ensure that all Buffalo tenants are given due process when in danger of losing their homes.

10. RIGHT TO AN AFFORDABLE HOUSING FUND

There should be a dedicated fund to offer grants and low- or no-interest loans to vulnerable tenants to ensure they are able to stay in their homes.

While still far from a reality, the passage of all or part of the Tenant Bill of Rights would significantly improve the lives and opportunities of thousands of Buffalo's most vulnerable

residents, and if India Walton is elected Mayor in November this dream could become Buffalo's reality. ▲▲▲▲

HOME HOSTS PAINTING WITH A PURPOSE

By Hannah Luterek

With in-person events making their return, Housing Opportunities Made Equal wanted to bring our supporters together for a fundraiser to help support our mission of fair housing for all. After some discussion, we decided to hold our first "Painting with a Purpose" event, a fun night full of art, snacks, and time spent among friends.

HOME teamed up with Painting with a Twist to host the event at their Cheektowaga location. Every month, each Painting with a Twist location nationwide teams up with a non-profit organization to give back to. For the month of June, this particular Painting with a Twist location was ecstatic to team up with HOME and help support our mission.

Guests were able to attend the event either in-person or virtually. Led by an instructor, each guest painted a still life featuring the word "HOME." Guests also enjoyed refreshments and the opportunity to take part in a 50/50 raffle.



HOME raised \$695 in total from the event. The funds we raised will directly help us to provide services for families in the Western New York area in need of a place of their own to call home. Our guests had a fun time and were so thrilled to finally be able to attend an in-person event in support of HOME.

We are so grateful for all who attended Painting with a Purpose and donated to our cause.

Our dedicated supporters show up time and time again to assist HOME in our mission of providing fair housing to those in need, and we cannot thank them enough.

We are looking forward to all the in-person events we have to come, including our Back to School Drive-Thru BBQ on August 28, 2021.



Q&A HOME'S NEWEST TEAM ADDITION

What did you do before you came to HOME?

What excites you about working for HOME?

What hobbies or interests do you have outside of work?

ALEJANDRO GUIDOS FAIR HOUSING SPECIALIST



I was born and raised in NYC, and my first step in my professional career was working at a non-profit which provided supportive housing to people with insecure housing and mental health concerns. I moved to Buffalo in 2018 to be with my fiancée, and after a few years of working in social services and getting to learn a new city, I found a new home at HOME!

I have always been passionate about working to achieve justice for underserved communities, and this has driven the choices I have made in my career. Working in supportive housing and social services made me realize how important housing is, and how having secure, safe housing is the first step in people being able to achieve their goals.

I have been playing video games since I was a little kid, starting with the Nintendo 64. More recently I have been playing on my gaming computer which I built myself. I also enjoy going to the movies, so I've been thrilled about theaters reopening and getting to see movies on the big screen again.

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