

RENT STRIKE

Resource and Organizing Package for the 2020 Pandemic #CANCELRENT #RENTSTRIKE #CANTPAYWONTPAY

The world is in the grips of a dark, strange and exciting time. We are hearing that up to 30% of people may be losing their jobs as a result of the pandemic. With 59% of Americans living paycheck-to-paycheck and so many confined in isolation, it is obvious that many people are just not going to be able to pay their rents or mortgages for some time. While many states have passed 90 day eviction moratoriums and stays for mortgage holders, there are still few protections for renters, who are fast becoming among the most vulnerable people in our society. Even many leading retailers have announced they will stop paying rent. Surely some will be able to work things out with compassionate landlords, but many will need to band together to resist predation. This document is for all of you.

If you can't pay your rent, or you know someone who won't be able to pay their rent, **now is the time to take action**. Use the form letters below (or make your own!) to start a conversation with your neighbors about a rent strike in your building. If you are a homeowner, see the section for tips on how to talk to your bank about not paying your mortgage. If you are a landlord, please consider reaching out to your tenants find a way to work together through this crisis

In the difficult days ahead, we are going to need to form fierce solidarities to protect our communities. We will need to move away from an "every man for himself" approach and start looking out for and caring for each other. It cannot be over-emphasized that the most important thing when organizing is just that: relationships, of trust and respect. It should also be noted that what we are all going through now (a global pandemic in the age of the internet) is fundamentally new territory, and offers countless possibilities, challenges, and opportunities for creativity. Many of the resources in this kit are things that have worked under different circumstances than we are now facing, and while they may be effective, now more than ever there is room for innovation. We must recognize this time not as a disaster, but as a moment of infinite possibilities.

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS THE 2020 RENT STRIKE?

5 DEMANDS  FOR EMERGENCY COVID-19 SURVIVAL	 FREE HEALTHCARE Free testing, treatment and healthcare for all.
	 NO WORK Suspend work obligations. Guarantee food stamps and sick pay for all.
	 NO PAYING — NO DEBT Suspend all rent, mortgage, utilities, loans, foreclosures, evictions and parking enforcement.
	 FREE THE PRISONERS End bail for jails, deactivate ICE, release detainees, and stop all sweeps of homeless camps.
	 HOMES FOR ALL Open up unoccupied homes to anyone who needs one.

Rent Strike is a movement of individuals dedicated to withholding payment of rent. It seeks to respond to the COVID-19 emergency in a way that benefits and meets the needs of everyday people.

RELEVANT DEFINITIONS

Rent Strike: a tactic by which a group of tenants join together in solidarity and refuse to pay rent, usually accompanied by a set of demands.

Rent Freeze: typically means rent is frozen at cost. Tenants still pay rent, but landlords can't raise the rent.

Rent Moratorium/Suspension: a temporary prohibition of rent being charged in a given city, region, or state.

Rent Abolition: rent is eliminated as an acceptable practice. No one can be charged rent.

[Image description: white text on a black background listing the 5 Demands: Free Healthcare; No Work; No Paying - No Debt; Free the Prisoners; Homes for All]

BENEFITS AND RISKS OF NOT PAYING YOUR RENT

What are the BENEFITS of not paying your rent?

1. If you can't pay, you just can't pay!
You shouldn't have to choose between buying food or paying rent, or have to consider putting yourself and your family's health at risk just to put money in the pocket of your landlord.
2. Even if you can afford to pay your rent this month, by participating in a rent strike you can help protect your more vulnerable neighbors.
Some folks have suggested putting your rent in escrow, donating it to a charitable cause or mutual aid network, or paying only the amount of rent necessary to cover utilities or basic maintenance.

What are the RISKS of not paying your rent, or organizing a rent strike?

**** DISCLAIMER **** the people who created this document are NOT lawyers. If you want legal advice relevant to your state, we would recommend that you search for your local tenant's union, or state bar association: many bar associations have free legal consultation services that are open to the public.

1. You could be evicted.
Many states have passed eviction moratoriums, barring evictions from happening except in certain situations (see [this link](#) for a map of where these policies have been passed). However, if you don't live in one of these states, your landlord could threaten to evict you. Even if you do live in one of these states, your landlord could still illegally threaten to evict you. The more renters in your building you get on board, the better: **they can't evict you all.**
2. Your landlord could threaten to shut off utilities.
Many utility companies have been barred from shutting off electricity or water during this public health crisis - you'll want to check locally to see if that applies to you. Even if it does, your landlord may still threaten to shut off utilities. You'll want to make sure you carefully document any communication your landlord gives you around this, and make sure you have access to the boiler room in your building so that you or another knowledgeable tenant can undo any damage your landlord does.

HOW TO ORGANIZE A RENT STRIKE

Even if you are able to pay rent this month, your support and involvement will help protect those who can't. See below for three simple steps to start coordinating a rent strike in your building.

***Important info on hand-written notes. Please read the following before taking any action*:** If you have any symptoms (eg. cough, fever, difficulty breathing, loss of taste or smell), or have been exposed in the last 14 days to anyone with any symptoms, or anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19, *please do NOT make any handwritten notes*. In general in this moment it is probably best to start with as much phone and digital contacting as possible.

1. Reach out to fellow tenants in your building.

You can text neighbors you already know, and slip handwritten notes under the doors of those you don't. Some people have had success with starting a conversation first about grocery and childcare help in their building, and then raising the topic of a rent strike once a group chat, email thread, or other form of community network is established.

SAMPLE NOTE TO A NEIGHBOR: (*Check out some other templates [here](#), or write your own!*)

Hi NEIGHBOR! My name is [insert name], and I live in unit [insert room number]. I just wanted to check in on you and our other neighbors in your room during these difficult times. We can practice social distancing and still look out for one another. With that said, I am reaching out to you to see if you are interested in joining a building-wide rent strike for April. I know that many of our neighbors have lost their jobs because of this crisis and may have trouble paying rent on April 1. If you are interested in joining together to ask our landlord not to collect rent for the month of April, you can text me at [insert phone number]. I'm going to start a group chat of people in our building who are interested in working together on this. The more of us get involved, the more legitimate power we hold as tenants. Thanks, [insert your name]

2. Reach out to your landlord.

This doesn't have to be with a list of firm demands! Some landlords may be understanding and want to work with tenants to find a solution together. That being said, the more neighbors you can get on board, the more weight your letter will hold. Also, you may want to be careful about when you share information with your landlord, so that they can't take action against you early on. You can start with something like the note like the one below, or check out more options [here](#).

Dear [insert landlord's name],

Since March 13, the United States has been in a state of emergency because of the COVID-19, or coronavirus, global pandemic. Local, state, and federal officials are encouraging people to self-quarantine, and many workplaces have closed or significantly reduced their hours. Many tenants were already struggling to make rent payments before the crisis, and now will be unable to pay altogether. The choice to keep your tenants safe is in your hands by freezing rent for at least a full month during the COVID-19 crisis.

In order to protect the health and housing security of your tenants, we call on you to act now so we will not have to make choices between keeping our loved ones safe and risking our own lives and the lives of other vulnerable, immunocompromised populations in our community. We are gripped by the COVID-19 crisis, with jobs sending people home and no paid sick leave. Without work, without paid sick days, many of us will not be able to afford our rent payments come April 1st. We are hard-working people who barely have enough to pay one month's rent at a time. Please consider not collecting this upcoming month's rent in order to prioritize the safety and lives of your tenants.

In community,

[insert your name, and the names of other neighbors signing on]

3. Continue to spread the word, to friends, neighbors, family, and community members!

The best next steps you can take are to spread the word to people around you, and to put pressure on your local government to suspend rents state-wide. Many states have already implemented eviction moratoriums and policies for mortgage relief, so it's reasonable to ask for rent payment moratoriums next. See [here](#) for a list of regional resources, petitions, and groups. You can also hang a white sheet out your window or put a white piece of paper in your window to signal to others in your neighborhood that you're participating!

ORGANIZATION & TACTICS:

[Podcast from Rebel Steps on Participating in a Rent Strike](#) Clear, comprehensive current overview. Very Good.

[Squatting Resources: How-to manuals, Foreclosure Site Maps, Foreclosure and Foreclosed Homes, Squatters Handbook: Political Squatting Tips, Information on Squatter's Rights, Twitter page for LA's Reclaiming Homes, Twitter page for Bay Area Moms 4 Housing.](#) With 90-day eviction ordinances popping up all over the place, this could be the best time EVER for squatting.

[Parkdale Documentary](#): 30 minute YouTube documentary on a rent strike that happened in 2017 in Toronto. Also a link to Parkdale Organize's [website](#).

[Phone Zap Campaign](#): Interview with Oakland Chapter of IWOC with ideas for mounting and winning a call-in campaign, and general resources and tips for general [phone banking](#).

[The Final Straw Podcast](#): Doing For Selves - Open Source Supplies and Tenant Organizing, Legal hacks and lots of interesting tactics [Relevant part starts 35 minutes in, the first part is kinda.... : \]

[Tactical Podcast about Organizing \(/vs mobilizing\)](#) Labor organizer Jane McAlevey gives a master class in political organizing.

Landlord “shaming” has been called both an effective and a dangerous tactic (for example, leaving posters all over the neighborhood saying the landlord has raised rent or is endangering tenants during the outbreak.) This may depend on how everything develops. Be careful. Be creative. We couldn't find any good online resources for this.

SAFETY:

[Security Culture](#) “Required Reading” ([audio version here](#))

[Stay secure during the Covid-19](#): some resources from online security activists at the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

[Tips for Tenants on Police and ICE](#): in English and in Spanish.

[ICE-HSI investigation manuals](#): very important as they show how they direct prosecutors to lie and cover up exculpatory evidence to secure convictions and deportations against those without the resources to fight & [ICE Patrol](#) - handy scraped public directory of LinkedIn profiles

File hosting websites: Mega.nz, Anonfile.com via tor browser or tails, [vshare.is](#) , Onionshare

Free website creation platforms: wix, weebly, wordpress, etc... [very easy to learn online!]

GENERAL RESOURCES and FURTHER READING:

A [collection of flyers](#) about CareStrike and Rent Strike in multiple languages.

Join [this](#) rent strike Telegram chat if you are interested in being more involved in coordination.

[Keepyourrent.com](#): website for a rent strike group. Toronto-specific information as well as useful general resources for organizing.

[RentStrike2020.org](#): petitions for state governments to suspend rent, mortgage, and utility payments for at least two months.

[RentsDue.org](#): website with templates for calling and writing your local representatives to advocate for financial relief (in the United States).

[Covid-19 Emergency Tenant Protections Map of USA](#): a map of the United States documenting where tenant protections have been passed, with policy summaries.

[5 Demands Global Site](#): a website with more information about the CareStrike. Has a useful FAQ section on the Rent Strike, as well as a hotline and email (text: (316) 742-0167; voice: (316) 804-8701; email: hello@5demands.global).

[Covid-19 Resources for Undocumented Communities](#): a Google sheet with resources for undocumented families in English and in Spanish. Linked resources available in further languages.

[Pandemic Financial Resources Info](#): a Google Doc with some links to news stories documenting unemployment and eviction relief.

[Collective Care is our Best Weapon Against Covid-19](#): a Google Doc with links to many mutual aid networks and relief funds across the United States and internationally

[Rent Strike Podcast](#): Includes a concrete how-to interview with a tenant organizer and talks about why people should participate.

[Short YouTube video](#) explaining the rent strike.

A [tweet](#) advising tenants whose landlords receive an FHA loan.

[Rent Is Theft](#): an old website explaining a deeper position against rent generally.

REGIONAL:

Information specific by place but very often with cross-applicable ideas and possibilities. This document is a work in progress, so if your area is not on there it doesn't mean there isn't organizing happening!

State-by-state petitions to enact a rent and mortgage moratorium can be found at [this site](#).

[Mutual Aid Groups During Coronavirus](#): [Scroll to the bottom of this article for helpful overview of ongoing mutual aid organizing efforts in different cities]

Join [this](#) rent strike Telegram chat if you are interested in being more involved in national coordination.

WEST:

PUGET SOUND

[Link to join the Puget Sound area Telegram group](#) (Telegram is a free, and relatively secure chatting app)

[Olympia Rent Strike](#). Olympia, Washington's central webform for committing to strike, downloading templates and flyers/posters. Please spread widely. Also can be "copied" through the website if you wanna make one for another city.

[RentStrike Blog](#) with Seattle-specific recommendations, resources, and templates.

[Letter to a landlord template](#) that cites WA-specific information on the eviction moratorium.

BAY AREA

[Link to join the Bay Area Telegram group](#) (Telegram is a free, and relatively secure chatting app)

[A sample letter for San Francisco renters](#). Folks are working for a guide for people who are doing political rent strikes, but either way sending a letter is necessary cover right now to activate protections against eviction.

[Petition from trans-led organizations to CA's governor](#) that includes housing demands.

LOS ANGELES

[Link to join the LA Telegram group](#) (Telegram is a free, and relatively secure chatting app)

[LA rent freeze petition & demands](#); [Petition from trans-led organizations to CA's governor](#); [LA rent freeze Facebook event](#)

[Sample Letters For CA Covid-19 unable to pay rent/rent strike/rent suspension/forgiveness](#)

["Naming the Moment: They Say Rent Hike, We Say Rent Strike"](#); [Specific info on LA demands](#)

[L.A. Tenants Union Handbook](#); [LA Tenants Union Covid-19 Demands](#)

ORANGE COUNTY

[Link to join the OC Telegram group](#) (Telegram is a free, and relatively secure chatting app)

COLORADO

[Colorado Rent Strike and Eviction Defense](#)

EAST COAST:

NEW YORK

[Rent Strike 2020 and Forever Resources](#) (NY specific but generally useful).

[Reclaim Our Homes / Mortgage Suspension Now!](#)

Housing Justice for All has an active petition for a rent freeze in New York State, including demands to house the homeless, and to freeze evictions. Please sign & share!

BOSTON

Email AllstonBrightonMutualAid@gmail.com to get involved: they are working on mapping the major property management companies and, long term, mapping vacant properties.

DC

DMV Rent Strike [Instagram Page](#) and [Google Drive Folder](#).

MIDWEST:

CHICAGO

[CHICAGO](#): website with mostly Chicago-specific resources, with more planned

[FAQ specific to Chicago](#) which may be helpful (modified for your city's landlord-tenant law). [Keep Your Rent](#) PDF with FAQ on why keeping rent makes sense.

[Midwest Rent Strike Stuff](#) on Twitter.

[Petition to Illinois Gov](#) on Google Docs.

OKLAHOMA

[Oklahoma petition for rent freeze](#).

SOUTH:

RALEIGH

[Tenants' organizing kit from Raleigh, NC](#) on a Google Doc

AUSTIN

[Austin Rent Strike Declaration PDF](#)

[Austin TX Rent Strike](#): Austin, TX's central webform for committing to strike, downloading templates and flyers/posters. Please spread widely. Also can be "copied" through the website if you wanna make one for another city.

ATLANTA

[Link to join the ATL Telegram group](#) (Telegram is a free, and relatively secure chatting app)

INTERNATIONAL:

CANADA

[Link to join the Carestrike Canada Telegram group](#) (Telegram is a free, and relatively secure chatting app)

[Keepyourrent.com](#): website for a Toronto-based rent strike group. Toronto-specific information as well as useful general resources for organizing.

LETTER AND FLYER TEMPLATES:

Trying to draft a letter to your landlord to notify them you won't be paying rent, or reach out to your neighbors to organize together? Check out these templates people have been using for some guidelines/inspiration:

[Landlord Letter Template](#): Lawyer-approved (WA specific but potentially adaptable) draft letters to landlords, employers, credit card companies, banks, courts, and more. stating an inability to pay rent on April and May 1.

[Tenant Outreach Template](#): a draft letter to send to your neighbors! And [Another One!](#) And [one that could help you establish a mutual aid network within your building.](#) [Here is another.](#) [And another.](#)

Sample Letter - From Renters, to Landlords, From Those Impacted by COVID-19 (WA specific & allegedly lawyer-approved)

Date (Landlord name) (Landlord Address) (Landlord Email)

Re: My tenancy at (address)

Due to the recent Washington COVID-19 crisis, I will be unable to pay my rent in a timely manner. I am giving you this advanced notice in writing as a courtesy. By violating the Governor's order, you may be subject to criminal penalties pursuant to RCW 43.06.220(5). On March 18, 2020, Governor Inslee enacted a moratorium on evictions. An excerpt of that Proclamation reads:

...based on the above noted situation and under the provisions of RCW 43.06.220(1)(h), and to help preserve and maintain life, health, property or the public peace, effective immediately and until April 17, 2020, I hereby prohibit the following activities related to residential evictions by all residential landlords operating residential rental property in Washington State:

1. Residential landlords are prohibited from serving a notice of unlawful detainer for default payment of rent related to such property under RCW 59.12.030(3).
2. Residential landlords are prohibited from issuing a 20-day notice for unlawful detainer related to such property under RCW 59.12.030(2), unless the landlord attaches an affidavit attesting that the action is believed necessary to ensure the health and safety of the tenant or other individuals.
3. Residential landlords are prohibited from initiating judicial action seeking a writ of restitution involving a dwelling unit if the alleged basis for the writ is the failure of the tenant or tenants to timely pay rent. This prohibition includes, but is not limited to, an action under Chapters 59.12 or RCW 59.18 RCW.
4. Local law enforcement is prohibited from serving or otherwise acting on eviction orders that are issued solely for default payment of rent related to such property. Nothing in this Proclamation is intended to prohibit local law enforcement from acting on orders of eviction issued for other reasons, including but not limited to waste, nuisance or commission of a crime on the premises.

Thank you for your understanding during this crisis. I am monitoring the programs available to assist renters and I will give you updates about my ability to return to work as I get them from my employer.

Signed,

_____ (your name printed below signature)

CRITIQUE

This document was created and compiled very quickly. We drew sources from the Rent Strike 2020 Telegram thread and took inspiration from this [Rent Strike NY document](#). Please recognize that this is the advice and thoughts of two people who are in no way experts. Feel free to disagree with us. We recognize that this document is incomplete and full of holes. We would love to expand this document. If you'd like to add any of the following things to this document, please feel free to edit the live version [here](#) (please note - this link is not always reliable, our apologies.)

- Further information and resources to mortgage holders.
- More feedback and ideas on tactics to engage neighbors and landlords.
- Translations and resources in languages other than English.
- Updates on utility shut-off moratorium policies.
- More scripts and form letters to send to neighbors, landlords, and representatives.
- Renter's Rights 101 information, and links to local tenant's rights organizations or legal resources.
- Links to funds that have been established to financially support rent strikers.
- **And more...**