

# TENANTS RIGHTS & ORGANIZING HANDBOOK

**A know-your-rights and organizing guide  
for tenants who are ready to fight back.**

By the Los Angeles Tenants Union (LATU)  
K-Town Local

**Sick and tired of your  
landlord's harassment  
and living under the  
constant threat of  
eviction?**





# WHAT IS THE LOS ANGELES TENANTS UNION?



The Los Angeles Tenants Union is an autonomous housing movement that fights **for safe and affordable housing for all**, and organizes **against landlord harassment, mass evictions, and the systematic destruction of rent controlled housing in LA and beyond**. We are a member-run and member-funded movement, with a focus on building community power and planning direct actions. **We are not another housing non-profit.**

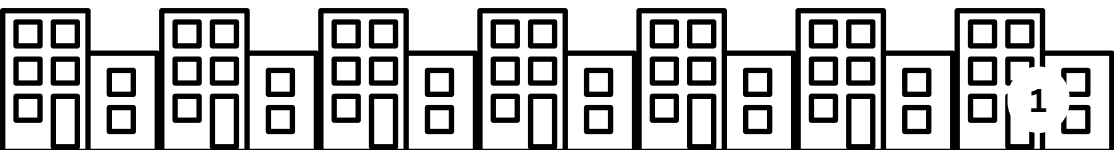
## WHAT DO WE WANT?

The Los Angeles Tenants Union is a **fighting union**. We fight against landlords who seek to profit at our expense and developers and politicians who connive to attract gentrification into our neighborhoods. And we fight for a world where, in the words of Emiliano Zapata, **the land belongs to those who work it.**

## WHAT DO WE DO?

LATU is comprised of **building-wide tenant associations (TAs)** and **neighborhood-wide committees** that host regular meetings. In these meetings, tenants learn about their rights and discuss community issues like gentrification and the mass evictions of poor and working-class people.

In our associations and committees, we plan **collective direct actions to take back control of our homes and neighborhoods**. Through marches and protests at our landlords' luxury homes, food distributions, street clean-ups, community celebrations, and more, **we are building a popular movement that centers the needs and demands of poor, working class, immigrant communities.**



# WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE?

This guide contains an introduction to **the most important rights protecting tenants in the city of Los Angeles**, and basic information on what to do if you are facing eviction, landlord harassment, or bad living conditions.

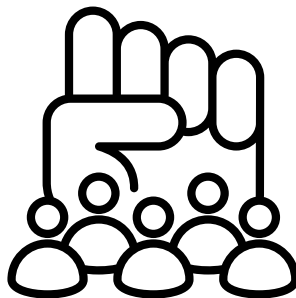
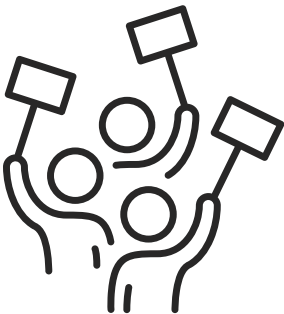
This guide also discusses **the importance of organizing with your neighbors**. Simply knowing your rights is **not** enough to ensure those rights are respected. Getting landlords and politicians to respect our rights requires us to **work together and build a large and powerful movement**.

Landlords and housing developers make massive profits by evicting tenants from long-term, affordable, rent-controlled homes, which incentivizes them to keep tenants ignorant of their rights against eviction, and powerless to enforce those rights.

This is why landlords and corrupt politicians paid off by the land-owning class insist we rely on their incompetent government agencies, which do next to nothing to actually protect tenants.

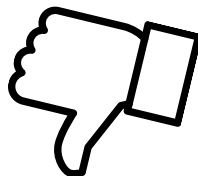
If every tenant across the city demanded their rights against eviction be respected, and refused to be intimidated into leaving their homes, the current waves of mass evictions would come to a crashing halt.

**The only way to make this a reality is to organize and build a movement, together.**





# THE TOP TEN LANDLORD LIES



*(And why you should  
ignore them)*

**(1) “This is MY property and I can evict you whenever I want to.”**

**FALSE!** Your landlord cannot evict you just because they feel like it. In the city of Los Angeles, tenants can only legally be evicted for specific reasons. Learn more on **page 5**.

**(2) “You need to move out so me and my family can move in.”**

**FALSE!** Landlords often lie about their intent to move into the property. This is because an “owner move in” is one of the few legal reasons a landlord can evict a tenant in LA. More on **page 5**.

**(3) “I can evict you because your name is not on the lease.”**

**FALSE!** If you pay rent in exchange for living at a property, you are a tenant, even if your name isn’t on a written lease. Learn more about documenting your tenancy on **page 6**.

**(4) “Leave or I’ll call the police and have you thrown out.”**

**FALSE!** Despite what they say, landlords can’t just ask the police to evict you. Landlords have to file an eviction case against you in court, win the case, and get a court order before a police lockout can happen. On **page 7-8**, learn more about the court process.

**(5) “You have to let me in to your house/apartment to inspect it whenever I want.”**

**FALSE!** Landlords love to creep around in our homes without permission as a way to harass and intimidate us. The truth is, your landlord can only enter your home under limited circumstances, which you can read about on **page 10**.

**(6) “You don’t have any rights because you don’t have papers.”**

**FALSE!** ALL tenants have the same legal rights, regardless of their immigration status. In LA, It is illegal for your landlord to threaten to call immigration authorities against you. Learn more on **page 10**.

**(7) “The building is going to be demolished. I’ll give you some money if you leave in 30 days, or else I’ll evict you and you’ll get nothing. All your neighbors are taking the money.”**

**FALSE!** Landlords often lie to tenants that they’re planning to demolish a building, when they really want to vacate all the units so they can raise the rent. Tenants have an absolute right to reject these “Cash-for-Keys” offers without retaliation. More on **page 11**.

**(8) “I can’t do any repairs unless you agree to pay higher rent.”**

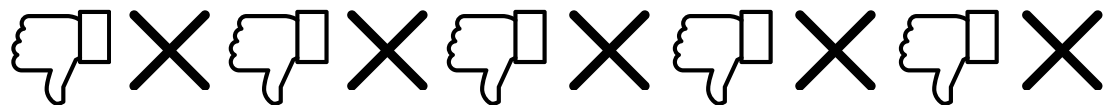
**FALSE!** Landlords are required to keep your home safe and habitable regardless of how much rent you pay. Learn how to demand repairs on **page 12**. There are also limits on how much a landlord can raise your rent in LA, which you can read about on **page 9**.

**(9) “I’ll help you out if you keep an eye on the neighbors and report to me if they do anything wrong.”**

**FALSE!** Landlords want to pit tenants against each other to create an environment of division, fear, and paranoia. Don’t let their empty promises turn you against your neighbors! Learn about how to organize with your fellow tenants on **pages 13-14**.

**(10) “I am a housing provider.”**

**FALSE!** Landlords **do not provide housing**. They buy up existing housing and make it more expensive and less livable for everyone. It’s tenants who build and maintain our homes and take care of the land. Learn more about how the union is building tenant power on **page 14**.





# **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!**

## **“Just Cause” Eviction Protections in Los Angeles**



In Los Angeles, **your landlord can’t just evict you because they feel like it.** They need to provide a specific reason. The two main laws that are supposed to strictly regulate evictions in Los Angeles are:

(1) the Los Angeles Rent Stabilization Ordinance (LARSO), L.A.M.C 151.00

(2) the Los Angeles Just Cause for Evictions Ordinance (JCO), L.A.M.C 165.00.

Under these laws, a landlord **cannot evict you without proving that they had a “just cause” to do so**, such as a violation of the lease or a failure to pay rent. A landlord can also claim they intend to demolish the property (“Ellis Act”) or that they intend to move into the property themselves as “just cause” reasons for eviction.



## **SO, WHY ARE THERE STILL SO MANY EVICTIONS IN LOS ANGELES?**

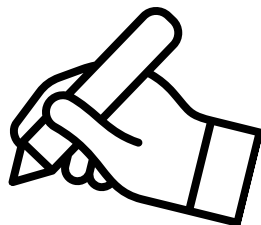
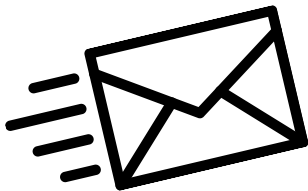


Because they profit from evictions, landlords are highly motivated to fabricate reasons to kick tenants out. Because of this, many landlords lie, harass tenants to the point of self-eviction, or even physically lock tenants out of their homes. And the city does next to nothing to stop it.

**That’s why it’s up to tenants to protect one another, force landlords to respect our rights, and make it impossible for them to evict us.**

# THE BEST WAY TO COMBAT LANDLORD LIES? DOCUMENT EVERYTHING!

- **Do not pay your rent in cash.** It's best to pay your rent using personal checks, cashier's checks, or money orders. Label your payments with your name, address, and the month/year of rent you are paying. If you mail in your rent, use certified mail.
- **Demand rent receipts from your landlord for every single rent payment.** Your landlord is legally required to give you receipts for payments made. (Cal. Civil Code §2075)
- **Stop answering your landlord's phone calls.** Only communicate with your landlord or property manager over text, email, or letters, so you can have a record of all interactions.
- **Take photos of all the parts of your home in need of repairs.** Make all requests for repairs in writing.
- **If your landlord or property manager harasses you, write it down.** Include the date and time it occurred, and everything you can remember about what happened.
- **Tell your landlord/property manager to provide all documents to you in your primary language.** It's your right to understand all legal documents being given to you! (Cal. Civil Code §1632)





# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!



## What to do if you're served eviction papers

If you or someone you know receives eviction papers, it can be scary. **But do not panic, and do not move out. You can still fight back.** Just follow these steps:

First, determine whether you have received an eviction notice or an eviction lawsuit. The notice is a document your landlord prepares on his own, and must deliver to you before he can ever file an eviction lawsuit, called an “unlawful detainer,” in court.

An eviction **lawsuit** will look like this and will come in a bigger packet. It will say the words “unlawful detainer” near the top.

**California Three-Day Notice to Pay Rent or Quit**

To: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Tenant in possession of the premises at \_\_\_\_\_  
 City of \_\_\_\_\_, County of \_\_\_\_\_, California.

Please understand that the rent on these premises is not to be paid for the following period:

YOU ARE HEREBY NOTICED that you must pay the amount within THREE (3) DAYS from the date of service of this notice to you, or to avoid the initiation of proceedings to evict you. Your failure to do so will result in legal proceedings being initiated against you to recover costs, attorney's fees, and costs of suit.

Where applicable, if the premises, declare the limitations of the rental agreement or lease under which you occupy the premises, and POST TO THE TENANT:

An independent, or  
 An independent, or  
 An independent, or

AT THE FOLLOWING ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_, California, phone: \_\_\_\_\_

IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER:

To person. Initial date and hours for rent collection are: \_\_\_\_\_  
 To mail to the person and address indicated above: \_\_\_\_\_  
 To deposit in court, \_\_\_\_\_  
 To deliver to your tenant, \_\_\_\_\_, California  
 By electronic funds transfer procedure previously established.



An eviction **notice** will look something like this, giving the tenant a deadline to either pay the rent, fix a lease violation, or move out.

**SUMMONS (CITACION JUDICIAL)**  
**UNLAWFUL DETAINER—EVICTION (INFRACCION LEYTA DE INMUEBLES—DESALUDO)**

**NOTICE TO DEFENDANT (NOTICIA AL DEMANDADO)**

**YOU ARE BEING SUED BY PLAINTIFF (Usted está demandado el demandante)**

**NOTICE (You have been sued)** The court has decided against you and you must pay the amount within THREE (3) DAYS from the date of service of this notice to you, or to avoid the initiation of proceedings to evict you. Your failure to do so will result in legal proceedings being initiated against you to recover costs, attorney's fees, and costs of suit.

**PERIOD (Llamada de juicio)** The court has decided against you and you must pay the amount within THREE (3) DAYS from the date of service of this notice to you, or to avoid the initiation of proceedings to evict you. Your failure to do so will result in legal proceedings being initiated against you to recover costs, attorney's fees, and costs of suit.

**COMPLAINT — UNLAWFUL DETAINER (Demanda por infracción de leyta de inmuebles)**

COMPLY (Cumplir) I have paid the amount of money demanded within the period specified in the summons.  
 ACTION BY DEFENDANT (Acción del demandado) I have filed a motion to dismiss the summons.  
 ACTION BY PLAINTIFF (Acción del demandante) I have filed a motion to enforce the summons.



### IF YOU HAVE RECEIVED A NOTICE:

Read it carefully and **try to determine the alleged reason for the eviction.** Don't be overwhelmed by legal jargon, which is often used to confuse tenants. Some notices include instructions for how to fix the alleged problem. such as a demand to pay the rent within 3 days.

Decide whether you can or want to comply with these demands. If the eviction notice demands that you pay rent that you can't pay or don't owe, alleges a lease violation that you never committed, or simply tells you to leave, **do not leave, and do not self-evict. Stay put, and keep reading this guide for ideas about what to do next.**

## **IF YOU HAVE RECEIVED A LAWSUIT:**

It's critical to respond as soon as possible. **YOU MUST FILE AN ANSWER WITHIN TEN DAYS TO AVOID AN AUTOMATIC EVICTION.**

Your Answer is your official response to your landlord's accusations, and will allow you to keep fighting your eviction in court. The Tenant Power Toolkit will help you file your Answer for free online: **[tenantpowertoolkit.org](http://tenantpowertoolkit.org)**.



If you have trouble using the internet or do not have access to a computer, the Tenant Power Toolkit hosts free workshops twice a week to assist tenants with filing responses to eviction cases. Call **(323) 207-5854** to attend an in-person workshop.

Once you have filed an Answer, you will receive a court date in the mail, and should start preparing your case. The back of this guide offers resources that might help you find free legal representation or prepare to represent yourself in court.

Within LATU, every tenant association and neighborhood committee has different capacities to help new members facing eviction cases.

You can receive direct support from the union's solidarity lawyers in an eviction case only if you join our movement by attending regular meetings and supporting other union members.



**KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!**



## Rent Control in Los Angeles

Most tenants in LA have some form of rent control. If you live in a multi-unit property constructed before 1979, you are likely protected by the city's "**Rent Stabilization Ordinance.**" If not, you are likely protected by the statewide "**Tenant Protection Act.**"

City rent control limits most rent increases to **4-6% per year**. Under the state law, rent increases can be **no more than 10%**. These percentages change every year. Joining LATU will help you stay up to date on how much your landlord can raise the rent.



Your landlord is required to inform you of any rent increases **in writing** at least 30 days in advance. If you believe your landlord has illegally raised your rent, you can file a complaint with the Los Angeles Housing Department. However, **the most effective way to fight illegal rent increases is to organize with your neighbors and decide together about how to fight the increase.** A landlord facing 10 housing department complaints is more likely to yield to your demands than a landlord facing only one.

**IMPORTANT:** Rent control limits the amount your landlord can raise the rent **only as long as you are still living in your home.** Rents can be raised to market rate once a unit becomes vacant. This means no matter how "good" of a tenant you are, **your landlord always has a financial incentive to vacate your unit.**



**KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!**

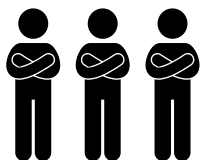


## Landlord Harassment

Has your landlord ever threatened to evict you in retaliation for repair requests, entered your home without permission, or threatened to call the police on you? These are just a few examples of **landlord harassment**.

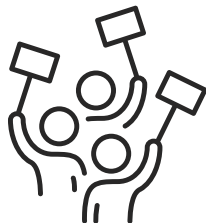
ALL tenants in the city of LA are legally protected against landlord harassment. Under the city's Tenant Anti-Harassment Ordinance (LAMC §45.30), landlords face possible monetary damages or even criminal charges for all types of harassment, including **refusing to conduct repairs, illegally entering your unit, bullying you with false threats of eviction, or saying they're going to call immigration or the police.**

But reality, these laws are **not enforced at all** by city officials. So in LATU, we use the power of organizing to defend ourselves against harassment. How do we do it?



*We show up to help block landlords who are trying to illegally enter union members' homes.*

*We post signs outside our homes warning landlords that we are protected by the union.*



*And we organize protests at the homes of our landlords to shame them in front of their neighbors, call out their abusive conduct, and demand an end to harassment.*

These tactics are **extremely effective** at stopping landlord harassment—and you can use them to defend your home too, by joining the union!



**KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!**



## Cash-for-keys offers

Why would your landlord offer you money to leave your home? It's not because they're being nice! It's simply because **they can make more money once you leave, re-renting your apartment at a higher price.**

Because they **CANNOT EASILY EVICT TENANTS**, landlords often resort to using **cash-for-keys agreements**, sometimes called “voluntary vacate agreements” or buyouts.

But the key word here is **VOLUNTARY**. If your landlord makes a cash-for-keys offer, you **ALWAYS** have the right to refuse. If your landlord or property manager claims you have to accept, or that they will evict you immediately if you do not accept, **these are LIES.**



Even if you've already accepted, you can still change your mind. By law, you have 30 days to cancel a cash-for-keys agreement. And don't lose hope if it has been more than 30 days since you signed the agreement—you still have options.

Is it worth accepting cash-for-keys?

**NO! Rejecting cash-for-keys and staying in your home ALMOST ALWAYS MAKES FINANCIAL SENSE.** A rent-stabilized unit is extremely valuable. If you've been in your unit for more than a couple of years, a one-time buy-out will never be enough to cover the amount of money you will save by staying in your home. A percentage of the money you receive as a buyout will have to be paid in taxes, and you also might lose government benefits or subsidies.



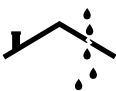
# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!



## Repairs

A common response to a tenant’s request for repairs is: “Why don’t you move out if you’re so unhappy here?” That is **illegal**.

Under California law, **ALL Tenants have the right to live in a unit that is both safe and sanitary**. This means that your landlord is legally required to repair or address things like:



- Leaks in ceilings and walls
- Holes in walls or floors
- Peeling plaster/paint
- Mildew or mold
- Damaged heater
- Plumbing issues
- Broken windows or missing screens



- Broken smoke or carbon monoxide detectors
- Inadequate garbage collection
- Unsafe stairs/handrails
- Insecure/improper doorknobs
- Faulty electrical wiring
- Vermin infestations



### IF YOU NEED REPAIRS:

1. Make a list and take photos of the damaged or infested areas,
2. Send your landlord a written request for repairs with the photos.
3. If the landlord does not repair the unit in a timely manner, you can file a complaint with the Los Angeles Housing Department or Department of Public Health (contact info on back of guide).

#### NOTE:

While filing complaints can help put pressure on your landlord and create paper trail, LAHD and the Department of Public Health can be negligent and complicit in property owners’ neglect of our homes. To learn about more direct, effective ways to win repairs, join LATU.



**IT'S TIME TO ORGANIZE!**



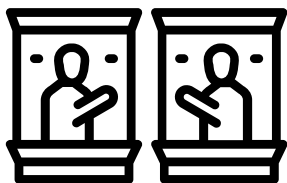
## What is a tenant's association?

No matter what type of housing turmoil your landlord is putting you through—from eviction threats to rent hikes to bad conditions—odds are you're NOT the only person in your building they're doing this to.

And the more people that fight back against this harassment, the more likely it is to stop. So how can you get your neighbors organized? **Form a tenants' association!**

A tenants' association, or TA, is a **group of neighbors who work together to improve conditions in their building and neighborhood**, and your right to form one is protected under state law (Cal. Civ. Code Sec. 1942.5). Here's how to start your own:

- **Do outreach.** The first step is simple: get to know your neighbors, if you don't already. Print out some fliers, knock on doors, share your concerns with your neighbors and listen to theirs. Then, gather their contact information so you can stay in touch.
- **Have a meeting.** Now it's time for your first TA meeting! Figure out a convenient time for everyone, and try to gather in a visible space like a lobby or courtyard, so you can show your landlord your powerful new group. At the meeting, discuss issues in the building, and start coming up with a plan to address them. Meet at least once a week, if possible.



- **Know your enemy.** Our landlords know tons of personal information about us, but work hard to conceal their own identities. As you plan ways to fight back, learn everything you can about the person who owns your building, including who they are, their associates, where they get their money from, and even where they live.
- **Plan your fight.** As your tenants' association grows more powerful, you can begin to strategize about how to get your landlord to comply with your demands. Tactics can look like anything from call and text blasts to rent reductions and strikes to protests at the landlord's house. Work together, and use your imaginations!
- **Join the union!** LATU's members have years of experience with this type of organizing, and can offer your new TA community support and ideas for how to fight back. We are also working to make changes on a larger scale. Our **neighborhood-wide Locals** organize protests and actions, community events and fairs, and mutual aid efforts like food distributions. And, we work with other neighborhood locals to fight for a better Los Angeles, where everyone has the right to a safe, habitable home and for-profit housing and displacement are a thing of the past.



# WE WANT YOU TO JOIN OUR MOVEMENT!

Contact the K-town Local to find a meeting happening near you.



Call or text: (323) 380-2264  
Email: [ktown@latenantsunion.org](mailto:ktown@latenantsunion.org)  
Instagram: @latu\_ktown



You can also donate to LATU, sign up to get regular updates about events in the neighborhood, and find your local chapter on our website: [latenantsunion.org/en](http://latenantsunion.org/en)

## OTHER RESOURCES

- **LA Tenants Union**
  - [latenantsunion.org](http://latenantsunion.org)
  - [info@latenantsunion.org](mailto:info@latenantsunion.org)
- **Tenant Power Toolkit**
  - [tenantpowertoolkit.org](http://tenantpowertoolkit.org)
  - [tenantpower@debtcollective.org](mailto:tenantpower@debtcollective.org)
  - (323) 207-5854
- **Stayhoused LA**
  - [stayhousedla.org](http://stayhousedla.org)
  - 1-888-694-0040
- **Eviction Defense Network**
  - [edn.la](http://edn.la)
  - (213) 385-8112
- **Los Angeles Housing Department (LAHD)**
  - (866) 557-7368
  - [housing2.lacity.org](http://housing2.lacity.org)
- **Los Angeles County Department of Public Health**
  - [publichealth.lacounty.gov](http://publichealth.lacounty.gov)
  - (833) 540-0473
- **Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety (LADBS)**
  - [dbs.lacity.org](http://dbs.lacity.org)
  - (213) 473-3231