

**END THE CORPORATE TAKEOVER**

# **HOW TO FIGHT BACK!**

***AND DEFEND YOUR RIGHT TO SAFE AND  
AFFORDABLE HOUSING***



**A GUIDE FOR GEORGIA RENTERS**

# INTRODUCTION

If you are a renter in Georgia, you know how difficult it can be to find a quality place to live. Units that are both affordable and well-maintained can be hard to come by. And even if you find an affordable unit in good condition, you may still have to put up with stress-inducing behavior from your landlord: new fees, rent hikes, unreasonable property rules, and utility interruptions are a few common examples.

If you are experiencing problems where you live, you may feel helpless to resist them. You may think that you're better off moving somewhere else, but because Georgia has some of the weakest tenant protections in the country, you might find yourself dealing with similar or worse problems in your next unit.

The landlord lobby is powerful, and in Georgia they are committed to shifting the law in their favor so that they can make as much money as possible, even at the expense of their tenants' wellbeing.

But there is still a way to fight back– **tenant organizing** can help you achieve the changes you would like to see.

This guide is meant to help walk you through the process of organizing your neighbors and developing a tenant association (also called a tenant union). Organizing is how we balance the scales and take power back from our landlords. You deserve to have a say over where you live.

# WHAT IS ORGANIZING?

## ORGANIZING IS COMING TOGETHER

Organizing means **coming together with others** to create the power in numbers needed to achieve your shared housing goals. One tenant raising concerns is easily ignored, but it is harder for management to brush off a large group of tenants working together.

## ORGANIZING DOES NOT REQUIRE EXPERIENCE

You don't need to have done this before to be successful—you just need to be **patient, persistent, and willing to put in the effort required**.

## ORGANIZING IS MAKING NOISE!

Many landlords think that they can get away with treating tenants poorly because we won't make noise about what is happening to us. With this guide, we hope to **prove them wrong**.



# STEPS TO ORGANIZING

1

**Reach out to your neighbors** and begin to bring them together. Most likely, you are not the only person in your complex with problems in your unit. Go door to door and start conversations with neighbors about what they are experiencing, or pass out notes urging them to get in touch with you. Here is an example of what a note could say: *"Hello, I am your neighbor in [UNIT] and I would like to know your thoughts about some of the problems in our building. Please contact me at [PHONE]."*

2

**Establish regular tenant meetings** to hear from your neighbors and learn about their concerns. Find somewhere to meet with your neighbors where management won't be able to interrupt you. It can be helpful to create an agenda to guide your discussion.



**TIP:** Everyone may not be willing or able to participate regularly, and that's okay! You can create a core organizing committee with as few as 3 to 5 people.

3

Come up with a **clear list of demands** that cover what you want to see changed or fixed in your complex. (EX: We are asking for 1) The elevator to be fixed, 2) a new security company, and 3) for the planned rent increase to be canceled).

**Send the demands** to your management staff and give them a deadline to respond.

4



**TIP:** Create an email address for your tenant group so that the names of individuals don't have to be attached to the communications that you send to management.

5

If they miss the deadline or do not respond favorably, **escalate your tactics** by organizing a protest, holding a press conference, or taking other actions to call attention to what is happening in your complex. Learn more about how to escalate on page 7.

Management may ignore or dismiss you the first time that you contact them. But if you are able to call enough attention to your fight and put outside pressure on them, you can force them to acknowledge your concerns and take steps to fix them.



**TIP:** Know your rights! Tenants in Georgia who organize are protected by law. It is illegal for your landlord or management staff to retaliate against you for joining a tenant organization.

# VICTORY!

For more information, check out this helpful list of frequently asked questions about forming a tenant association.



## OUTSIDE SUPPORT

When you are new to organizing, it can be helpful to have people that you can reach out to for guidance and assistance. There are several organizations in Georgia that specialize in providing organizing support to tenants. Remember that even though it can be useful to have the support of professional organizers, ***only you can lead your own fight.***

Visit this directory to find legal aid and tenant rights organizations near you:

**[justshelter.org/community-resources](https://justshelter.org/community-resources)**

# ESCALATE!

Raising awareness about what is going on in your complex is critical. This helps to put **pressure** on your landlord to do the right thing.

Protests and rallies are common escalation tactics. Below are a few other examples:

## **Display banners or signage:**

Ask neighbors to post signs or banners to show their support of the tenant association and its demands.

## **Post on social media:**

Share your story online. Be sure to mention the name of your landlord in your post.

## **Phone or email blast:**

Ask your network (family, friends, coworkers, etc.) to send calls or emails to your landlord supporting the tenant association's demands.

## **Create a petition:**

Collect petition signatures to show community support for your demands.

## **Contact elected officials:**

Reach out to your local city councilmember or county commissioner. They may be willing to contact your landlord on your behalf.

## **Contact the media:**

If the issue is severe, you may be able to get some news coverage.

## **If all else fails, consider a rent strike.**

A rent strike involves refusing to pay rent until your landlord meets your demands. Some renters have used this tactic successfully, however in Georgia this is highly risky as tenants do not have a legal right to withhold rent for any reason. Before you proceed, you need to make sure that a large majority of your neighbors are committed to participating.



# CREATING COMMUNITY

It can be helpful to have a tenant association even if you are not experiencing any significant or urgent problems where you live. Knowing your neighbors is a great way to protect your home from crime and ensure a support network in the event of an emergency.

Plus, if your housing ever does become threatened, you and your neighbors will already be prepared to respond.



# ORGANIZING WORKS

There is no strict set of rules for tenant organizing, but learning from what others have done can help inform and inspire your own strategy. Check out the links below for stories about **successful tenant organizing campaigns**.

**Tenant Power: Organizing for Rent Strikes and Landlord Negotiations**

**Striking Tenants Withhold Rent for 247 Days and Win**

**After a Six-Year Struggle, Tenants in Boston's Mattapan Neighborhood Win Permanent Affordability**



For information about your rights as a tenant in Georgia, **review the Georgia Landlord Tenant Handbook.**

## ABOUT END THE CORPORATE TAKEOVER

The End the Corporate Takeover Campaign is a coalition of renters, policy advocates, and housing justice organizations fighting to protect the public from corporate housing investors and increase rights for Georgia renters. Learn more at **[endthecorporatetakeover.com](https://endthecorporatetakeover.com)**.