

September 11, 2025

Dear Members of the Council of the District of Columbia,

We are a broad-based coalition writing to express our opposition to the Rebalancing Expectations for Neighbors, Tenants, and Landlords (RENTAL) Act.<sup>1</sup> We are leaders of long-standing organizations that have served hundreds of thousands of DC residents for decades. We provide food, shelter, healthcare, legal services, union representation, and other core services. It is due to this experience that we have a deep sense of alarm about potential erosions to housing rights and access to safe, affordable housing.

The RENTAL Act has provoked overwhelming outcry from the community. This includes a marathon 13-hour public hearing with dozens of speakers and hundreds of pages of written testimony from organizations and tenants.<sup>2</sup> Tenants and advocates even protested by occupying Councilmember White's office in a sleep-in, rallying against the District's reduced investment in permanent housing solutions and the erosion of tenant rights. Councilmember White indicated that "no one should have to sleep on the floor of a government building to be seen or heard,"<sup>3</sup> and yet the DC Council voted to move the RENTAL Act forward, knowing that this legislation would lead to more homelessness and housing insecurity. We urge the Council to reject the RENTAL Act and instead prioritize legislation that will advance our shared goals of maintaining and creating habitable, safe, and affordable housing for all DC residents.

The District stands at a crossroads. DC residents are being priced out of their neighborhoods due to skyrocketing rental prices. Families continue to struggle to afford the cost of living in one of the most expensive cities in the country. Evictions in the District reached a ten-year high last year.<sup>4</sup> Multiple landlords have been fined or sued, including by the DC Attorney General, for deplorable housing conditions, including large-scale water leaks and mold, rodent and pest infestations, and broken heating and HVAC systems.<sup>5</sup> Despite this, the RENTAL Act seeks to let landlords fly through the eviction process without providing tenants meaningful notice and an opportunity to fight against being evicted from their homes.

While the RENTAL Act contains multiple changes to erode residents' rights, key detrimental amendments include:

**1. The RENTAL Act guts protections that ensure tenants receive notice and have an opportunity to rectify issues before they lose their homes.**

For decades, DC law has required landlords to notify tenants of alleged lease violations

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<sup>1</sup> Though many of the undersigned organizations oppose the entirety of the RENTAL Act, this letter focuses only on the proposed changes to the eviction process.

<sup>2</sup> Jon Banister, *TOPA Reform Divides D.C. Housing Industry At Marathon Council Hearing*, BISNOW (May 29, 2025, 3:23PM), [bisnow.com/washington-dc/news/multifamily/topa-reform-divides-dc-housing-industry-at-marathon-council-hearing-129576](https://bisnow.com/washington-dc/news/multifamily/topa-reform-divides-dc-housing-industry-at-marathon-council-hearing-129576).

<sup>3</sup> Statement from Councilmember Robert White on Housing Advocacy Sleep-In and Budget Deliberations (June 23, 2025, 7:07PM), [robertwhiteatlarge.com/statement-from-councilmember-robert-white-on-housing-advocacy-sleep-in-and-budget-deliberations/](https://robertwhiteatlarge.com/statement-from-councilmember-robert-white-on-housing-advocacy-sleep-in-and-budget-deliberations/).

<sup>4</sup> Council Office of Racial Equity, *Racial Equity Impact Assessment RENTAL Act of 2025* (July 2025), [dropbox.com/scl/fi/berye9w8s6tal7shnv2tn/Bill-26-0164-RENTAL-Print-REIA.pdf?rlkey=5ic19yqwmeac1pq5dinbaujyp&e=2&st=wyob2g8p&dl=0](https://dropbox.com/scl/fi/berye9w8s6tal7shnv2tn/Bill-26-0164-RENTAL-Print-REIA.pdf?rlkey=5ic19yqwmeac1pq5dinbaujyp&e=2&st=wyob2g8p&dl=0).

<sup>5</sup> Office of the Attorney General of the District of Columbia, *Attorney General Schwalb Sues Ward 7 Property Owner Over Dangerous Housing Conditions* (April 17, 2025), <https://oag.dc.gov/release/attorney-general-schwalb-sues-ward-7-property>.

and give the tenant 30 days to respond before filing an eviction lawsuit. This is critical so that tenants can fix problems before losing their housing. The RENTAL Act would roll back this longstanding right so that landlords can move forward with an eviction even if they didn't follow the proper steps for filing their case or notifying the tenant.

The RENTAL Act also allows landlords to haul a tenant into court with only 10 days notice whenever the landlord claims the tenant has failed to pay rent. Currently, DC law requires the landlord to give tenants 30 days notice. Allowing landlords to rush through the eviction process, while simultaneously cutting investments in housing programs and government safety nets, will only lead to increased housing instability and homelessness in the District.

**2. The RENTAL Act tips the scales to make it even easier for landlords to win in eviction court regardless of the merits of their claims or tenants' defenses.**

Although landlords often have law firms or attorneys representing them in court, tenants typically cannot afford legal representation. Yet, the RENTAL Act will make the law even more favorable to landlords and hostile to tenants. For example, DC law currently requires landlords to serve tenants at least 30 days before they must appear in front of the court for an initial hearing. If the tenant does not attend this initial hearing, they will lose their case by default, and the eviction can move forward. The RENTAL Act cuts this window down to only 14 days. This is not enough time for a tenant to find an attorney or obtain legal advice, request time off work, find childcare, or obtain evidence to defend against the eviction.

In addition, even when a tenant's housing is uninhabitable with severe housing conditions, the RENTAL Act can require a court to order a tenant to pay whatever amount the landlord requests every single month into the court registry while the lawsuit is pending. Then, if the tenant fails to make these payments, the court will sanction the tenant—including barring them from providing evidence of unsafe housing conditions—essentially awarding judgment to the landlord and unfairly and unjustly rewarding landlords who refuse to remedy poor housing conditions. Therefore, many tenants will face severe hardship by having to comply with the court order while also paying to make their units habitable or paying for alternative housing—all while also trying to afford food, medical care, and basic necessities for their families. Without a doubt, the RENTAL Act will ensure that more tenants will be unjustly evicted from their homes.

**3. Landlords will be able to evict innocent tenants if someone in their household has allegedly committed certain crimes.**

The RENTAL Act does not require evidence of a conviction to evict a person from their home. People could lose their homes without any criminal court finding that they actually violated any laws. And family members who were not involved could be evicted too. DC already allows evictions if a tenant or their household member is proven in criminal court to have done something illegal in the home. The RENTAL Act would

only confuse the law. The RENTAL Act also requires the court to schedule an expedited hearing within 20 days when a landlord files an eviction case under this section. This is likely a violation of the DC Home Rule Act<sup>6</sup> and cannot be effectuated by the court, given court staff shortages. The Council has said this change is required to ensure the community is safe, but this change seems unnecessary because violent/dangerous crimes in the District are at a 30-year low.<sup>7</sup> The RENTAL Act adds no meaningful protections against real crime.

#### **4. The RENTAL Act potentially violates the rights of survivors of domestic violence.**

Under federal law, survivors of domestic violence cannot be penalized or threatened with eviction after being the victim of a crime or seeking emergency assistance.<sup>8</sup> The RENTAL Act permits landlords to file an expedited eviction proceeding after any violent or dangerous crime, including those involving domestic violence survivors. Domestic violence survivors can try to defend against the eviction, but they should not be forced into court in the first place—especially only days or weeks after suffering abuse and physical harm.

It is noteworthy that the Council Office of Racial Equity (CORE) determined that the RENTAL Act would likely harm and disproportionately impact Black and Latine residents and residents of color.<sup>9</sup> As CORE noted, this bill does nothing to address eviction court staffing shortages, pandemic-related backlog, or the increased eviction filings from landlords who abuse the system.

We understand that the Council must strike a balance between tenants and landlords in the District, but the RENTAL Act goes too far. The RENTAL Act will only drive families into homelessness and destabilize our community. This will deepen poverty and hardship at a time when income inequality is at an all-time high, widen DC's already gaping racial inequities, and significantly roll back collective efforts to improve the quality of life for all DC residents.

We welcome any opportunity to work with the Council on developing legislation that will preserve as well as encourage the creation of safer, habitable, and affordable housing. We will gather our coalition members and the community towards our shared vision of a more inclusive and equitable District.

Sincerely,

Bread for the City  
Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center

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<sup>6</sup> See DC Code § 1-206.02(a)(4) (“The Council shall have no authority to . . . [e]nact any act, resolution, or rule with respect to any provision of Title 11 (relating to organization and jurisdiction of the District of Columbia courts).”).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Columbia, Violent Crime in D.C. Hits 30 Year Low (Jan. 3, 2025), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/violent-crime-dc-hits-30-year-low>.

<sup>8</sup> 34 U.S.C. § 12495(b)(1) (Tenants, residents, occupants, and guests “shall have the right to seek law enforcement or emergency assistance on their own behalf or on behalf of another person in need of assistance; and shall not be penalized based on their requests for assistance or based on criminal activity of which they are a victim or otherwise not at fault under statutes, ordinances, regulations, or policies adopted or enforced by covered governmental entities.” Penalties prohibited under this provision include “actual or threatened eviction.”); 34 U.S.C. § 12491(b).

<sup>9</sup> Council Office of Racial Equity, Racial Equity Impact Assessment RENTAL Act of 2025 (July 2025), [dphox.com/scl/fi/hcrye9w8s6tal7shnv2tn/Bill-26-0164-RENTAL-Print-REIA.pdf?rlkey=5ic19yqwmeac1pq5dinbaujyp&c=2&st=wyob2g8p&dl=0](https://dphox.com/scl/fi/hcrye9w8s6tal7shnv2tn/Bill-26-0164-RENTAL-Print-REIA.pdf?rlkey=5ic19yqwmeac1pq5dinbaujyp&c=2&st=wyob2g8p&dl=0).

Baldwin House  
Black Swan Academy  
Children's Law Center  
DC Action  
DC Bar Pro Bono Center  
DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
DC Fiscal Policy Institute  
DC Jobs with Justice  
Empower DC  
Equal Rights Center  
Fair Budget Coalition  
First Congregational United Church of Christ of DC  
Grassroots DC  
House of Ruth  
Legal Aid DC  
Legal Counsel for the Elderly  
Metro DC DSA  
Miriam's Kitchen  
Movement Matters  
National Family Violence Law Center  
Open City Advocates  
Positive Force DC  
Rising For Justice  
Save Chinatown Solidarity Network  
The Festival Center  
The Playtime Project  
The Safe Sisters Circle  
The Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless  
Tzedek DC  
Volunteer Legal Advocates (formerly DC Volunteer Lawyers Project)  
Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs  
We Are Family Senior Outreach Network  
Yachad  
Andrew Budzinski, American University Washington College of Law Civil Advocacy Clinic  
Andy Wassenich, Director of Policy, Miriam's Kitchen  
Deborah Epstein  
Donald Whitehead  
Philicia Majors, House of Ruth  
Laquita Stagg  
Leigh Higgins, Senior Attorney at D.C. Tenants' Rights Center  
Rachel Camp  
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