

# FACT SHEET

## Affordable Housing – Tenant Protections

### Problem:

People with lower incomes tend to rent instead of owning homes, and more than one-third of renters in Virginia are cost-burdened by their housing. Many tenants aren't familiar with all their rights, and legal jargon can be confusing. Additionally, much of Virginia law is slanted disproportionately in favor of protecting landlords, creating a power imbalance for tenants. People of faith recognize the need to stand with the poor, and want to see those who rent treated fairly.

### Solution:

Virginia must pass legislation offering protections for renters and strengthening existing tenants' rights. Here are a few policies that would help:

#### ***Make housing more affordable***

The General Assembly should consider allowing localities to create limits on how much rents can increase year over year. This would **prevent rent gouging**, and make sure that tenants can budget appropriately from one year to the next. In addition, **vouchers for 5000 families** that need affordable housing would be beneficial for communities around Virginia.

#### ***Give tenants more time to pay***

The first step of eviction proceedings is a letter saying a tenant has five days to pay the back rent or leave the premises. While it is true that this "pay-or-quit" letter is only the first step of an eviction, many renters don't realize this. Tenants often vacate the property from fear of legal action. **The pay-or-quit period should be permanently expanded to 14**

**days**, which gives tenants more time to learn their rights and get financial and social support.

#### ***Greater protections against landlord exploitation***

Tenants should be able to sue their landlords for unsafe conditions, even when the resident is behind on rent. The law should also recognize that when landlords fail to address safety/health threats, that is a defense for nonpayment of rent. In addition, tenants should be able to pay rent without any additional transaction fees. Tenants have a right to collectively organize against improper landlord activity.

#### ***Allow localities to create protections***

Counties and cities throughout Virginia are most intimately familiar with their community's housing needs and the unique challenges in their area. As such, it is only sensible to strengthen localities so that they may check improper activity by landlords which unduly harms tenants. Legislation that gives localities the **Right of First Refusal** to purchase housing complexes that offer subsidized rent would make sure that supply stays consistent. Greater authority for **localities to sue negligent landlords** would protect the health and safety of residents.

#### ***Stop price fixing***

With modern technology, large rental services change prices based on internet search history, with no bearing on the actual cost of a unit. **Preventing algorithmic price fixing** would ensure that units don't increase in price disproportionately.



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