

UNITED



**TENANTS OF
ALBANY, INC**

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

www.utable.org
info@unitedtenantsalbany.org
518-436-8997





Bleecker Terrace Tenants and Supporters after a rally this Summer



Protest in Support of NYS Right to Shelter



Parkview Tenants Association members after a hearing at the Albany Common Council about the apartment conditions

Table of Contents

01

Introduction

02

About UTA

03

Acknowledging the Team

04

Homelessness Prevention Program

05

Community Organizing & Impact

06

Tenant Organizing & Impact

07

Statewide Organizing & Impact

08

Tenant Data from 2023

10

Get Involved!

Introduction

2023 was anything but 'business as usual' for United Tenants of Albany (UTA). In addition to celebrating our 50th anniversary, moving the office back to 255 Orange Street, and the introduction of new staff, programs, and funding streams, UTA set its sights on numerous objectives for the City of Albany and New York State.

In March, the Appellate Court, Third Department struck down Albany's Good Cause Eviction protections on the basis of preemption, which means that municipalities cannot override the State outlined eviction process. This launched conversations about tenant protections into the NYS Budget later that month, which failed to secure any transformative renters rights, placing 'housing' on hold until a deal could be struck.

As the legislative session slogged on, Good Cause remained an ever relevant and polarizing topic. In May, alongside coalition members of Housing Justice For All, two Bleecker Terrace Tenants Association leaders met with Andrea Stewart Cousins, the second most powerful woman and politician in NYS, to advocate for Good Cause. Nonetheless, in the final days of the 2023 session, the Senate, Assembly, and Governor could not come to a deal, leaving many hot-housing-topics on the table.

While statewide work failed to produce any significant tenant protections, UTA worked valiantly with our community to secure what was possible. Beginning in February, UTA was consulted with by CARES of NY, Inc. in the construction of an APRA rental assistance project for the City of Albany that saw over \$300,000 spent on eviction prevention. Between February and April, as a member of Housing For All (Albany), UTA helped secure the strongest inclusionary zoning protections in upstate NY.

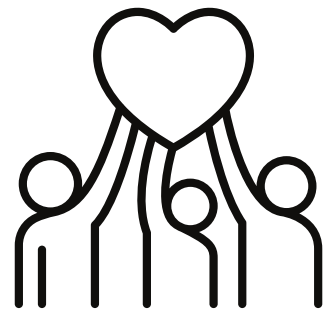
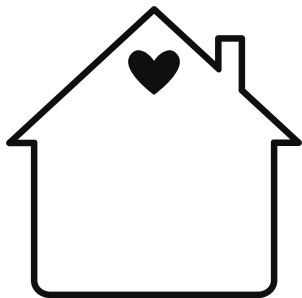
At the same time, we saw the development of the Parkview Tenants Association, which brought city-wide attention to the needs of low income renters and poor living conditions. Then in July and August, UTA helped establish two tenant associations, one in a LIHTC property that is home to over 100 elderly tenants, and another in a mobile home community in Colonie.

Throughout the year, UTA connected 213 tenant households with \$478,543 in emergency rental assistance, with 78% of those households receiving intensive case management from UTA Housing Counselors. UTA's court advocate assisted over 300 tenant households in eviction proceedings, receiving tenant-favorable decisions more than 90% of the time. We also worked with the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern NY and a local pro bono attorney to ensure all members of our tenant associations had legal representation while in court.

As the year closed, many transformative goals set out by UTA started coming to fruition. On the back of successfully opposing what many tenants considered to be an anti-panhandling/anti-homeless resolution proposed by the Albany Common Council and City leadership, UTA and advocates were able to promote affirmative alternatives that the Common Council took seriously. Most important of those proposals was moving forward with the vacancy study to determine if Albany is eligible to opt-in to rent stabilization (ETPA). Just before Thanksgiving, the Common Council allocated \$75,000 in the City budget for the vacancy study, supported by a strongly worded budget resolution.

UTA also learned in December that the Court of Appeals (NY's highest judicial body) will be hearing the City of Albany's Good Cause Eviction appeal after being struck down by two lower courts. We are cautiously optimistic about the possibility of securing Good Cause Eviction at the municipal level, and plan to submit an Amicus Brief with tenant unions across the State.

2024 brings many opportunities, anxieties, and hopes. With statewide elections taking place, we are hopeful to see more tenant friendly electeds coming into office, given the dire needs of housing justice in Albany and beyond. However, we know that true tenant power comes from the tenants themselves, and look forward to building a housing justice movement that is directed by those directly-impacted renters that seek fairness and equity in their lives and homes.



About UTA

Our Mission

The mission of United Tenants of Albany is to protect tenants' rights for safe, decent, and affordable housing, with special emphasis on those who have the greatest need or who experience the most severe problems and to promote the development and presentation of more affordable housing.

Our History

United Tenants of Albany, Inc. has been a renter's resource for housing and tenant justice in Albany County for fifty years. UTA founders Maria and Roger Markovics met at a rent strike in Michigan before moving to Albany and working at the Providence House under the Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany. Persistent conversations with residents regarding slum conditions led to the formation of United Tenants of Albany in 1973, first located at 77 Columbia Street in the city of Albany. Throughout the 1980s, UTA facilitated the development of the Albany Community Land Trust, the Capital Region Community Loan Fund, the Affordable Housing Partnership, and a variety of other community-based organizations focused on community control and neighborhood preservation. In the 1990s, UTA began to focus on more direct services and client-based assistance. This has generally been the organization's tract since, with an emphasis on tenant and court advocacy, emergency rental assistance, housing and budget counseling, and crisis management and intervention. Throughout UTA's history, the organization has helped to secure local and statewide tenant rights, including the Warranty of Habitability, mobile home owner protections, retaliatory eviction protections, the Housing Stability Tenant Protection Act of 2019, and more!

This year, UTA celebrated its 50th Anniversary, commemorating all of the workers, supporters, and successes of the organization throughout the years!

Board of Directors

Debbie Collura, President
Anthony Judd, Vice President
Tandra LaGrone, Treasurer
Ibrahim Pedriñán, Secretary
Laurie Buitrago
Eileen Cregg
Matt Drescher
Christian Garramone
Gabriel Silva



Acknowledging the Team



Aylann Campbell,
Intake Coordinator



Allie Dentinger,
Court Advocate Assistant



Crista Edroi,
Court Advocate



Marco Flagg,
Tenant Organizer



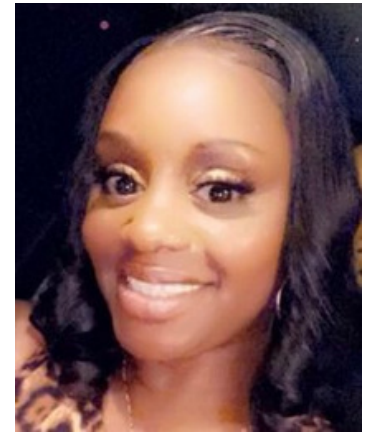
Emma Hollins,
Tenant Advocate



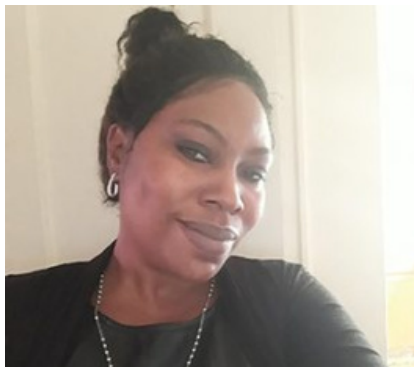
Jennifer Krstovich,
Executive Assistant



Shatiqua Pannell-Hyndman,
Deputy Director



Fantashia Robinson,
Housing Counselor



Dorothea Ross,
HPP Coordinator



Canyon Ryan,
Executive Director



Mehr Sharma,
Tenant Organizer

Additional Thanks to:

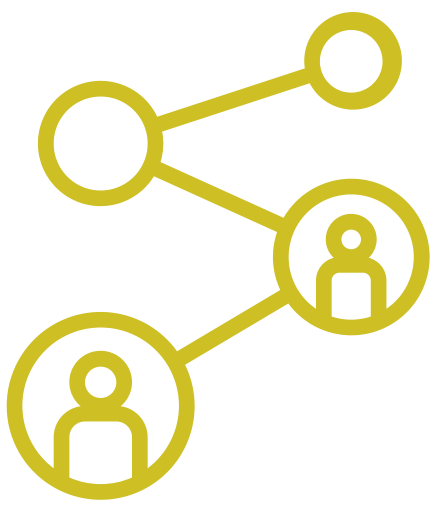
- UTA consultants Laura Felts, Lisa Frisch, and Erin Reale
- Albany Law School's Community Economic Development Clinic
- Albany Law School Tenants' Rights Pro Bono Project
- SUNY Albany BSW interns Crista Edroi (Spring), Anders Iaconelli (Spring), Aylann Campbell (Fall), and Avinna Vasconcellos (Fall)
- Siena College Professors Suvarna Cherukuri and Cynthia Bott
- Siena College Center for Academic Community Engagement interns
- Siena College Nonprofit Excellence and Transformation interns



Homelessness Prevention Program



Distributed \$269,560 to support 175 households at-risk of eviction, in addition to \$208,953 distributed to support 36 households via direct referrals to CARES ARPA emergency assistance



Joined the Unite Us platform to receive direct referrals from Capital Region community-based organizations and strengthened existing partnerships



Received more than 6,300 emergency housing hotline calls



Assisted more than 300 tenant households in eviction proceedings



UTA staff at 2023 Bowling Party



Mehr distributing literature on rent stabilization

Community Organizing & Impact

- Helped advocate for the strongest Inclusionary Zoning ordinance in the Capital Region, overriding two mayoral vetoes (February-April).
- Coordinated an Albany Common Council Housing and Community Development Committee hearing about the conditions at Parkview Apartments (August) and the crisis at Bleecker Terrace (December).
- Formed a coalition of service providers, community organizations, and tenants to prevent the passage of a resolution calling on the public to refrain from giving to panhandlers that had top-down support from the Mayor's office to the Common Council President (September-October).
- Advocated for the development of a 185-unit Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) property on Northern Boulevard, replacing an abandoned motel (October).
- Launched Albany's ETPA campaign and successfully secured \$75,000 in the City of Albany budget to conduct a vacancy study to determine if the City can opt into rent stabilization, benefitting at least 15,000 tenants in the City (October-November). In one month, UTA canvassers knocked at least 1,000 doors.



Bleecker Terrace Tenants and UTA after a Common Council Committee Hearing about the issues at the complex



UTA and supporters after the anti-panhandling resolution was held by the Albany Common Council

Tenant Organizing & Impact

- Beginning in March, UTA helped develop the Parkview Tenants Association (181-units), representative of 181 low-income elderly and disabled tenants that had not had stable hot water for over 18 months, in addition to pest concerns, maintenance and management issues. Within months of organizing, the tenants secured new pipes and sufficient hot water, while the landlord began investing hundreds-of-thousands of dollars into the building and changed property management.
- Advocated for tenant protections at the state level and supported members from the Blecker Terrace Tenants Association (279-units) in their meeting with NYS Senate Majority Leader and Temporary President Andrea Stewart-Cousins (May).
- Beginning in July, UTA assisted 56 mobile home tenants in Colonie, NY organize to oppose an on-average rent increase of 7.8% mid-lease. Come October, the landlord visited the park for the first time, reversing the increase and even repaying tenants that didn't participate in the rent strike.
- Beginning in September, UTA assisted the nascent Tenant Association at Livingston School Apartments (103-units), where tenants suffered disproportionate increases despite their LIHTC protections and other tenant-based subsidies. In November, tenants met with management, and have continued to demand an end to the rent increases and for better maintenance.



Members of the 2 Ahl Ave Tenants Association talking to their landlord after he agreed to reverse illegal rent increases



Members of the Blecker Terrace Tenants Association receiving an award at UTA's 50th Anniversary Celebration

Statewide Organizing & Impact



UTA at the Housing Courts Must Change Retreat in June



UTA at the Housing Justice 4 All 6th Annual Conference

- **Worked in partnership with Community Services Society of NY to secure \$350,000,000 in the NYS Budget to support public- and subsidized-housing tenants that weren't eligible for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program throughout the pandemic (March-April).**
- **Joined the Cash Assistance Reform Network to advocate for greater investments into public benefits across NYS (April).**
- **Worked with Common Council Member Owusu Anane to resoundingly pass a Resolution calling on the Legislature and Governor to support a Statewide Right to Counsel (May).**
- **Helped advocate for the Hinchey-Clark bill that was signed by the Governor in December which codifies the way Kingston conducted their vacancy study, making it easier for Upstate NY to opt into rent stabilization (June).**
- **UTA joined the Housing Courts Must Change Steering Committee to advocate for Statewide Right to Counsel, Defend [NYC] Right to Counsel, Winter Eviction Moratorium, and Clean Hands (July).**
- **Successfully advocated alongside MHAction for the Governor to sign a bill granting mobile home owners the opportunity to pursue community friendly models of tenant ownership (October).**
- **Filed an Amicus Brief with tenant organizations in support of the City of Kingston Rent Guidelines Board's rent reduction (December).**

Tenant Data from 2023

As of December 21, UTA completed 2,295 extensive tenant intakes representative of 5,105 people.

- 33% of intakes were Walk-In tenants, which likely impacts the overall statistics below, concentrating the information collected as City of Albany and Albany County residents.
- 37% of hotline calls were for rental assistance, 18% of calls were for court advocacy, and the remaining 45% of calls regarded general tenant issues.
- 25% of referrals to UTA come from tenants' immediate support networks (family, friends, neighbors); 15% of tenants were introduced to UTA in the courts or through tenant organizing.

Location:

- 93.4% of Intakes were with tenants from Albany County, with a full 72.4% coming from the City of Albany alone. 4.9% of calls came from Troy, 1.7% of calls came from Schenectady.
 - 20.5% of intakes came from the 12206 zip code, while 15.2% came from 12210.

Race:

- 62% of tenants identified as Black or African American, 11% identified as Other, 1% identified as Asian, and 1% identified as Native American or Indian, meaning 75% of people served identify as BIPOC.
- 25% identified as White. 14% identified as Hispanic.

Household Info:

- The average household size was 2.24 people, including 0.91 Children:
 - This is the same as last year.
- 73% of tenants to receive assistance from UTA were women.
 - This is the same as last year.
- The average household income is \$1,885.64.
 - There was a \$202.50 increase in Average income from 2022 (from \$1,683.14 to \$1,885.64).
- The average rent \$938.07 (includes subsidized rents*), which is \$59.49 more than in 2022.
 - Included in the rent calculations are 218 public housing tenants, 186 tenants in 'affordable housing', and 85 Section 8 holders. This is representative of approximately 20% of the intakes conducted.
- More than half of the households with children contacted UTA for rental assistance.



Albany Law School Tenant's Rights Pro Bono Project Volunteers



Behhinn speaking at a teach-in at City Hall

Tenant Data from 2023, continued

Reading the relationship of Rent and Income:

- Average rents increased 6.7% between 2022 and 2023, compared to an average income increase of 12% between 2022 and 2023. This is a welcomed change from UTA's 2022 statistics, which demonstrated rent was increasing 7% faster than average incomes.
- The average rent-to-income ratio is more than 50%. This means the average UTA assisted tenant household is severely rent burdened.
 - \$1,966 is 30% the Area Median Income for one person, meaning the average tenant household is considered "Very Low Income".

Residency and Rights:

- 54% of tenants assisted by UTA have moved in the last three years, with 23.2% having moved within the last 12 months.
- 44% of tenants UTA spoke with are on Month-to-Month leases with scarce protections.
- The majority of Month-to-Month tenants have lived in their units for more than one year, demonstrating a lack of lease renewals as the lead cause for lost protections.
- 2023 saw holdover eviction filings increase from 19% in 2022 to 27% in 2023, highlighting the need for Good Cause Eviction.

A Special Thanks to our Friends, Coalitions, and Partners



Get Involved!

UTA is working on several campaigns and projects that can use your support!

1. The City expects to complete its vacancy study by May 2024. If a vacancy rate of below 5% is found, the City can declare a 'housing emergency' and opt-in to the Emergency Tenant Protection Act (ETPA), effectively introducing rent stabilization in the City of Albany. UTA estimates that this would impact ~25% of renters, as ETPA only impacts properties built before 1974 (that have not had 'substantial rehabilitations') with six or more units. Once the emergency is declared, rents in eligible properties are frozen until the Common Council appoints members of the City's Rent Guidelines Board who will then oversee the introduction of any rent changes. There will be many opportunities to help ensure tenants are aware of their new rights, and to ensure the new RGB is aligned with tenant interests.
2. The need is overwhelming. UTA received 6,300 housing hotline calls in 2023, the same amount as in 2022, which was approximately 20% more than in 2021. **We need volunteers to assist UTA in reaching as many tenants as possible, as quickly as possible.** If you are interested in working to support more tenants, this is a very important way.
3. We are working to alert officials that Albany is a Tenant City. In addition to direct services, UTA intends to **establish a Tenants Vote campaign.** If you are interested in supporting UTA in registering renters to vote, please reach out!
4. Another way of guaranteeing tenant power in Albany is to **proliferate Tenant Associations.** If you believe in community control, UTA's Tenant Organizers could always use additional canvassers, researchers, and leaders.
5. **UTA is preparing to expand its Board committees.** If you are interested in taking an active role in the direction that UTA takes, we welcome your participation!

Contact Us

www.utaalbany.org

info@unitedtenantsalbany.org

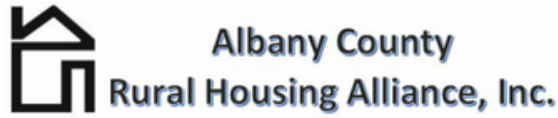
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255 Orange St. #104, Albany NY 12210

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