WE KEEP US SAFE:

COMMUNITY DEFENSE
WHO WE ARE

We are a grassroots organization of tenants and community members working together to put an end to the violent process of eviction, displacement and dispossession. We believe that mutual-aid, solidarity, and community intervention are needed to combat the relentless regime that is the profit-driven capitalist housing market.

Intersectionality

We believe in centering the tenants who have the most at stake in our fight. Centering means looking to long-standing tenants, elders, disabled tenants, immigrants, Black and brown people, as leaders with decision-making power. Because of their lived experience, our approach is given a richer nuance. It is with this nuance we go forward in creating a world that illuminates, rather than invisibilizes, the marginalized in order to uplift and transform the housing problem.

Tenant + Worker Power

We believe in the right to habitable living conditions free of oppressive landlords and state-sponsored neglect. We believe in a form of community self-organization that ensures everyone’s basic needs are met. Our power lies in our numbers, our collective struggle, and our ability to work together! The safety and quality of life of our community must be managed by the community itself!

Self-Preservation + Self-Determination

No one cares about tenant issues more than tenants do. No one puts as much labor, resources and hours of care into a home than tenants do. No one has more ideas and solutions around housing issues than tenants do. It is only logical, then, that tenants should hold the power to make decisions regarding their communities. We believe in taking that power away from the ruling powers of the State and Capitalism. Those so-called Elites, who put profits and private property over our livelihoods, should not be allowed to dictate how the land is used. The structure of our organizations and communities must rely on the innate capability of tenants – not corporations, the state or non-profits – to take ownership over our lives.
WHAT IS EVICTION DEFENSE?

Eviction defense is direct action to keep neighbors safe and in their homes. Takes many forms including: blockades, stoop watches, re-entering home, and so on.

Any action requires the community to support and uplift. Neighbors organizing together to provide care, supplies and tools, physical and emotional support, and in some cases, raise funds for the tenant in crisis.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Tenant centered

- What do they need?
- What will keep them safe?
- What do they want?

Specific to context

- Is the tenant being physically or verbally harassed by the landlord?
- Were they illegally locked out and need to get back in?
- Were they served an eviction notice?
- Are the marshals, police, or agents of the landlord trying to remove them from their home?
HOW TO: POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

Stoop Watch

Stoop watches put neighbors in between the tenant and the landlord to try and mitigate harassment by a landlord or their agents. This kind of harassment includes verbally or physically threatening a tenant, illegally entering a home, among other forms of abuse. Neighbors take turns on guard outside (sometimes inside) a home, keeping watch for the landlord or their agents and intervene on behalf of the tenant.

Re-entering Homes

Landlords often escalate their harassment by breaking in and changing locks on a tenant without a legal eviction order. In such cases, neighbors can support by attempting to re-entering the home and changing the locks back for the tenant. If the community cannot re-enter themselves, they can source funds to hire a locksmith who can help. A stoop watch may also be organized in case the landlord or their agents attempt another illegal lockout.

Eviction Blockade

If a landlord has won an eviction case in court, and marshalls were hired to evict a tenant, neighbors physically block the eviction by standing in between the home and the landlord/state’s agents, causing a scene, and showing mass force with the hopes the marshalls back down.

ROLES

Regardless of what kind of support is needed, there are always certain roles and tasks that every eviction defense share:

Tenant Liaison
Someone dedicated to making sure the tenant is okay, understanding of their situation, and comfortable with actions. Connects tenant with other resources in community that can also help.

Communication
Someone to sound the alarm for the community as a whole that action is needed. In contact with Tenant Liaison and able to communicate needs for people, supplies, etc to broader community.

Police/Marshal Liaison
Someone who is comfortable interfacing with agents of the landlord/state

Interpreters

Other support
Medical, snacks, meals, water, coffee, handing out masks.
AFTERCARE + REFLECTION

An eviction defense doesn’t end with the resolution of a direct action. (If we step back here, it creates a hierarchy of power and dependency, which is what nonprofits do!) Community defense is about building relationships of care with those around you, those with whom you share space.

Check-in with the tenant, with yourself, and with each other:

Does everyone feel safe?

Direct actions, especially when it involves the violent forces of cops, marshall, landlords, or their hired goons, can be physically and emotionally traumatizing. Follow through with medical care and jail support when necessary, take deep breaths, and make sure everyone gets home safe.

What kind of mutual aid could we fulfill for each other?

The more we share with our communities, the more prepared we can be to show up for each other. Some possibilities include skills, resources, and knowledge, cooking meals, running errands with/for each other, sharing stories and laughter.

Does the tenant have secure housing?

That’s the goal afterall; make sure the tenant in crisis has secure housing and feels safe. This may involve raising funds for temporary housing, organizing a stoop watch, helping write letters documenting the events and asserting their rights (cc the landlord and local reps!)
What is a Tenant Association and How does it Work?

It is exactly like it sounds! It is a group of tenants who choose to come together in order to improve their living conditions. TAs are a powerful way we can collectively and democratically enforce and strengthen our rights.

The only requirement for a tenant association is that you meet regularly. Most successful tenant associations meet monthly. The best way to start a TA is by getting to know your neighbors. Grievances such a lack of repairs, an unresponsive supper or landlord, or general dissatisfaction with the lack of community can be great ways to navigate the initial steps of forming a TA.

Remember: It is illegal for a landlord or the police to harass you for joining a tenants association!

We have power in our numbers!