

# Rent Control is as American as Apple Pie

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Since World War I, rent control has been an effective tool to protect middle- and working-class Americans against predatory landlords and skyrocketing rents. That was especially true during World War II and when rampant inflation took off in the 1970s. In the big scheme of things, protecting tenants through rent control is as American as apple pie.

Soon after World War I, with backing from the federal government, fair rent committees were set up in 153 cities in the United States. The idea was to help tenants fight back against skyrocketing rents caused by a worsening housing shortage. The committees routinely reached out to landlords to stop sky-high rent hikes.

In Washington D.C. and Denver, rent commissions were established to determine fair rents. In New York, where rent prices were dramatically rising, emergency rent laws were passed by state legislators to control a worsening housing affordability crisis.

Federal, state, and local politicians understood the serious need to protect middle- and working-class tenants and keep them housed – and elected officials took action.

During World War II, which was preceded by the economic devastation caused by the Great Depression, rent control only expanded. Numerous academics note that the federal government established rent control for roughly 80 percent of rental housing in the United States in response to housing shortages and rent gouging.

When that federal program started to be phased out, some states, such as New York and New Jersey, created their own rent control policies in the early 1950s.

Time and again, politicians saw the need to keep rents manageable for middle- and working-class tenants, helping them to stay in their homes and not face the dire situation of choosing between paying the rent or paying for food and medications. Tenants could also save money for future emergencies.

Then in the early 1970s, with inflation worsening, rents spiked again – and tenant activism took off. President Richard Nixon pushed for temporary rent controls, which was followed by numerous cities passing rent regulations, including Berkeley, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

But by the 1980s, the real estate industry pushed back, using powerful lobbying organizations such as the California Apartment Association and the National Apartment Association. On the behalf of landlords, the groups aggressively lobbied state legislatures across the country to pass rent control bans or rent control restrictions.

Today, more than 35 states have laws that stop the expansion of rent control. The tenant rights movement to protect middle- and working-class renters against predatory landlords and homelessness has been handcuffed ever since.

Unfortunately, greed is as American as apple pie, too – and tenants are suffering the life-altering consequences.

California now has the most rent-burdened tenants anywhere in the U.S., which is fueling the state's homelessness crisis. Housing affordability crises are also slamming middle- and working-class tenants in Oregon, Illinois, New York, and Florida, among many other states.

At the same time, corporate landlords have been charging higher and higher rents to rake in obscene profits off the backs of hard-working Americans. The RealPage Scandal is just one example. Through its software program, RealPage, a Big Tech firm based in Texas, helps a cartel of corporate landlords to work together to wildly inflate rents in numerous U.S. cities. More than 20 lawsuits have been filed against RealPage and its corporate clients, and members of Congress have called for federal investigations.

It's clear that federal, state, and local politicians must follow the lead of their predecessors, who took decisive action to protect tenants after World War I, during and after World War II, and during rampant inflation in the 1970s. They must repeal rent control restrictions, and

then expand rent control. It's the time-honored way that elected officials have protected the American people.

In California, Housing Is A Human Right and its parent organization, AIDS Healthcare Foundation, are carrying out the proud American tradition of keeping hard-working people housed through rent control.

HHR and AHF are leading a broad, statewide coalition made up of housing justice organizations, social justice groups, labor unions, and prominent civic leaders to pass a 2024 ballot measure called the Justice for Renters Act. It will end statewide rent control restrictions in California and allow localities to expand rent control.

The California Apartment Association and corporate landlords will spend tens of millions to spread lies and confuse voters. But prominent economists and top experts at the University of Southern California, UCLA, and UC Berkeley have all found that rent control is a valuable tool to stabilize the housing affordability crisis and to prevent people from falling into homelessness. In other words, they found that rent control works.