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We're doing introductions right now and some housekeeping at the top. We'll do introductions of our panel in just a moment.

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We'll do a background and context setting just to kind of get us all on the same page about why we're here together.

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We'll talk about tenant protections, kind of the primer that we just released together, and then we'll kind of narrow down to a local spotlight to show what this work actually looks like in practice and how we can be advocating together for these policies.

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We'll wrap with hopefully 10 to 15 minutes at the end of a Q&A session. So if you have any questions throughout or if you want us to discuss anything at the end, we'll be saving time for that specifically. And again, if we don't get to your question, we'll do our best to follow up.

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All right, so let me introduce you to our lovely panel. My name is Amni Minkara. I am based in Washington, DC. I'm at the Sierra Club, and I helped publish this primer with my friend Ruthie at Clyden Community Institute, who will be speaking a little bit later in the session.

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We are also joined by John Washington from the Tenant Union Federation, who will be setting some context for us before we dive into the policy specifics. And then Chelsea will be wrapping us up at the end with a local spotlight on the work that Chelsea's team is doing in Los Angeles.

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All right. So before we dive in, why exactly are we here today? This is not news to most of y'all, but we are right now altogether facing a housing and a climate crisis at the same time, and tenants are really at the intersection of those two crises.

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This new primer that we've just published identifies and addresses this critical overlap. It's only eight pages, so we didn't really get the opportunity to dig in too deeply, but we also didn't want to overwhelm and is what to be an introduction for many folks, especially on the climate side.

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We have...

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been working to develop kind of a shared language around the necessary protections that we must be addressing jointly as we advance climate policies to address the climate crisis. Again, this is just a starting point and a way to develop some shared language. And that also happens through dialogue and discussion. So we want this to be an open space for us to talk about what this language is and how we're using it.

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So fortunately, in the last couple of years, we have made a little bit of progress on advancing policies to address the climate crisis and specifically the housing and building sector's contribution to the climate crisis.

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But at the same time, these policies barely put a dent into the climate issue and don't really address the housing crisis or tenant protections at all. This collaboration in Primer is a way to kind of open that conversation and determine kind of the path forward to make sure that we're not repeating that mistake continuously as we continue to address the climate crisis.

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Before I introduce and hand the mic over to John, I did want to just address kind of the moment that we're in right now. We just

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kind of went through a very real example of what exactly we're talking about today. We're acknowledging like a very real and very recent example of how the climate crisis and this increased

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severity of disasters like Hurricanes Helene and Milton have impacted very specific communities and

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communities very distinctly and disproportionately and so

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We did want to acknowledge at the top and just flag that there are resources via FEMA and local agencies and aid groups. And a lot of y'all are already doing that really important work on the ground. And we want to just say thank you for that and point you in the direction of resources if you are still in need of that. And many folks could not join us today because they are still doing this work on the ground and so wanted to acknowledge their work as well.

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All right, we are on time. So I'm going to hand the mic over to John to set a little bit of context and just introduce yourself to the folks.

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Thanks so much. Yeah, so my name is John Washington. I'm the training organizer for the newly formed Tenant Union Federation.

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But before that, I spent a lot of time doing climate and community-based organizing. To be honest, I really don't like the frame of climate. I think that we live in an environment

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It's really not about the climate. And so I worked at an organization called Push Buffalo. I still live in Buffalo and built an enormous amount of power over the course of my years there in trying to do what essentially would

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control our community with leaders, people in buildings, people not in buildings

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And we were able to really

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build a lot of power winning campaigns around

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Community Climate Protection Act, fought pretty much every rate case that came through from utility companies, fought for the rights of individual tenants, built hundreds of units of affordable housing, built a community land trust, first some community solar project in the state of New York at school 77 and ran that campaign top to bottom.

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And after building all of this power, after winning all these campaigns and after seeing some people's lives changed.

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dealt with the real stark reality that most of that work did not have the impact that I wanted it to

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And actually, in the process, like.

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displaced a lot of people. And I got really clear

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about the reality of tenancy in America.

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that tendency is a class and we have different classes of tenants.

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And that when folks are

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oppressed in the tenant class, it affects absolutely everything that happens to them and really makes folks absolutely unable to receive any improvements. And so, you know, our ultimate goal was to try to do right by our community. And I think, as Dr. King said in his later years, I fear that we really integrated our people into a burning house that is our housing system, because housing is actually the infrastructure

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of how racial capitalism works in America.

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We'll come in a couple of days after Indigenous Peoples Day, and I really want to ground people that this government was designed to destroy people. It was designed to extract

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the power of land and labor. It was designed to create a legal framework to make sure that the people who owned land received all of the benefits of the land and could dominate and control anyone who was on that land or even kill them.

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And so when we do like the acknowledgements of land and where we're at and calling in, you know, indigenous folks and their relationship to land currently, I think it's really important that we like

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don't just leave that in the past that we recognize that we still exist and live on that and that the entire policy infrastructure of the country and our municipalities really rests on that.

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And I feel that acutely as a Black man, because whenever I am on property, that the landlord deems that I should not be on, there is an entire infrastructure of police and courts who will

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house my body differently for not being in the place that I'm supposed to belong.

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And so that's like really driven so much of like what I've done in my organizing career.

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And I think it's important when we start this conversation that we understand

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But if we want to solve

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the climate crisis and the housing crisis together, we cannot see them as separate and we cannot see them as crises. They're actually products of systems of the way that things work. And if we want to fundamentally change those things in ways that impact people, the clarity we have about the connection between the two is essential.

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I think the best way to like do this is by telling a short story.

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And so when i uh

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When I started organizing, one of my jobs was to build a community development committee. On doing that, we did a lot of canvassing. And on one of our canvases, we met like a really, really powerful woman who was dealing with COPD.

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She had a home that was full of lead mold and other impacts of the fact that Buffalo has the second oldest housing stock in the country.

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And she was literally told that she was only going to have six months to live because of the condition of her house and because of her health conditions.

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There's so much more detail to this, but our organization through the weatherization program that we were able to organize and through a lot of different services was able to package together \$42,000 to basically get to remediate her home.

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to fix her home and make her home a place where she would be able to

live.

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unable to survive. And in the process, she became a big part of the organization, came to all of our meetings, always made rice and flan. It was really just like a beautiful, dynamic person, one of our abuelas.

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And so, you know, fast forward to actually all of the work that went into figuring out how when we only had, based on our policy, \$15,000 to work with, we were able to get the \$42,000 it took to rebuild her home.

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It started with the contractors.

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So the contractors were all mostly white men who were part of unions or part of a cabal of construction folks who got all the contracts and were incredibly disrespectful.

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to her because they were very clear that the government was paying the contract and that they really didn't need to respect her as a person, respect her own wishes in her own home.

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Then once the work was done, which was absolutely beautiful and amazing, part of the process was that the value of her home was reassessed.

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So putting \$42,000 in meant that it was now more valuable.

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And that combined with the

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way that gentrification was working in Buffalo at the time meant that even though she had purchased her house for \$35,000 in the late 90s and was like.

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this close to paying it off.

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With very small mortgage payment.

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of about \$250 a month.

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Her house was reassessed at \$238,000.

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So \$200,000 more, which meant that she would have to pay six times more taxes and every mortgage has written in it the ability for the mortgage company to renegotiate the mortgage because the mortgage pays the taxes. Lots of different ways this happens with FHA mortgages.

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The bank is actually paying the taxes and that is baked into the mortgage.

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So she gets this service that helps keep her alive and saves her home and immediately is told your house is worth \$238,000 and you now have to pay six times as much taxes, which is followed by a letter from KeyBank.

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That says, oh, by the way, because we have to pay that much more in taxes, your mortgage is now \$750 a month.

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And in fact, that was even relatively reasonable, you know, based on the situation.

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And so, you know, what I want to name here is that like

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from a class perspective, the way that our society is set up.

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The housing market does not believe that she deserved the quality of home that she was going to get. And it also sets it up that

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In order to get that quality, you have to pay for it. And if you can't pay for it.

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you have to be moved out. And so, you know, she came to me freaking out like, wait a minute, I thought.

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I thought this was a good thing like i thought

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I was going to get a place where I was going to be able to live. And she was just confused. I was confused too, because even though I conceptually understood these things, I'd actually never dealt with that situation.

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And by the time I really wrapped my head around it, I was really agitated because I was like, oh, this actually has probably happened to hundreds, if not thousands of other people who've received our services. It's just that we're in deep relationship with Luce and she's able to show us this.

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Coincidentally, at the time, we were negotiating what would be the largest community benefits agreement between a city and a community organization and a bank that had happened to that point with KeyBank because KeyBank was buying all of the other banks in Buffalo.

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And so I actually knew the CEO of KeyBank. We were in the middle of a campaign that Lucid had been participating in.

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And we were able to renegotiate her mortgage

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And renegotiate her taxes because of the power of the organization and because of the role that she had been playing in our campaigns.

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Had that not happened.

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a woman who wanted to save her life by remediating the mold, lead, and asbestos that was in her home so that she could save her life to have a home to live in would have been on the streets.

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in a community where rents were rising so rapidly that there is absolutely no way that she was going to find anywhere where she would be able to live for \$250 a month and she would have to given up all of the value and all the money and equity that she put in her home and equity she put in the community based on living in that home.

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And, you know, through this whole process, it became so clear to me

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that um



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we need to get really serious about tenant protections.

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Even doing the weatherization work, you would often see landlords, homeowners who would say, well, I'm not going to weatherize my home. Why would I spend the time to do that?

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I'm going to sell. And so I think when we understand that our housing market is based on exchange and it's based on extraction, the idea that we want to improve it for the sake of the world

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is incredibly important and is also always at tension with the experience that tenants are going to have.

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And what I learned is that

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over the course of the years that I worked there and all of the weatherizations that we did and all of the hundreds of millions of dollars of resources that we got invested into that community.

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Other people were waiting to take that money back out.

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Through tax reassessments, through tax foreclosures, and through evictions. And so

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you know loose was a home owner theoretically, she had more rights

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than a tenant. But the reality is

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She was a tenant of the bank and she was a tenant of the municipal government that had the right to tax her.

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And so we believe that in some ways everyone is a tenant.

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We focus on building power in buildings because that is what gives the most leverage against the target that is the landlord. But the reality is most of the people in America are in some form of tenancy.

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And have some entity that can take away

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They're right to their housing.

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And the more money that is invested in their housing, the more viable and the more demand that there is for their housing.

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the more likely it is that those improvements will displace them.

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And that puts the interests of the climate movement and the interests of people living in homes at tension. Because I think we all want to spend an enormous amount of money, whatever it takes.

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to do all the things that we know need to be done in order to preserve our ability to continue living on this planet.

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And at the same time, capitalism is structured and our housing market specifically is structured to extract as much value as possible from people and to not really care what happens to them as long as the exchange value of the home is what's centered.

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And so what I want you really to think about is like, as you are building

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your campaigns as you're thinking intentionally about how to build social housing, how to build green social housing.

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the impact that these improvements have on tenants and their experience.

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And the law and the legal infrastructure that exists in each individual context has to be taken into account

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Or we're doing the work of capitalists for them by improving buildings.

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that will ultimately displace tenants, which will give them way easier time raising rents and justifying raising rents because they have the coolest, greenest building ever. And that is actually something that is in high demand for liberal people in the tenant class.

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And so I think it's really like what I want to close with

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is that when we are

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clear about how the housing market works, our own experience in it, and in deep relationship with the tenants who are going to be the recipients of whatever benefits we think that we're creating for them.

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You also have to be willing to negotiate.

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And to actually understand that

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Even though we have an idea.

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that this might actually save someone's life.

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The reality is it could kill them too.

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And so this is not to be

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you know doom and gloom, but actually it's to say that like we need each other. We need power. We need clarity, and we need to be in deep relationship in order to negotiate. And there is no magic wand of policy solutions that is going to shift the functionality and the way that the government works. It's actually going to be all of us coming together in different ways and different roles

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and figuring out together how we negotiate with the entities that we're trying to move with these policies first.

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So the just last two things I want to name so that you're really clear is that

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Housing is the infrastructure of racial capitalism. It defines the built environment.

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race, class, and gender, then within that, define those things.

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any improvements or investments

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that creates quality is going to displace a class of people. And then in that class, it is going to marginalize the people who have the least money and who are the furthest away from whatever the social norms are.

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And so because everything is about the extraction of value, the more value we bring to the market, the more people want to extract it and the more people will suffer for that displacement. But ultimately, one of the reasons I became a tenant organizer is I believe that we need to control the infrastructure of this country, of our buildings, and of our neighborhoods before we're able to move these improvements in the ways that we all want to

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Because if we don't have the power to dictate the terms of the quality, the terms of the improvement, then ultimately we will create displacement, which then makes us all way harder to organize and way less connected to home.

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We, as animals, as humans, like want to be deeply connected to home. And I think our housing market is a really powerful strategy to disconnect people from their home, to disconnect people from their self-interest and their larger home of this earth.

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And to put people in a survival loop that makes it almost impossible to organize them around anything other than what their immediate needs are.

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And so if we're going to actually prove that the climate movement and the policies that I think are almost all good that we want to move.

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are going to have a deep impact on people. It really starts by being really intentional about what that impact is and consistently proving to people that this work is valuable and will have a material impact

on their lives and the impact it has on their lives is going to make it easier for them to live a life that will allow us all to live on this planet much longer. And I'll stop there.

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Thanks so much, John. Yeah, that was very grounding. And I think it kind of

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sets us up well to dig in a bit deeper together, but I really appreciate you centering us on community and our relationships with each other. And I know you might have to go off camera in a second, so you're welcome to do that as soon as you need to. But we'll welcome you back for the Q&A if you're able to join us.

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All right.

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On that note, we will move along and I will pass the mic to our next panelist, Ruthie. So Ruthie, if you want to come off.

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mute and introduce yourself and just let me know when you want me to advance the slides for you.

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Cool. Thanks so much, Ammie. Hey, everybody. My name is Ruthie Guravich. So good to be with you all. And yeah, huge thank you, John, for being super influential in how I've been thinking about this over the last many years and also for being here today. I think it's like a real gift to get to share what you've learned over so many years with people who might be newer to this intersection. So yeah, today I'm going to kind of

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take the grounding that John said of like why we need to be thinking at this intersection and the contradictions also inherent of thinking at this intersection, given the world we live in, and kind of insert a frame of tenant protections as one of the many things that we believe are needed to be actually working at the intersection of the tenant crisis and the climate crisis.

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at the same time in a way that is getting the goods to people, making sure that tenants are organized and getting the protections that they deserve and want, and that there aren't unintended consequences like the one that John just told us about in that story.

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So you can go to the next slide. Why tenant protections? I mean, John already set a lot of this up, but the basic is like for tenants, the quality of their housing is largely left in the hands of their landlords, right? Like tenants have very little control in the private unsubsidized rental market of America over

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what their housing unit looks like, what their conditions are, how that impacts their health, what rent they pay, what utility bills they pay, all that.

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And in most parts of the country, tenants have very few, if any, protections and rights as consumers of rental housing. So if you think of rental housing as another good, just like food or cars, you know, in those other industries, we see like basic health and safety standards. We see anti-price gouging regulations, those kinds of things in the rental market, it's really few and far between.

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And that's kind of the path that tenant protections can provide are those basic regulations that can help tenants make sure that they're not getting price gouged, make sure they're not getting exploited, all of that. And we can go to the next slide to talk about how that relates to the climate crisis.

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maybe we all agree that that's important just in itself. But I think like as people who work more in the climate space, there's a lot of ways that this intersects with climate action. So like just to start off.

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Tenants have disproportionately higher utility burdens and energy inefficient homes compared to homeowners. Like the rental housing stock is a whole other beast. There's a lot of like

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40% plus of rental units in the US have conditions issues just to start out. And when you add energy burden on top of that, you see that tenants are really struggling through the crisis of energy bills and of climate inefficient homes.

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If tenants do want to assert their rights to a habitable home, they might be met with an eviction notice. In a lot of the country, their landlords don't need much of a reason at all to evict a tenant. They can do arbitrary evictions and are often known to retaliate against tenants who ask for repairs, ask for improvements or even band together with their neighbors to do so.

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In the wake of disasters like we're seeing right now, research has shown the tendency actually increased eviction rates and like no fault eviction. So arbitrary evictions and rent gouging. So in post-disaster context, when tenants are already struggling the most and so in unstable, maybe have lost their homes, it's

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it leads to permanent displacement because there's a lack of tenant protections.

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Then there's a whole bucket of work in part led by Chelsea, who will talk next around what happens when we're actually trying to decarbonize rental housing. So what we see is that green investments often don't flow to the rental market.

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Because landlords are less likely to upgrade homes that they don't live in, right? As John was saying, a landlord's like, why would I do that? I can make more money by just raising rents and one day selling it rather than decarbonizing it and making it more energy efficient.

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And then as Sage has shown, upgrades and resilience policies can actually lead to higher rents and displacement altogether. So in itself, these upgrades aren't

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guaranteed to be a positive thing for tenants, even if at the outset of our policies, that's who we aim to serve, it might have the consequence of displacing people and attracting higher income earners.

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So next slide.

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So that brings us to the need for tenant protections, like really urgent bad need for big, bold tenant protections. Tenant protections is an umbrella term. It's quite a large category of what can be considered

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a ton of protection, right? Think about like the grab bag of consumer protections. In the primer that Ammie and I co-authored, we named four that are a place to start thinking about tenant protections, especially within this intersection of climate investments and post-disaster contexts. But just to say like there are more and happy to talk to people about even more options if that's of interest.

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The first one is around eviction protection. So good cause or just cause eviction protections limit the reasons a landlord can evict a tenant. As I said earlier, without these protections, landlords can do no fault evictions that can often be for arbitrary reasons. They can run the clock on tenants. And we see this both as a strategy for attracting higher income tenants

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And a strategy for enforcing the racial capitalism in the housing market that John spoke about.

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So just cause eviction protections narrow the reasons that a landlord can evict a tenant.

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Rent regulations is another big category. Essentially, they protect these regulations, protect tenants from untenable increases in their annual or monthly housing costs by limiting the amount that the rent can go up each year. They can also be called rent control or rent caps or rent stabilization. Each of these policies have a slightly different flavor to them, but essentially the goal is to prevent price gouging.

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When it comes to rental costs and to make the rent increases fairer for tenants over time.

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The next is protecting the right of tenants to organize. So ensuring that tenants can organize with their neighbors without facing retaliation from their landlords. For example, in Connecticut, if a tenant joins a tenant union, they can't be evicted for a certain number of months as a result of joining that union. So there's like laws like that on the books that you can

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that kind of create the necessary conditions to enable tenants to organize together and fight for some of this money to go to their property or for better conditions, health improvements, those kinds of things.

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And then the last category that we talk about in the primer is habitability standards and enforcement of those habitability standards.

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These are policies that set baselines often to ensure that

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covered properties, eligible properties are maintained in good condition. And then, of course, the work is to define what good condition is, right? Maybe that's energy efficient AC units in the context of extreme heat. Maybe it's basic health and wellness standards like mold amelioration, that kind of thing. And then emphasis on enforcement, like making sure that

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people know their rights, that money is sent to be able to ensure that properties are up to code, you know, all of those pieces.

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So in their own way, each of these policies connect to climate justice.

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you know just cause eviction protections can really reduce discrimination and retaliation. It can allow tenants to assert their rights to better living conditions. It can prevent displacement in the wake of disasters.

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rent regulations can ensure that those improvements aren't passed to tenants in the form of egregious rent hikes. And then also rent regulations can provide like neighborhood level stabilization in the context where improvements outside the home are happening, like new parks or new stormwater infrastructure or a new storm wall going up, those kinds of things, rent regulations prevent like the gentrification

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and displacement cycle that can happen after that.

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Protecting the right of tenants to organize can allow, you know, can help like demand that landlords actually decarbonize our building stock, right? Like a lot of, to John's point earlier, like takes a lot of organizing power to even get one

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homeowners, house, like up to health code. And so imagine the amount of organizing that needs to happen to actually realize the climate investments that people on this call are working towards, protecting the right to organize is an essential piece in that puzzle. And then,

of course, habitability standards improve health of tenants amidst increasing extreme weather that can exacerbate underlying conditions like

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extreme heat days leading to even more mold buildup. And they can also address those crucial like pre-weatherization and pre-decarbonization needs of the housing stock, like repairing windows, repairing floors, making sure the roofs are in good condition before you strap a heat pump on to make sure that those investments are actually meaningful to the tenants who live there rather than

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only leading to maybe the CO2 emission goals that might be happening at the policy level.

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Next slide. So just a couple of things to think about before I pass the baton here. First, in the category of trying to pass data protections.

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this is a huge, this is like where a lot of tenant organizers spend a lot of their time. They can be passed on their own as standalone policies. That is ideal. That is great news that has happened across the country and in our primary, you can see examples of that. They can also be connected to funding pots, like included as conditions on receiving funds. So for example, like.

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conditioning XYZ grant program on, you know, just cause eviction for any tenants who are recipients of that program for 10, 20, 30 years, whatever it might be.

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They can be passed at varying levels of government. There's actually active campaigns that we've been tracking at all levels from the SAGE is doing in LA to Just Cause campaigns in Connecticut and Oregon, in Colorado that just passed, to national campaigns for rent caps led by the Tenant Union Federation.

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The actual flavor of these campaigns and policy pushes

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depend a lot on preemption conditions. So that's kind of one thing to think about at the outset of pushing for a policy. The majority of states preempt local jurisdictions from regulating rents, for example. And so in some of those contexts, what advocates are pushing for is changing the preemption laws, lifting the ban on rent control as a

first step

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toward tenant protections.

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And then, yeah, loopholes and policy nuances like any policy conversation obviously impact the significance and the impact of this policy, which really just leads me to the last point, which is like.

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actually partnering with tenant organizers, with tenant led organizations, with the housing advocates in your community really gets the goods. It will ensure that the programs will be better designed. They are already experts in their own housing conditions. So instead of you having to go down a million rabbit holes and try and only address this from a policy perspective, like really encourage people to be going out

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I'm talking to the people that are potential partners in their community to help make sure that

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whatever policy design you're coming up with or campaign design, if not a policy, is avoiding some of these loopholes and is actually going to be beneficial to the people who need it.

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So enforcing tenant protections is arguably as big of a category as passing tenant protections. Tenant protections are only as good as they are enforced and enforcement often requires capacity in the form of people and resources like financial resources, and it also often requires organizing, like ongoing organizing to ensure

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that these protections may stay enforced.

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And you can see the picture here, our tenants in Hartford, Connecticut, who

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where there's already laws on the books about there was a fire in their property, there's laws on the books about what happens after that. That wasn't what was going on. And so tenants had to organize just to enforce their rights to safe habitable homes in the wake of

this fire. And you can see they brought the receipts on their poster board. So that's why I love this picture.

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And then last thing, intent predictions work especially well when they're thought of comprehensively. So like really encourage you all to think about like how these things fit together, like just cause is really helpful, but you also want to see a right to organize. And so people are starting to think about things like tenants bill of rights and just generally from an organizing perspective, like.

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You know, to kind of think about that as you are designing your own plans.

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And then my last slide is just that

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As we say in our primer, tenants are really ready to like make this green future a reality. I was just talking to tenants in New Haven about how they want to see solar panels on their home and they know that the step to do that is to collectively own their home in a community land trust because their landlord's not going to put solar panels on their home. So it's really time to let tenants lead us and looking forward to thinking with you all about

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how to actually operationalize that.

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So thanks. I'll turn it over to Chelsea to talk about your work in LA.

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Thanks so much. Thank you, Ruthie.

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Yeah, okay, next slide, please.

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Hey, everyone. My name is Chelsea Kirk. I'm a policy director at SAGE, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy. I work at the intersection of housing and climate justice here in LA.

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My background's in tenant organizing. I've been organizing with tenants since 2016. But for the last four years, I focused on making sure that efforts to decarbonize residential buildings in LA and California don't lead to tenant displacement. So I'm going to talk a bit about that today.

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So a little bit about our organization to get started. SAGE is an economic justice organization. We've been around since 1996. We're based in South LA, and we have a very large membership of mostly working class Latinx tenants. And our approach to housing justice is about bringing together community organizing as well as policy advocacy, and specifically our goals are to advance tenant rights, healthy housing, and equitable land use.

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Historically, we have not worked in the realm of climate justice. That changed in 2021. At that time, the LA Green New Deal, which is an ambitious climate plan that set out a goal to decarbonize buildings by 2050, was newly published. And the mayoral administration at the time was working very quickly to advance on this goal. And this goal would ultimately require that landlords make substantial changes to their rental properties.

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One of our allied organizations sort of reached out to us and asked, what do you think the impact of this is going to be on renters? And we never thought of it before. And so at that point, we realized no one had really considered that question before, despite renters being the majority in our city.

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So here's what we learned from talking directly with our members about this, but also from what we know as tenants ourselves and as tenant organizers.

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In LA, any policy that requires landlords to make green upgrades, whether it's energy efficiency appliances, solar panels, carries significant risks for tenants if safeguards are not in place.

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We identified those specific risks to include harassment.

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From landlords who might pressure longstanding tenants into leaving to

recoup the costs of these upgrades onto market rate tenants.

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Rent increases as a result of landlords trying to pass on costs directly.

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And then evictions, specifically evictions for substantial renovation work, which is a legally allowable reason for eviction.

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For tenants who live in buildings that were constructed after 1979.

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And we knew these risks were real because we're already seeing them happen without any decarbonization policies and programs in place. And so then the sort of question is.

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how then given we are already seeing a lot of tenant displacement, a lot of harassment, a lot of evictions, how does a policy that mandates landlords to spend upwards of \$20,000 to decarbonize a rental unit, how does it not have an adverse impact on the occupants of those buildings within this landscape of inadequate tenant protections, under enforced protections, gentrification, and escalating rents?

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So what were we going to do about this?

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We felt like we had to act really quickly because there's a lot of

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A lot of governments like in California are trying to move on this or trying to quickly move on climate goals, rightly so. There's a climate crisis. But we were worried that this was going to exacerbate our housing crisis. So we worked quickly to inform people

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At this time, no one in the tenant world, as far as I was concerned, really knew this was happening or what the implications would be.

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rightly our partners were busy working on like COVID-19 rental protections, right to counsel, just cause ordinances, a lot of the things that Ruthie presented on earlier and getting those policies in place.

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And then the people I came across in the climate space, those advocating for decriminalization, didn't know a whole lot about tenant issues.

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And so we did a few things. We organized meetings. We informed people about this. We put out a report for help decard policy advocates and decision makers. We inserted ourselves in policymaking processes to amplify renter perspectives.

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And we weren't trying to stop decarbonization. We wanted and we want it to happen, but we think that what's key for us is making sure that renters actually benefit from it. And so that means pushing for tenant-centered decarbonization.

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We also knew we couldn't really do this alone. We brought together organizations who are working in environmental justice, in housing, in climate justice, traditional environmental groups, and we formed a coalition in LA called LA for Resilient and Healthy Homes. And with these coalition partners, we've been advocating for tenant protections within decarbonization policies and programs.

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And we've been somewhat successful to an extent.

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I think we've been able to get really important language into a lot of policies. We got important language into reports from LA's climate emergency mobilization Office, our housing department, and our Department of Building and Safeties to inform the city's existing buildings decarbonization policy.

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that basically highlights like what kind of negative unintended consequences this could create and basically like commits the city to making sure to do this

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in a way that doesn't negatively impact renters.

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We also are working with California Air Resources Board to help them design an appliance standard that also mitigates the negative impacts for tenants. We're working with cities in the greater LA area on reach codes to make sure they work for tenants. Soon we're going to get to work on incorporating tenant protections in the forthcoming Go Zero

rebate program.

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And we also work to get important language in California's Building Energy Savings Act. This was signed into law last October, and it basically requires the California Energy Commission to come up with a strategy to decarbonize California's buildings without displacing tenants.

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Just want to share about one program in particular that we focused on. This is California's Equitable building decarbonization Program. This program represents the largest allocation of funds for residential building decarbonization in the state, and it's designed to fully fund retrofits for homes occupied by low-income residents.

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So we advocated a lot to get tenant protections into this program. Some of the protections we won were rent increases must be capped for five to 10 years.

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Property owners cannot issue evictions for retrofits or related activities under the program, and construction projects should be limited to 30 days.

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Securing these provisions did feel like a victory because a lot of programs that are similar to this don't have any protections at all, but we definitely recognize this is not enough to shield tenants from any harm. Landlords easily sidestep these types of provisions and enforcement remains a huge challenge.

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And specifically, we remain like deeply concerned that the issue of rent evictions

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we were just going to see a lot more rent evictions because again, as I said a little earlier, it's entirely legal to evict tenants for renovation work in LA and in California.

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that meets certain criteria.

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And so we realized that if we were going to actually prevent rent



evictions, we couldn't just merely write in these types of clauses and every single building decarbonization program that passes through LA or California.

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figuring out how to enforce these types of things with agencies like the California Energy Commission is confusing and complicated. They're not experts in this area at all. They're not a housing department

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collaboration between energy agencies and housing departments is very hard to facilitate. And so we realized we needed to change the law. We needed to actually just change the law for the entire city and we needed to close the rent eviction loophole in LA.

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At the time, a group of tenants actually living on my block in Echo Park organized by the LA Tenants Union, of which I am also a member, were facing evictions precisely for this reason. And this situation really propelled us to turn our concerns into a focused policy campaign.

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And not only was this important for decarbonization, but basically after COVID-19 protections ended, the city started seeing a surge in this type of rent eviction. It became well known among landlords as a very good excuse

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to evict tenants. Just to give an example on the screen, in August, notorious landlord attorney Dennis Block hosted a webinar called Renovate to Beat Rent Control.

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Where he basically advised landlords on how to use this provision in our just cause ordinance to remove like below market rate tenants. He said.

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There are ways to get around statewide rent control and also in other municipalities. What if, for example, your tenant is doing nothing wrong and you have this beautiful ocean view apartment and the rent is \$700? And you can't just ask a tenant to move under statewide rent control?

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He says, well, there's a really good reason to be able to have this tenant vacate that will allow you to obtain market rents for your unit. So what is that reason? That reason is if you want to renovate that unit.

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So Dennis Block said the quiet part out loud. I think as both John and Ruthie said, and as I'm hoping to drive home through my presentation.

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Landlords are already, you know, rents are escalating, landlords are trying to raise the rent as much as they can. Decarbonization is going to be an added pressure on top of things we have already been seeing.

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And so in December, our coalition, LA for Resilient and Healthy Homes, took on this campaign to end rent evictions in earnest.

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We began by educating council offices and our climate partners about this issue. We made policy recommendations. We identified a champion in the city council, and we engaged media to raise awareness about this issue.

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I'm really happy to announce that after months and months of organizing and advocating for this, today there's going to be a vote at the LA City Council's Housing and Homelessness Committee at 2.30 to end rent evictions in LA. So I am heading there right after this, kind of stressful to be at a webinar when all this is going on today.

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But I wanted to share that news that we're super thrilled about. Next slide.

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And I also want to share that we received a lot of endorsements for this local LA campaign to end rent evictions, not just from housing and tenant orgs, but also from a wide array of climate, EJ, and environmental orgs beyond the coalition we organized in LA.

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As you can see on the screen. And so it's really exciting to think that two years ago when I first started working on this, we went from warning people about green retrofits leading to rent evictions to now

being able to eliminate that fear entirely.

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So this is going to be a major win for our organization, and we're actually gearing up to take this fight to the state level next, because this is not just a loophole in local LA law, but it actually exists in the state's Tenant Protection Act as well.

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Here are just some photos to bring some of this work to life. This was us late Monday night at 9 p.m. prepping everyone for today's public comment. This is what organizing looks like.

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Yeah, and just some more of that just cause. Next slide. So to conclude, I just want to say that, you know, we realize that

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There's a real opportunity to be very successful at winning these types of campaigns when we can build a strong coalition of environmental and climate groups and housing and tenant groups. I think

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having environmental and climate groups rally behind our cause is super crucial and helpful to us. And so if we're serious about ensuring that the solutions we're putting forward to address the climate crisis don't worsen the housing crisis, we absolutely need to join forces. We need to work together towards meaningful change, and we need to learn from each other. Where you are experts, I am not. Where we are experts.

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Well, maybe you are, but from my experience, you are not. So let's work together and share our expertise.

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I think it's super critical for climate advocates to embrace the tenant cause as their own.

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Thanks.

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Thanks so much, Chelsea. And thank you for joining us when you have to like hop straight to like the actual work of getting this done. And thanks to all the panelists for being able to join today. Folks are already like saying their thank yous in the Q&A. So I'll

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like pivot us to Q&A. We're remarkably on time. I've never had a webinar move on pace like this. So we have about nine minutes now for Q&A. We won't get to all your questions, but we will follow up if we're not able to get to them. I pulled out some specific ones to start with, just because they seemed really relevant to some of the issues y'all were talking about. The first one I'll give to Chelsea just because this is a local issue for y'all at SAGE.

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The question is, what will the impact of Prop 33 be on local rent control? And if you could explain for folks who are not familiar with Prop 33 also what that is briefly, that'd be really helpful.

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Yeah, so this is a ballot prop 33 is a ballot measure on the California ballot to be voted on next month. And what it would do, it would repeal a state law called the Costa-Hawkins Act of 1995.

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And what this law did was it prevented vacancy control. Vacancy control is a type of rent control

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that regulates the unit's rent price and says when a tenant vacates a unit.

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The rent doesn't go up or reset when a new tenant moves in. So for example, I pay \$1,100 in rent every month. If I moved out and we had vacancy control, my rent would have to stay at \$1,100. It wouldn't be reset to market rate.

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And so if Prop 33 passes, so right now that's illegal. Right now, what we have is called vacancy decontrol. When I move out, my rent resets to market rate.

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So what Prop 33 would do is it would allow local jurisdictions to amend their local rent control ordinances if they have local rent control ordinances and allow them to do vacancy control. It would also allow

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jurisdictions to extend rent control to all units. So right now in LA, for example, our strong local rent control tied to inflation is only applicable to units constructed before 1979.

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So it would expand rent control and it would allow local jurisdictions to adopt

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stronger rent control.

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Awesome. Thanks, Chelsea. I hope that answered your question in the Q&A to anonymous attendee. I think the next question, just because this feels like the next step here, Andruti, you did highlight this when you were giving kind of an overview of tenant protections. We need protections, but we also need them to be enforceable. And so the question is, how are these provisions enforceable legally? What does that look like and how can we advocate for that alongside

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the protections to be enforced in law.

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Yeah, sure. I can jump in here. I mean, it does really vary based on like what specific type of habitability standard or tenant protection there is.

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for so like if it's embedded within a program, for example, like within the Inflation Reduction Act money, that falls, the enforcement kind of falls in this gray zone where there aren't strong like legal protections, but states are kind of supposed to be doing this and there's not money to actually like create the workforce needed to enforce

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those protections. When it comes to other tenant protections, they are enforced largely in court or like through court proceedings and the case making is done through a series of court proceedings. And so, but often what you see when you go to housing court is there's very little room to even get to just like the cards are really stacked against tenants. There's often tenants don't have lawyers and lawyer's do.

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And so the whole project of even getting to just have tenants know their rights and have legal representation is like a first step enforcing these tenant protections.

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Yeah, jump in, Chelsea.

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Yeah, just to add to that, yeah, it's an excellent question.

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And Ruthie got it to the heart of the answer here.

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Yeah, enforcement is a challenge.

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I think one thing we're doing with the equitable building decarbonization program, which I presented on, right, we got those provisions in the program that go beyond existing law. They're voluntary. So that's why they're legal to include in a program to begin with. We're not forcing it on a landlord. A landlord is volunteering to

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in exchange for public taxpayer dollars to retrofit their private property has to agree to these new protections. No clear way to enforce it. How we're enforcing the equitable building decarbonization program is that we've made a real case for like needing to pay attention to enforcement. And so we're actually joining the administration team of that program and we're going to be in charge of enforcement, like what that looks like, monitoring it and things like that. But unfortunately, it's like.

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not it's case by case. So like program by program is going to have to come up with their own way of enforcing it and the will to do that needs to be there.

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Housing departments is another way that these things get enforced. So in California, the Tenant Protection Act is not enforced by any state housing department. That's enforced by the court, as Ruthie sort of explained. But in LA, a lot of our rental protections are enforced by the housing department, but they're under enforced and often overlooked because the housing department has no funding and is understaffed. So in any opportunity for

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climate funding to funnel into our housing departments.

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Yeah, I just want to jump in and say quickly um

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The state is not interested in enforcing things that benefit tenants and benefit people of lower classes. And so the way that we enforce things is strikes and rent.

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Like we actually already have the power and when we look to the government for all the power we need without pre-organizing the power of the strike and the consequences that we can create for capital, the consequences we can create for our targets in government, of course, they're not going to follow us because this is actually about power, not about who's right or what's written down. Where I'm from in Buffalo, nobody follows any of the rules unless you have the juice to. And I think we need to get much, much more clear

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about the relationship between building power and passing policy so that we're not passing policies that we have no power or ability to create consequences around that will actually drive the behavior of systems that are designed to do exactly what they're doing.

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Thanks, y'all for all jumping in on that question. I think we have just a couple minutes left, so maybe one more question to end on. And then we'll follow up with answers to questions we weren't able to get to. I really appreciate everyone sending in questions. Y'all were super paying attention and we appreciate that. I think the final question here is a really great one to end on, I think, is what kind of linkages are missing between housing and climate officials within

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government and even within the movement itself. It feels like there's a gap between our efforts where existing building decarbonization is an opportunity to act on both fronts. And I think maybe we'll start with Ruthie again, and then if everyone wants to jump in and we can kind of end on that note.

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Sure. Yeah. I mean, the gaps are abundant. So yeah, it's a great question and something that I love to dig in more in future work. One of the reasons that we put together this webinar and this primer is that like part of it is just a lack of shared understanding about like what is the housing crisis and therefore like what are we actually needing to solve for as we work on the climate crisis from the climate space

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And of course, the opposite is true too, like from the housing space, you know, helping people understand like what is decarbonization? Why is it important? Like, what is it that people are working towards? So I think like shared language is one of the things and like shared

understanding of the problem. And then, of course, like all of the issues around different funding pods, you know, like government silos, those pieces are things that we need to work to address.

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But I think that like the kind of

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thing that makes me hopeful slash also going off of John's last point here is um

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Like I see as someone who also has been involved in organizing like tenant organizers and tenants rights is really getting at the heart of the problem, which is the extractive relationship between landlords to tenants with no regulations in place. And I think that like.

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climate advocates have a lot to learn and to support, both in terms of throwing down expertise, resource sharing, financial resources, everything to actually like solve that problem once and for all in the quest of making our homes healthier and decarbonized. And so I'm really excited about like how the kind of clear-eyed understanding that tenants are organizing with can be paired

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with the expertise resources and momentum of the climate movement to really like increase partnership and address this more deeply.

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Thanks for that, Ruthie. Chelsea or John, anything you'd like to add here at the end or shall we add on that call to action?

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I just want to add that some of those separations are intentional on the government side and then on our side, like it's really about power. And I think that ultimately there is no policy without power. And we're often naming and complaining about the enormous amount of power that capital has, but we give it to them every day in every way. And I'm just interested in us all building and thinking more about how we can leverage power and what policies are going to come

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from the power that we actually have, because I think that's how we actually close the gap. The gap is more privilege and perspective than it is like what we want to see happen in the world.

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Thanks, John. Chelsea, any final words here before we wrap up?



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Or if like some pot of money can be set aside for enforcement that goes to housing departments in specific jurisdictions, that's a huge help.

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Yeah, I think for our members, like engaging our membership on the topic of decarbonization has been challenging because, you know, we're talking about the tenant crisis, like tenants are in crisis. They're dealing with being evicted. They're dealing with mold. They're dealing with

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all sorts of things. And now we're saying, hey, pay attention to this issue where landlords are going to replace your gas stoves and your gas heaters. And they're like, I don't want that. I want the mold gone. I want my tub to stop, you know, what my toilets backed up, like they haven't fixed this. They haven't fixed that. I need hot water. I haven't had a hot water in five years. And so it's

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We're asking like that's why I think a point I'm trying to make is I think it's a really important for climate groups to really embrace the tenant cause.

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Our focus is in like a million different places trying to keep people housed. Like it takes a lot of effort to engage on these types of policies. Sage has been really fortunate to build up the capacity over the last four years to be able to focus on this, but our partners in the housing and tenant space don't have the same kind of capacity to engage on these issues. And so, yeah.

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Thanks, Chelsea. And I recognize that we're over time, so I will wrap us up here and we will follow up on the questions we weren't able to answer. So thanks again to all our panelists for joining us and to all of the attendees and participants who were able to join live. Your questions were really thoughtful. And so, yeah, just thanks again to everyone for joining. We will follow up with the slides, the recording, and answers to the Q&A questions.

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Thanks, everyone.