

Washington State Rent Stabilization Bills Moving This Year

GET THE FACTS

Washington Low Income Housing Action Fund

Last year the legislature made [some progress](#) on the state's greatest challenge - a lack of affordable housing and economic evictions. But renters are still facing excessive rent increases, creating waves of economic evictions in nearly every community across Washington state. [Nearly 500,000 say they felt pressure to move because of high rents](#) between May and October 2023. Of those nearly 28% were displaced by the rent increase.

The [average monthly rent in Washington state is \\$1,763](#), meaning a 5% increase would be almost \$100 per month. While an increase this high on today's rents is still a struggle, renters say that they could manage this predictability over the excessive rent increases occurring across the state.

Impacts of excessive rent increases:

- **Forced displacement**, when renters are forced to move and can't find affordable alternatives in their community and in the same school district where their children attend school.
- **Cause evictions, and can drive tenants into homelessness.** A [U.S. Government Accountability Office study](#) found that, "a \$100 increase in median rental price was associated with about a 9 percent increase in the estimated homelessness rate." And evictions are rising significantly in Washington.
- **Hurt workers and small businesses.** Employees can't afford to live near their jobs or are suddenly uprooted from excessive rent increases, further straining staffing shortages. Workers are increasingly forced to work multiple jobs to make ends meet and all pay raises go straight to their landlord.
- **Threaten seniors** who live on fixed incomes. Seniors are being forced to skip meals or medications to keep up with rising rents.
- **Prevent families from saving to buy a first home.** Renters are paying so much in rent, that they are unable to set aside anything to save to purchase

a home. This keeps renters trapped in unsustainable housing and away from the security of homeownership with a mortgage that doesn't increase every year.

What's Happening Next:

We expect action to address Rent Stabilization in the 2024 Washington Legislative Session. Both the new House and Senate bills are set for hearings the first week on Thursday at 8:00 AM in the House Housing Committee and Friday at 10:30 AM in the Senate Housing Committee.

Lawmakers and affordable housing advocates listened to the feedback of landlords and tenants last year, incorporating it to create a **simplified rent stabilization measure this session**. Companion bills, [HB 2114](#), sponsored by Representative Emily Alvarado and [SB 5961](#), sponsored by Senator Yasmin Trudeau, will prevent excessive rent increases but still allow 5% increases every 12 months, provide more predictability and notice for renters and address fees which are also being used to gouge tenants.

The rent stabilization measure will allow landlords to raise their rent every year by 5%. The [average monthly rent in Washington state is \\$1,763](#), meaning a 5% increase would be almost \$100 per month.

This rent stabilization measure would help a million households in Washington who rent by:

- Providing rent predictability and stability for renters including working families, seniors and people with disabilities.
- Protecting both manufactured homeowners who must lease the land their home is on, and residential tenants.
- Requiring landlords to provide six months notice for rent increases of 3% or more.
- Stabilizing rents by keeping rent increases to 5% or less annually.
- Counting fees as rent for the purposes of the increase, capping late fees at \$10 and all move-in fees to no more than one month's rent.

- Allowing tenants to end their lease and move if rent increases 3% or more.
- Prohibiting different treatment of month-to-month leases than fixed-term leases in terms of rent levels and fees.
- Providing tools to tenants faced with unlawful rent increases or other violations of their rights such as enforcement with a private right of action, penalties or through action by the State’s Attorney General’s Office.
- Create a landlord resource center to support landlords with model leases, state resources and important updates.
- Exemptions: The bill exempts newly built properties from the certificate of occupancy through 10 years, and it exempts nonprofit owned affordable housing whose rent increases are already addressed by their fund source.

Why rent stabilization is needed now:

The “economy”- specifically the cost of housing and the homelessness crisis in Washington - is the number one priority for legislative action cited by voters.

Tens of thousands of tenants across Washington are subject to excessive and unsustainable rent gouging by landlords. In fact, many have been displaced by new rent increases just this past year. U.S. Census Pulse Survey data from October shows that 496,961 Washingtonians felt pressure to move in the previous six months due to a rent increase. And 28% did move because of that pressure.

859,343 renters surveyed by the Census Bureau in October report receiving a rent increase in the last 12 months of over \$100 per month. More than 104,000 report rent increases of \$500 or more:

Number of Renter Households Who Report a Rent Increase in the Last 12 Months by Amount of Rent Increase	
October 18 – October 30, 2023 (Week 63 of Pulse Survey)	
Amount of Rent Increase	
Rent increased less than \$100	199,937

Rent increased \$100-\$249	621,101
Rent increased \$250-\$500	134,055
Rent increased by more than \$500	104,187

When tenants receive excessive rent increases that they are unable to pay, they are often forced into eviction because of the inability to find an affordable alternative. According to Washington courts data, as of September, evictions in Washington were on pace to be up by over 34% from 2022.

Don't confuse rent control and rent stabilization:

Rent Control: policies that cap rents in-between tenancies. Rent control “follows the rental unit” with few opportunities to increase rent between tenants.

Rent Stabilization: policies that regulate how much a landlord can raise the rent each year on a specific tenant, but does not regulate rent increases after the tenant moves out. Rent stabilization allows landlords to raise the rent, while preventing excessive rent increases. It also provides renters with predictability so they can plan for rent increases in coming years, while still allowing landlords to have enough to make repairs, keep up with costs, and make a profit.

Why must the state act to stabilize rent?

Washington state passed a bill in 1981 that prevents any local government from passing local laws to protect tenants from rent increases. The rent stabilization bills this year do not lift this preemption and instead seek to create state level protections for all renters.

It's well documented that rent increases across Washington have been excessive

and are impacting renters' ability to pay for other essential items like medication, food, meet your children's needs or other essential needs.

According to Zillow, [median WA rent is \\$1995](#). Social Security for seniors is not keeping up rent. And wages for working families in Washington [aren't keeping up with rising rent either](#). In fact numerous studies have shown you'd have to [work nearly 80 hours a week to afford a 1 bedroom rental](#) earning minimum wage in Washington to afford rent.

Washingtonians overwhelmingly support rent stabilization:

A recent EMC opinion survey of likely Washington voters found nearly 60% say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports limits on rent increases.

In a December, 2022 [survey of Washington voters](#):

- Nearly three quarters (72%) have either experienced housing instability themselves or know someone who has.
- Two-thirds (66%) of voters indicate that the housing affordability crisis has impacted their household.
- 63% support taking measures to protect renters from unfair rent increases, including things like rent stabilization.

Also, according to a 2022 [survey by the WA State Department of Commerce](#):

- 76% said they were directly impacted or knew someone directly impacted by the cost and availability of housing
- 49% said it was difficult or very difficult to find affordable housing
- 14% of respondents have been displaced due to housing costs, eviction, or foreclosure

For questions about the rent stabilization bills, or to talk with impacted landlords, tenants, and affordable housing advocates, please contact Rob Huff at (253) 229-5769 robh@housingactionfund.org