

Albany renters unionize, call for needed upgrades

Amsdell residents point to floors, mold, pests, unsafe wiring

By Lili Iannella

STAFF WRITER

ALBANY — When Kira Bruno moved into The Amsdell, an apartment building in Albany, in December 2024, she looked

forward to "restarting" her life after moving out of New York City. Two weeks in, the 27-year-old said she had lost heat and

water. "We deserve dignity, safety and decent living conditions," she said. "Our home is not putting our lives in danger," Edwards said.

The woman, whose apartment caught fire, declined to speak at the press conference.

Behbinn Francis, a tenant organizer with United Tenants of Albany, castigated its CEO Seema Gruman, for how the complex is run. Francis shared an email sent Tuesday, days after the fire, warning residents not to use extension

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The Amsdell Tenants Union organized a rally at 175 Jay St. in Albany on Saturday.

Courtesy of Behbinn Francis

"I was kind of walking in expecting everything to be working perfectly," Bruno said. "Unfortunately, that wasn't the case."

Bruno said she came across

frustration and even tenant protests.

The Amsdell Tenants Union also want to consider this failure to keep up with basic maintenance.

"It was really, really wonderful to see a lot of community members show up," said Bruno.

Granted, crime and violence are not unique to Albany Housing Authority.

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Tenants unite at Albany Housing Authority

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Tenants organize in face of rent hikes

Fearful of eviction, residents of Albany complex unionize

By Steve Hughes

ALBANY — Residents at Danker Village, a Lincoln Ave-

"If a lease is expiring in September, why are we getting renewals four and five months ahead of time?"

Mahmood Chaudhury, a Danker Village resident who said he's paying \$1,150 a month in rent while his new lease would increase that to \$1,515 a month.

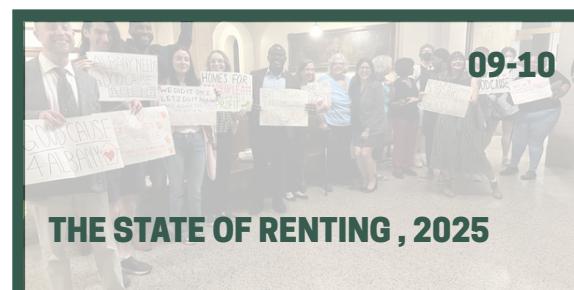
Cass Hill President Marc Quinn said in an interview Friday that his firm bought Danker Village last year with the understanding that the complex needed upgrades. Part of that process included raising tenants' rents, which were below market rate for the area, he said.

"Our analysis is that the increases are justified," Quinn said.

MISSION

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

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ABOUT

Maria & Roger Markovics met at a rent strike in 1969 while attending college in Michigan. Two years later, they moved to Albany and worked at a storefront crisis center called the Providence House. In 1973, they founded United Tenants of Albany.



UTA was created to address substandard living conditions, housing discrimination, high rents, lack of renter protections, and a popular desire for tenant empowerment. Since its inception, UTA has combined direct services, community organizing, and policy advocacy to address the anti-tenant status quo and build community at the grassroots level.

For 50+ years, UTA has built power in our community and brought change not just to Albany, but all of New York State. UTA has played a role in winning nearly every tenant protection passed in NYS since its founding. All the while, UTA has also played community defense, supporting tenants in crisis with rental assistance, tenant and court advocacy, and housing counseling services.



It is with this history in mind that UTA continues its work in developing fighting tenant unions, advocating for tenant protections, defending tenants facing displacement, educating tenants about their rights, assisting tenants in overcoming homelessness, preventing housing discrimination, and empowering tenants to demand fair & dignified housing!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Sergio Barnes
Tenant Organizer



Crista Edroi
Court Advocate



Bebhinn Francis
Tenant Organizer



Tyquazia Gause
Tenant Advocate



Emma Hollins
Investigative Coordinator



Ariel Kenny
Housing Counselor



Jennifer Krstovich
Finance & Operations



Shatiqua Pannell-Hyndman
Deputy Director



Hilary Rasch
Investigative Coordinator



Sheida Robinson
Community Services
Advocate



Dorothea Ross
Fair Housing
Enforcement Manager



Canyon Ryan
Executive Director



Tim Sarver
Court Advocate



Felicia Thornton
Fair Housing
Intake Coordinator



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Debbie Collura, Vice President
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THE YEAR IN REVIEW

We entered 2025 with much optimism, even as signs pointed toward a worsening landscape for tenants and nonprofits alike. We knew the Trump Administration planned **major changes to social care systems**, but the February executive order freezing nearly all domestic and international aid had an immediate impact on UTA.

Although the order was later overturned, **hundreds of thousands of dollars were paused or quietly cut**, and other grants were severely delayed. UTA was able to frontload an Albany County ARPA grant to offset the losses, in turn spending nearly the entire two-year, \$350,000 award in just months solely on rental assistance.

Around this time, the Rent Emergency Stabilization for Tenants (REST) Act was introduced, aiming to make rent control easier to adopt across upstate NY and Long Island. UTA supported REST and **helped secure a major coalition win** when the state budget included the Housing Access Voucher Program pilot, a Section 8-like subsidy that will benefit thousands starting in 2026.

2025 also brought major growth. By April, UTA had fully staffed its Fair Housing Office, the first of its kind in the Capital Region. With support from the NYS Attorney General, we can now **test landlords for discrimination and enforce fair housing laws**, greatly strengthening our tenant rights work.

With backing from the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern NY, UTA also **expanded court advocacy** into smaller Albany County courts and parts of Rensselaer County. The funding also allowed us to hire a Community & Social Services Advocate to support tenants in Public Housing Authority and Department of Social Services fair hearings. It helped maintain existing staff as well, freeing up more rental assistance dollars.

Meanwhile, the **Ida Yarbrough Tenants Union formed** and held its first protest over safety and conditions. Their action prompted seven months of negotiations, coordination with press and public officials, and ultimately the achievement of **all sixteen union demands**.



ARIEL AND SHATIQUA TABLING AT A COMMUNITY EVENT

THE YEAR IN REVIEW, CONTINUED

UTA also **joined the push for Good Cause Eviction in Schenectady** this Summer.

Unfortunately, after several months of hard work, the Schenectady Common Council became the second city in NYS to vote against these tenant protections, and subsequently kicked two of the three lead supporters of Good Cause off the ballot, resulting in them losing their elections. Altogether, *the City of Schenectady failed tenants.*

Soon after, **UTA completely exhausted its rental assistance funds**. We stretched the remaining dollars as far as possible, but federal cuts and delays

caught up to us. Still, we didn't stop. We went public to highlight how small nonprofits were being squeezed by federal policy, and we continued supporting tenants in every way we could. As a result, foundations like KeyBank and B'nai B'rith Gideon stepped up and donated tens of thousands for this crucial work.

Tenants responded, too! Four days after our announcement, more than 30 people attended a tenant-organizing training, which led to the launch of the **Amsdell Tenants Union** at 175 Jay Street. They submitted 16 demands at their first round of negotiations, and like IYTU, won every demand by the end of 2025, including direct repayments for false advertising and poor conditions.

By November, UTA's rental assistance fund was replenished and money was being distributed. UTA was tapped by the incoming Mayor's Administration to join the transition team and participate in the Economic Development & Growth Strategies Policy Committee, and we were looking forward to a calm end to the year.

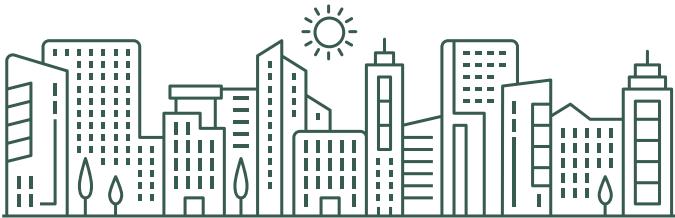
Later that month, Mayor Sheehan's Administration attempted to **dramatically modify Albany's existing Inclusionary Zoning ordinance**, which requires developers to set aside a fraction of their developments for low-income tenants.

UTA was able to **prevent this proposal** from going through by working with our partners on the Common Council, while also starting much needed dialogue with all involved parties. We anticipate these conversations to continue into the new year, with a new Administration, and a new Common Council working to ensure Albany remains a city where all tenants can live comfortably.

PHOTO FROM UTA'S 1ST SESSION OF "TENANT UNION ORGANIZING" 101



HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



Our Housing Counselors distributed \$490,305 in emergency rental assistance to support 333 households at risk of homelessness, or to overcome homelessness.



UTA helped 34 tenants sue their landlords for repairs, rent abatement, money judgements, shelter and moving expenses, and more.



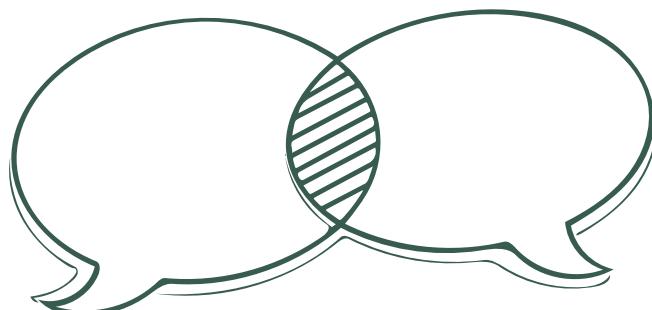
Our hotline received over 7,700 calls.



Our Court Advocates assisted over 508 households during eviction proceedings, with 85%+ achieving their desired outcome.



More than 1,240 households received assistance by simply walking into our office.



Our team conducted over 3,400 intakes.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING & IMPACTS

- **Co-led the successful campaign to win the Housing Access Voucher Program**, a housing voucher accessible to historically marginalized tenants.
- Launched a pilot program to **support tenants displaced by code enforcement** due to negligent landlords, with the support of Assemblywoman Gabriella Romero.
- **Expanded our base** of mobilized tenants through door-knocking campaigns at Tivoli Park Apartments, Thurlow Terrace, and the Rensselaer Housing Authority.
- **Collected hundreds of signatures** in support of expanding rent stabilization across NYS.
- Held a series of **Tenant Organizing trainings** that brought out nearly 50 interested tenants.
- Prevented Mayor Sheehan from eliminating Albany's landmark Inclusionary Zoning ordinance.
- UTA was mentioned in 31 news items over 2025.



THE IDA YARBROUGH TENANTS UNION POSES FOR A PHOTO WITH MAYOR APPLYRS AFTER RECEIVING THEIR AWARD AT UTA'S 52ND ANNIVERSARY



IDA YARBROUGH TENANTS UNION AT A PROTEST



Less Rent
More Control!

TENANT UNION ORGANIZING

- Supported the formation of the **Ida Yarbrough Tenants Union**, which secured all 16 demands after 7 months of negotiations, resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars in property investment.
- Helped build the **Amsdell Tenants Union** alongside residents, achieving 80% tenant participation and winning all 16 demands, including direct restitution to tenants for false advertising.
- Seeded a super-majority union effort (65%+ tenant membership) with the **Hinckel United Tenants Union** that is now actively preparing for landlord negotiations.
- Organized in partnership with tenants at **Thurlow Terrace Tenants Union** to establish a majority union now responding to chronic management and maintenance failures.
- Collaborated with the **National Union of the Homeless Albany Chapter** to win the Housing Access Voucher Program and launch this year's Winter Offensive.
- Backed the **Bleecker Terrace Tenants Association** in challenging 25% rent increases that exceeded Good Cause Eviction protections.



The Ida Yarbrough Tenants Union
Is getting results!



- Common areas addressed
- Trash chutes cleaned
- Floors steam cleaned
- Windows washed
- Walls painted
- Community room cleaned

What's next?

Come to the next meeting on Friday, August 1, at 6pm in the Community Room!

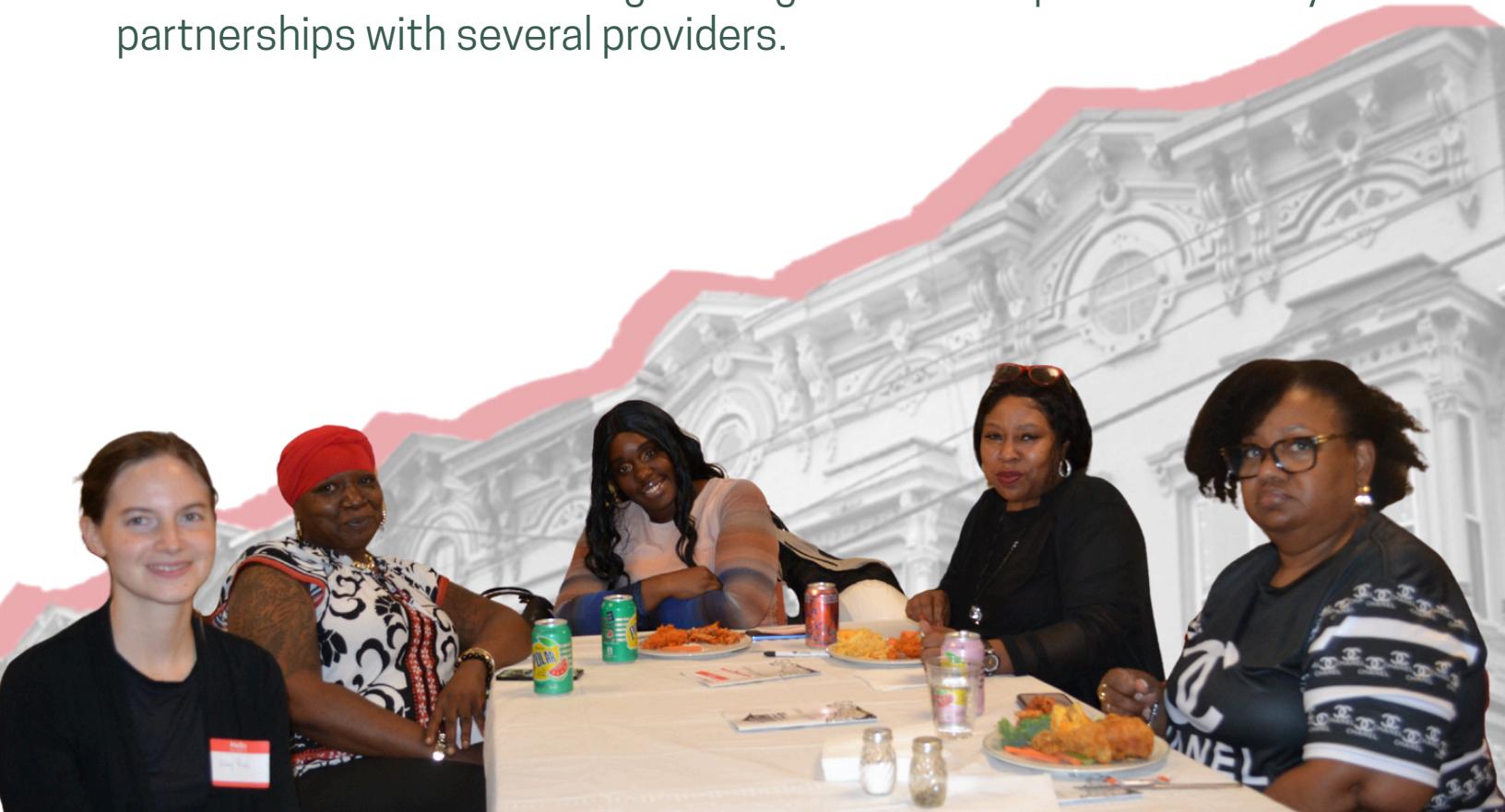
FLYER FOR AN I.Y.T.U. MEETING



IDA YARBROUGH TENANTS PROTESTING
OUTSIDE OF ALBANY HOUSING AUTHORITY

FAIR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT

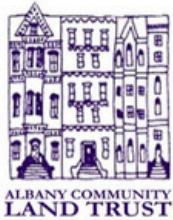
- Officially launched in June of 2025.
- Established a **35 member ‘team of testers’** to investigate landlords for discriminatory renting practices.
- Conducted **68 tests**, mostly in Albany County.
- **Investigated 11 properties**, two of which have demonstrated *differential treatment* toward protected tenant classes so far.
- Received **16 referrals** and conducted **40 in-depth intakes**.
- Held a series of Fair Housing trainings and developed community partnerships with several providers.



We send an addition thanks for the coalitions we work with, our partners, and friends!



**HOUSING
JUSTICE
FOR ALL**



ALBANY COMMUNITY
LAND TRUST


**Community
Loan Fund**
of the Capital Region


**affordable
housing
PARTNERSHIP**
of the capital region, inc.
HOMEOWNERSHIP CENTER

Housing for All


**Albany
Landlord
Report Card**



**Right to
the City**




Right to Counsel
NYC COALITION
No Evictions, Defend Your Rights!

THE STATE OF RENTING IN 2025

UTA received 7,700 calls on our hotline and conducted over 3,400 intakes in 2025. That's 1,100 more calls than last year!

What is the average household demographic & composition?

- The 3,400 intakes are representative of 7,140 individuals - 4,532 adults and 2,608 children.
- 1,367 households had children in the home, with the remaining 2,031 households composed of adults.
- 2,380 intakes were conducted by single-adult households, with 919 of those households being single-parents.
- 2,352 (71%) intakes identified women as the Head of Household.
- 2,281 (68%) identified as Black, African American, or Mixed; 774 (24%) identified as white; and 297 (8%) identified as Other. 422 (13%) of households identified as Hispanic or Latino.
- 1090 (33%) of intakes identified household members as people with disabilities.
- The average Head of Household was 43 years old.

What are tenants' average income?

- 335 (10%) households had no income to report.
- Excluding those without income, the average monthly income was \$2,196.
- With an average household size of 2.15, that means the average household has an income below 30% of the Area Median Income, qualifying them as "extremely low income".
- 39% of households that conducted intakes had an income below the federal poverty level (\$15,060 per year for one-person households).

How much is rent?

- 607 (18%) tenant households lived in a Public Housing Authority, HUD-subsidized building, or had Section 8; and 234 (7%) tenant households lived in Low Income Housing Tax Credit properties.
- Including subsidized rents, the average household paid \$1,063 per month.
- Excluding subsidized rents, the average tenant paid \$1,227 per month.
 - This means that the average UTA tenant paid more than 50% of their monthly income towards rent.
- The median rent was \$1,055 per month.



THE STATE OF RENTING IN 2025, CONTINUED

Where do tenants live?

- 2,301 (72%) tenants lived in the City of Albany.
 - The most intakes came from the 12206 zip-code (26.7%), followed by 12202 (18%), 12210 (17.7%), and 12208 (10.2%).
- 335 (10%) tenants were actively homeless (whether residing in shelters, rough sleeping, overcrowding, squatting, etc.)
- 195 (6%) tenants lived in Troy; 171 (5%) lived in Cohoes, 142 (4%) lived in Watervliet, with the majority of other tenants residing across the Capital Region.

Top 5 reasons tenants contacted UTA:

1. Help with Back Rent (53%)
2. Court & Eviction (27%)
3. Help with Moving (7%)
4. Code Violations & Habitability Issues (5%)
5. Problems with the Landlord (5%)

How did tenants hear about UTA?

1. Government Institutions (38%)
2. Friends, Family, and Community Organizations (37%)
3. Online (15%)
4. Familiar with UTA (9%)
5. Other (1%)



THE YEAR TO COME

- **Co-lead the Housing Justice For All campaigns** for upstate base-building & legislative advocacy.
- Build **more tenant unions** and begin developing the '**Capital Region Tenants Union**'.
- **Expand Good Cause Eviction** protections for other localities in the Capital Region.
- Begin utilization of **new voucher program** funds to rehouse at least 30 formerly homeless households.
- **Distribute at least \$375,000** in emergency rental assistance to keep **250 tenant households** in secure, safe, and dignified housing.
- **Prevent at least 350 evictions** in the Capital Region.
- Begin **enforcing fair housing laws** in Albany County.
- **Defend** Inclusionary Zoning, **expand** Rent Stabilization, and **win** new tenant protections.
- **Establish new partnerships** with community organizations and members dedicated to tenant empowerment and housing justice.



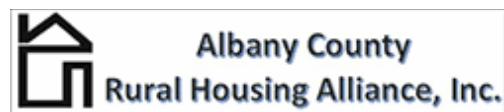
**AMSDELL TENANTS UNION
CARDS**
**(80% OF TENANTS SIGNED ON
TO THE UNION)**

**HINCKEL UNITED TENANTS
UNION CARDS**
**(75% OF TENANTS SIGNED ON
TO THE UNION)**

**THURLOW TERRACE TENANTS
UNION CARDS**
**(60% OF TENANTS SIGNED ON
TO THE UNION)**



MANY THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS!



Assembly Member Gabriella Romero, Sen. Patricia Fahy, The Barry Alan Gold Memorial Fund, The John D. Picotte Family Fund, The Review Foundation, The Tobin Family Fund, The Winnie Fund, The Marr Tikkun Fund, the Mugno/Trompeter Family Fund, Harding & Mazzotti, and many, many community members!



This year UTA celebrated its 52 Anniversary where we honored the Ida Yarbrough Tenants Union, Assembly Member Gabriella Romero, and the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern NY for their commitment to tenants rights and housing justice!

We are sincerely thankful to our community. We wouldn't be able to do what we do without your support!