



Date: June 3, 2025

To: Chair Irwin and Members of the Senate Housing and Human Services Committee

From: Julie Cassidy, Senior Policy Analyst, Michigan League for Public Policy

Subject: Support for Senate Bills 19-22 — Tenant Empowerment

Good afternoon, Chair Irwin and members of the Senate Housing and Human Services Committee. My name is Julie Cassidy, Senior Policy Analyst with the Michigan League for Public Policy. We appreciate the opportunity to express our support for Senate Bills 19-22. We thank Sen. Anthony for introducing this tenant empowerment package. The legislation is an important step toward ensuring that all Michiganders have housing that is safe, healthy and conducive to their economic security.

The League is a nonpartisan research and advocacy organization that promotes economic opportunity for all and analyzes the impact of public policy on the lives of Michiganders who have been systemically left out of prosperity. The League is also the state's Kids Count organization, working as part of a national effort to measure the well-being of children at the state and local levels and to shape efforts that improve their lives.

Everyone deserves a safe place to live, but many residents are living in homes with serious health and safety hazards. This is especially true in Michigan, which has fairly old housing stock. About half of the homes in our state were built before 1970,¹ and may have extensive maintenance needs or contain substances that we now know to be extremely harmful.

These dangers can disproportionately affect families who rent because they have to rely on their landlords to address problems quickly and adequately. Many landlords operate with ethics and care for their tenants. But the law must be strengthened to empower families whose landlords don't meet their legal obligation to maintain basic standards of health and safety.

The 2023 American Housing Survey shows that, nationwide, renters are more than twice as likely as homeowners to live in moderately or severely inadequate housing. Renter families are more likely to experience heating, cooling and toilet breakdowns; blown fuses or breakers;

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Selected Housing Characteristics," American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Data Profile, Table DP04, 2023, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2023.DP04?q=DP04&g=040XX00US26&moe=false>, accessed on June 2, 2025.

Using data to educate, advocate and fight for policy solutions that undo historic and systemic racial and economic inequities to lift up Michiganders who have been left out of prosperity.

leaking walls, windows and doors; and the presence of mold. They're also more likely than homeowners to report signs of cockroaches, broken plaster or peeling paint (the greatest childhood lead exposure risk), and exposed wiring.²

Housing conditions are critical to health, safety and economic security. Asthma is the top chronic illness reason kids miss school, and the most common cause of childhood hospitalizations.³ Between 20% and 30% of asthma cases are linked to home environmental conditions.⁴

Older adults and disabled residents are at a greater risk of falling in substandard housing due to broken steps, uneven flooring and poor lighting.⁵

A lack of adequate heating and cooling systems can force people to keep their homes at unsafe temperatures or take dangerous measures to stay warm. This can be especially harmful for babies and toddlers, who are more susceptible to heat- and cold-related mortality. And when their homes are too cold, their bodies have to direct the calories they eat toward keeping warm rather than growing.

Additionally, many poor housing conditions — such as outdated heating and cooling systems, leaky windows, and deteriorating roofs — lead to energy waste.⁶ As a result, tenants face crushing energy bills that make their housing even less affordable.

In addition to being life-threatening, unaddressed problems can lead officials to condemn rental homes. Families are evicted through no fault of their own, and the housing supply is reduced at a time when communities are so desperately trying to grow it.

Strengthening tenant rights is an essential part of the larger strategy to alleviate the housing crisis in our state. We urge the Committee to support this legislation to make clear that tenants have the right to withhold rent or conduct repairs at an unresponsive landlord's expense; receive adequate notice of rent increases; and have their security deposits returned more quickly.

² U.S. Census Bureau, American Housing Survey, 2023, https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/ahs/data/interactive/ahstablecreator.html?s_areas=00000&s_year=2023&s_tablename=TABLE5&s_bygroup1=2&s_bygroup2=1&s_filtergroup1=1&s_filtergroup2=1, accessed on June 2, 2025.

³ C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, University of Michigan Health, "Asthma (Pediatrics)," <https://www.mottchildren.org/conditions-treatments/peds-respiratory-care/asthma>, accessed on June 2, 2025.

⁴ American Public Health Association, "Healthy Housing Standard," <https://www.apha.org/publications/reports-and-issue-briefs/healthy-housing-standard>, accessed on June 2, 2025.

⁵ Elderly Fall Prevention, "Fall Risks," <https://elderlyfallprevention.com/fall-risks/>, accessed on June 2, 2025.

⁶ Michigan League for Public Policy, "Empowering Families Through Affordable Energy," July 2021, <https://mlpp.org/empowering-families-through-affordable-energy/>, accessed on June 2, 2025.

Using data to educate, advocate and fight for policy solutions that undo historic and systemic racial and economic inequities to lift up Michiganders who have been left out of prosperity.

1223 TURNER STREET • SUITE G1 • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48906

P: 517.487.5436 • F: 517.371.4546 • WWW.MLPP.ORG

A UNITED WAY AGENCY