

Energy Efficiency in Low-Income Rental Properties

*Barriers and Opportunities for Engaging Tenants
in Collective Action*



A Report of the Tenant Energy Advocacy (TEA) Project
Yale School of Public Health
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Executive Summary

People who rent and are low-income often struggle to afford their energy bills yet are more likely than others to live in homes that are not energy efficient, which further contributes to their high bills. We must urgently identify strategies to overcome barriers to low-income rental housing energy efficiency, particularly when landlords do not pay utility bills, given the high associated climate, racial equity, economic and health justice costs. While various barriers have been well studied, including the landlord-tenant split incentive problem, and health and safety barriers, we know little about how to engage tenants in collective action to advocate for stronger regulations and support to ensure that they are able to live in energy efficient homes.

The Tenant Energy Advocacy (TEA) study used Community Based Participatory Research methods to explore the potential for and barriers to collective low-income tenant action on energy efficiency. The project involved three components: i) Focus groups with low-income tenants and landlords; ii) In-depth interviews with tenants, landlords, and activists, and iii) Installation of Air Quality monitors in homes undergoing energy efficiency upgrades. This report presents the findings from the second component of the project – in-depth individual interviews with tenants, landlords and activists. Briefs and reports from all phases of the project are available at the TEA website linktr.ee/teaproject.

We learned from low-income tenants living in New Haven that they find it difficult to afford their energy bills. Despite their best efforts to earn enough income to pay bills, many are unable to do so. Recent rent increases and rising energy costs have exacerbated this challenge. To pay their bills and avoid disconnection, people cut back on other essentials, utilize food pantries and other resources, and, where possible, borrow from friends and family. Some are unable to avoid disconnection and live for periods of time without light or heat. Energy assistance and utility hardship programs are essential but are often inadequate in addressing the need; some people are unable to pay their remaining share of the bill even after receiving assistance, and others need help but are ineligible due to exceeding income requirements. Applying for the program can be challenging, and funds are limited and sometimes run out. People do their best to be responsible about paying bills; some do not use the available assistance even if they might be eligible, and people who are protected from disconnection due to medical hardship often pay what they can.

Tenants are aware that their homes are not energy efficient and understand that this is one reason why their bills are so high. They do what they can to reduce their energy consumption by using strategies such as putting plastic on windows, blocking drafts, minimizing use of appliances and lights, and being out of their homes as much as they can. Even so, some said that they are obliged to turn their thermostats extremely high to create tolerable conditions during the winter. Many simply can't afford to keep the heat at a reasonable level and must accept living in uncomfortably hot or cold conditions. Some also said that the heat is not evenly distributed in their homes, with some rooms extremely cold while others are too warm. To stay warm, some people leave their stove on or keep a pot of water boiling on the stove.

Some landlords fail not only to ensure that their buildings are energy efficient but also to complete basic repairs; many tenants said that their landlords do not adequately maintain their properties. Even those who said that their landlords keep up with basic repairs say that more significant maintenance issues are not addressed, including providing energy efficient appliances. Tenants spoke of difficulties contacting landlords about repairs, and frustration when landlords respond by suggesting that tenants fix the problems themselves. Tenants with non-responsive landlords explained that by themselves, they have little hope of changing their landlord's behavior; some said that they are afraid to complain, fearing that their landlord may increase the rent or evict them.

Many tenants have heard of energy efficiency programs, and some have used them; some had positive experiences, but others spoke of application and scheduling difficulties, and of limited effectiveness due to health and safety and other barriers. Some who had used the programs said that their landlords had willingly signed the necessary forms. Others who had not previously applied for the programs thought that their landlords may be willing if they don't have to spend time or money for the upgrades to happen. Others said they were sure their landlords would not be interested at all.

The tenants we spoke with are interested in collective action and other forms of advocacy in order to make it easier for them to live in energy efficient, affordable homes, including giving testimony, but spoke of significant barriers that need to be overcome. Some said that they need more knowledge and information to be able to speak with their neighbors about the issues. Some said that it is hard to come together with other tenants when they don't know who has the same landlord. Many tenants explained that they avoid participating in collective action out of fear that they will make waves or upset their landlords; others said that they are too busy to spend time at meetings or organizing others. They said that elderly tenants face even more challenges in getting involved. Several tenants bemoaned the fact that their communities have experienced a growing sense of fragmentation over time. They noted that in the past, people used to work together to bring about change. However, people no longer speak with their neighbors, which makes organizing very challenging. Some said that they had no confidence that things would change; they focused instead on doing what they could to find a new place to live, rather than changing the conditions in their current home.

We spoke with some small-scale landlords interested in energy efficiency, who are motivated either by personal interest as they live in the same building as their tenants and/or a personal commitment to addressing climate change. The landlords we spoke to are not representative of most New Haven landlords, but their perspective is nonetheless important in indicating where barriers exist and what might be possible for rental properties. These landlords told us that even though they are interested in making their properties as energy efficient as possible, they face barriers such as lack of information about energy efficiency programs, uncertainty about available funding through the programs, difficulties scheduling building assessment and upgrades, navigating the various programs and companies who offer energy efficiency upgrades, and financial constraints.

Finally, we spoke with activists who offered valuable advice for engaging people in collective action. They suggested organizing events that are easy and fun to show up to, focusing on immediate needs and offering tangible next steps, and making sure that information is presented in a way that is accessible to people. They also suggested sharing examples of successful collective action from elsewhere. They said that it is important to acknowledge the intersectionality of energy efficiency and to address the broader structural problems that perpetuate energy injustices, including the power of landlords' vis a vis tenants and the fact that housing and utilities are commodified, which results in profits taking precedence over human needs.

Recommendations¹

We recommend that tenants who are low-income and their allies take the following steps to ensure that more people live in energy efficient, affordable housing (these recommendations are specific to Connecticut, but many will be relevant in other states).

1. Prioritize energy affordability. It may be hard for people to think about energy efficiency upgrades if they are unable to afford their utility bills. Know where you can find information in both English and Spanish (and other languages) about energy affordability so you can share with others.
 - a. Find information about energy assistance at the [Connecticut Energy Assistance Program \(CEAP\)](#). Operation Fuel aids with utility bill payments; [apply here](#).
 - b. Find out more about [affordable utility payment programs](#) and [how to avoid termination of service](#). Contact Bonnie Roswig at the Center for Children's Advocacy for more information – broswig@cca-ct.org or 860-566-0836.
 - c. Educate yourself about energy affordability. See research reports from Operation Fuel [here](#), including maps showing state energy affordability variability [here](#).
 - d. Operation Fuel provides information about [how to get involved in advocacy for energy affordability](#), including recommendations for rental units.
 - e. If you have a complaint about a utility, you can complain to PURA [here](#), or email pura.information@ct.gov, toll Free Number: 1-800-382-4586.
2. Know where you can find information in both English and Spanish (and other languages) about energy efficiency so you can share with others.
 - a. CT energy efficiency programs are the [Weatherization Assistance Program \(WAP\)](#) and Energize CT's [Home Energy Solutions-Income Eligible \(HES-IE\)](#) program.
 - b. Connecticut's [I Heart My Home](#) program can help you to navigate the different energy efficiency programs.
 - c. The [TEA website](#) summarizes what we learned about barriers to energy efficiency. Tell us if you need briefs about specific issues – we can help!
3. Build relationships with and work alongside housing justice groups including tenant unions, ensuring that all resources are provided in both English and Spanish (at least).
 - a. Support efforts to build tenant power so that tenants are not afraid to make a complaint to/about their landlords:
 - i. Work with tenant unions in Connecticut – visit [CT Tenants Union](#).
 - ii. Find out and publicize information about landlords of different properties so that tenants can easily find other tenants with the same landlord.
 - iii. Support efforts to improve tenant rights, including expanding [Good Cause eviction protections](#), and expanding [Fair Rent Commissions](#).
 - b. Help get energy affordability and energy efficiency on the housing justice agenda (resources at the TEA website may be helpful):
 - i. Encourage activists working in housing justice to learn about how energy affordability relates to housing justice; if people can't afford their energy bills it makes it even harder to pay the rent.
 1. Inform housing justice activists about programs that help tenants afford their utility bills – see recommendation #2 above.
 - ii. Educate housing justice activists about how energy efficiency relates to housing justice; buildings that have energy efficiency upgrades are healthier to live in and have lower utility bills.

¹ See links in appendix

1. Inform housing justice activists about energy efficiency programs targeting low-income tenants – see recommendation #2 above.
4. Build relationships with and work alongside climate change activists:
 - a. Get energy efficiency on the climate change activism agenda (resources at the TEA website may be helpful):
 - i. Educate climate change activists about low-income tenants' understanding of and expertise in home energy efficiency.
 1. Inform climate change activists about energy efficiency programs targeting low-income tenants – see recommendation #2 above.
 - ii. Educate climate change activists about the importance of energy affordability when advocating for more energy efficiency; being able to afford energy comes first.
 1. Inform climate change activists about programs that help tenants afford their utility bills – see recommendation #2 above.
5. If organizing meetings about energy efficiency, try to do the following:
 - a. Emphasize community building – meet your neighbors! Provide food!
 - b. Ask people what is most important for them.
 - c. Provide information about energy assistance and energy efficiency programs (see recommendation #2 above.).
 - d. Give examples where collective action has been successful in making change.
 - e. Suggest different ways to get involved including contacting legislators, writing testimony, or testifying at hearings (generally can be done remotely) – provide templates for support for specific bills.
 - f. Ensure that different language groups are welcomed, and interpretation provided.
 - g. The [TEA project](#) can help with materials, templates, and ideas – email annie.harper@yale.edu.

1. Introduction

Households are considered ‘energy burdened’ when energy expenses exceed ten percent of the household’s income (Hernandez, 2016). Renters tend to pay higher utility bills; in Connecticut, where this study was conducted, energy burden among low-income residents is approximately six times greater than the statewide average (Sears et al., 2020). The burden of high energy bills is a racial, economic, and health justice issue. People of color are more likely to be low-income renters and have a substantially higher energy burden than white households, though the energy burden of white households has also increased in the last 25 years (Hernandez et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2021). Difficulty paying energy bills can result in cutting back on essentials, arrears, utility disconnections, damaged credit, and raises the risk of eviction, all of which have significant negative health impacts. These include stress-associated physical and mental problems associated with chronic stress, including debt-related stress, illnesses related to living in homes that are too cold/hot, asthma associated with mold, and a higher risk of carbon monoxide poisoning (Sweet et al., 2013; Hernandez et al., 2016; Jessel et al., 2019).

People who rent and are low-income are more likely than others to find it difficult to afford their energy bills yet are more likely to live in homes that are not energy efficient, including inadequate insulation, older windows, and less access to energy efficient appliances such as dishwashers and freezers (Best et al., 2021). We urgently need to identify strategies to overcome barriers to low-income rental housing energy efficiency, particularly when landlords do not pay bills, given the high associated climate change, racial equity, and economic and health justice costs.

The landlord-tenant split incentive problem, where landlords who do not pay energy bills have no incentive to invest in energy efficiency and tenants who do not pay energy bills have no incentive to reduce energy consumption, is a key barrier to rental housing energy efficiency. Even when landlords are interested in making their properties more energy efficient, the upgrades are expensive, and significant financial benefits are often not seen for ten to fifteen years (APPRISE, 2017). Significant research has been conducted on this issue, particularly in the more common and challenging scenario where landlords do not pay bills. Various solutions have been identified, including energy efficiency labeling and disclosure, regulations requiring minimum energy efficiency standards, allowing landlords to pass on upgrade costs to renters by raising rents, innovative financing mechanisms, and subsidies to make the upgrades more affordable (Gillingham et al., 2012; Catellazzi et al., 2017). In practice, progress has been slow in implementing such solutions; one reason is that it is extremely expensive; the recent Inflation Reduction Act provides \$4.5 billion for low-income energy efficiency retrofits at a maximum of \$14,000 per household; this is only enough to service 1% of families who need the upgrades (Wolfe & Lovejoy 2023).

Housing conditions are another well-studied barrier to housing energy efficiency, that add to the expense; low-income rental units are more likely to have roof leaks, mold, poor indoor air quality, lead piping, asbestos, and old wiring, which prevent significant energy efficiency upgrades from being completed. An estimated 25-30% of low-income households cannot take advantage of publicly funded energy efficiency programs due to health and safety barriers, which must be remediated before work can begin (Prevost, 2022). In Connecticut in 2019, a quarter of low-income residential weatherization projects through Energize-CT could not proceed due to such barriers (DEEP, 2020). Funds are being made available for repairs in some areas, particularly remediation of health and safety barriers (mold, asbestos, lead), but these efforts are not always well coordinated with energy efficiency work, and the available funds are far less than what is needed (Broderick et al., 2017; Sears et al., 2020). These problems tend to be more common in rental properties owned by large corporate property owners, who are more likely to delay or ignore maintenance requested by tenants (Rose & Harris, 2021). One study showed that proper-

ties owned or managed run by large, professional management companies had a code violation rate 38.2% higher than properties owned and managed by small, private landlords (Rose & Harris, 2021). In New Haven, the site of this study, many multifamily units are owned by larger management companies.

An underexplored area of research concerns how to more effectively engage low-income tenants who pay energy bills to not only take direct steps themselves to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, but also to actively advocate for their landlords to act (Jenkins et al., 2020). While the Covid-19 pandemic exposed and, in some cases, intensified racial, economic, and health inequalities, there was during the height of the pandemic a renewed commitment to fight for justice in all these areas, encouraged in part by government policies such as stimulus payments and eviction/utility disconnection moratoria that showed that radical policies are not unthinkable. For example, in Connecticut, through intensive tenant organizing, a Right to Counsel bill was passed in June 2021, giving all tenants at risk of eviction the right to legal counsel. Since that time, a state-wide tenants union was created, and numerous smaller tenant unions have emerged across the state.

Inspired in part by the success of Right to Counsel, and the growth of tenants' movements, the goal of the Tenant Energy Advocacy (TEA) project is to identify mechanisms through which to engage tenants around residential energy efficiency, and to bring the power of their collective action both to advocating for implementation of already identified solutions and imagining different solutions (Jenkins et al., 2020). The project aimed to learn from low-income renters in New Haven, particularly those living in 2–4-unit buildings, as well as other stakeholders, about barriers to tenant engagement around energy efficiency, and what could motivate them to engage and advocate, both for upgrades for their own homes and for the larger community.

The TEA project had three components:

- 1. Focus Groups:** In the first phase of the project, students from the Yale School of Public Health's Clinic Class in Climate Justice, Law, and Public Health, with the support of colleagues at the Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health, conducted 12 focus groups with 41 tenants who identified as struggling to afford their energy bills, and 5 landlords. Findings from this first phase included i) tenants do not have the bandwidth to address home energy efficiency if they are struggling to meet basic needs, ii) tenants understand that their homes are not energy efficient due to being poorly maintained, and iii) tenants face barriers to engaging in collective action. These findings are available on the TEA project website.
- 2. Individual Interviews:** In the second phase of the project, that we report on here, we conducted in-depth individual interviews that built on the findings of the first phase. Four of the five students involved in the first phase continued data collection in the second phase. During this phase, we conducted in-depth individual interviews with 36 tenants, four landlords, and six activists.
- 3. Air Quality Monitoring:** Parallel to the qualitative data collection, we installed air quality monitors in 12 homes in New Haven that were enrolled in the I Heart My Home program, which guides residents through energy efficiency upgrades, to assess whether those upgrades affect air quality. The results of this part of the project are reported separately.

2. Methods

2.1 Community Based Participatory Research

The TEA project used Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) methods to understand experiences with energy efficiency in rental units, particularly those occupied by low-income tenants. CBPR is a collaborative research approach that involves an equitable partnership between researchers, community members, and organizational representatives, with the goal of producing results that can lead to positive change within the community (Coughlin and Yoo, 2017). We also used a transformative paradigm of research, that pays particular attention to issues of power and has the explicit goal of including people who are typically research subjects as leaders in the research process, for the purpose of catalyzing change (Cram, 2015; Israel, 1998). Such an approach is crucial when research aims to understand experiences among people who are marginalized and to contribute to relevant policy change, as is the case in this project. We used a mix of quantitative (for the Air Quality monitor component) and qualitative (for the focus groups and interviews) methods. Qualitative methods enable people with lived experience to participate actively in the research, sharing the details of their experiences and providing input during the analysis and interpretation phase. In keeping with CBPR methods and the transformative paradigm, our goal was to involve the community not only in defining the problem, developing research design, and participating in data collection and analysis, but also in considering future research needs, and tying the data collected to social action (Mertens, 2007).

We began the project by meeting with individuals who have long been involved locally in energy justice and climate change activism and asked for the suggestions of who else we should be talking with. We identified three local partner organizations who we paid to help with recruitment and to advise through the project: these included Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) of New Haven/I Heart My Home, Junta for Progressive Action, and the Community Action Agency of New Haven (CAANH). We then convened a Community Advisory Board (CAB) of local experts in different areas of energy to guide the project's direction, including tenants with ongoing experience of finding it difficult to afford their energy bills, long-time energy justice and climate change activists, and representatives of our paid partners. CAB members were primarily from New Haven, though we also invited some key activists working across the state. Through the course of the project, regular CAB were held during which members provided input on the study's design, helped with recruitment, and gave feedback on emerging findings; their local expertise ensured the research was as helpful and relevant as possible. It was during our first CAB meeting that the name 'TEA' was coined for the project. The CAB also kept the team up to date about energy-related issues that could impact the project, including efforts to change state-level legislation. CAB members were paid for their participation.

Twice during the project, we presented emerging findings at public community feedback sessions. At each meeting, we shared our findings and encouraged feedback on findings from the study, shared information about energy assistance and energy efficiency programs, and discussed the next steps for activism on the issue. During the second community feedback session, we introduced attendees to CT Tenant Union Organizers and stimulated ongoing conversations to sustain efforts for collective action among tenants. We intend to continue supporting community advocacy efforts through attending activist meetings, supporting local and state-level legislative reform efforts, including through writing testimony, supporting non-profit and community group grant-writing efforts, and identifying areas for future research, based on community needs. We have also prepared and disseminated briefs highlighting key findings of the project on the TEA website (for example, we have created briefs focusing on tenant experiences with Energy Assistance and Energy Efficiency Programs); we will continue to prepare such briefs

in response to community requests.

2.2 Recruitment

To recruit participants in the New Haven area, our team drew on existing networks and ties to community-based organizations to identify and recruit low-income tenants who faced difficulty paying energy bills. Our partner organizations helped with recruitment, as did the TEA CAB. The project partners disseminated information about the study to the populations they served and other community organizations. We also circulated information about the project with eligible individuals who had participated in prior studies and offered focus group participants from the project's first phase the opportunity to participate in individual interviews.

2.3 Tenant and Landlord Interviews

We conducted in-depth individual interviews with low-income tenants in New Haven to learn more about their experiences with energy assistance, energy efficiency programs, and collective action. During February and March 2023, we conducted 36 tenant interviews; one interview was conducted in Spanish. Tenants resided in 14 neighborhoods across the City of New Haven (one was from West Haven). We used a semi-structured interview guide to steer the conversation while allowing participants to share new insights. The guide was developed using information collected during the first phase of the project. We also conducted individual interviews with four landlords owning 2–3-unit properties in New Haven. Each person consented to participate in the study before beginning the conversation. Interviews were recorded, professionally transcribed, and then de-identified. The team stored all information in a password-protected server and file.

2.4 Activist Interviews

In addition to tenant and landlord interviews, we interviewed activists working on housing and energy-related issues for various organizations across Connecticut. These interviews were conducted during the project's first phase but were analyzed during the second phase. Therefore, we included the findings in this report. We relied on our existing network to enlist activists in the study. The interviewers used a semi-structured interview guide to lead the conversation, but activists were encouraged to expand on their thoughts and experiences related to energy work. During the first phase, activists were crucial in developing the project's interactive community report-back session.

2.5 Analysis

We used combined deductive and inductive methods to analyze the data; the interview guide provided the initial themes, which were then revised over time as new themes emerged from our continuous observations. Using a grounded theory approach, our analysis overlapped with the data collection. Immediately after each interview, student researchers summarized their conversations with participants in a detailed paragraph. In our weekly team meetings, we discussed these summaries, their emerging themes, and field observations to guide the remaining data collection. As the data collection slowed, we drafted a list of themes and began the initial stages of a codebook. The findings from the focus group data, which were analyzed using Rapid Qualitative Analysis methods, also influenced the theme development in the second phase. Each team member reviewed 2–3 transcripts from interviews that they did not conduct and created a list of themes. In the weekly meetings, the team integrated themes to create a comprehensive list. Once the team had a draft, which would eventually become the list of codes, we tested it by having all team members code three transcripts in Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis tool. Since our analysis approach followed an iterative process, our list of codes changed weekly to cover as many emerging observations as possible.

Demographic Detail of Participants

Sample Characteristics	Total	Percentage
Gender		
Men	13	36
Women	23	64
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	24	67
Native American or Alaska Native	1	2
Asian	0	0
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0
White	6	17
Other or Mixed Race	4	11
No Response	2	6
Hispanic/Latine	4	11
With children under 18		
Yes	14	39
No	22	61
Neighborhood		
East Shore	1	3
Annex	0	0
Fair Haven Heights	1	3
Quinnipiac Meadows	1	3
East Rock	2	6
Fair Haven	2	6
Wooster Square/Mill River	1	3
Long Wharf	0	0
Hill	5	14
Downtown	0	0
Prospect Hill	1	3
Newhallville	7	19
Dixwell	3	8
Dwight	1	3
West River	3	8
Edgewood	0	0
Beaver Hills	1	3
West Rock	0	0
Amity	0	0
Westville	3	8
Other	1	3
Not Sure	3	8
Type of Housing		
Single Family Home	1	3
2-4 Unit Building	17	47
5-6 Unit Building	7	19
More than 6 Unit Building	7	19
Other	2	6
No response	2	6

3. Themes from tenant interviews

We identified the following themes from the individual interview data: 1) Energy bills are too high; people cannot afford their bills, and while energy assistance and utility hardship programs are essential, they are often inadequate to meet the need, 2) Tenants' homes are not energy efficient; tenants understand this is one reason why their bills are so high, 3) People do their best to reduce their energy consumption, but often have no choice but to live in uncomfortably hot or cold conditions, 4) Many landlords fail not only to ensure that their buildings are energy efficient, but also to complete basic repairs; many tenants said that their landlords do not adequately maintain their properties, 5) Many tenants have heard of energy efficiency programs, and some have used them; some had good experiences, but others spoke of application and scheduling difficulties, and of limited effectiveness due to health and safety and other barriers, and 5) Tenants are interested in collective action and other forms of advocacy but spoke of significant barriers that need to be overcome.

3.1 Energy bills are too high

3.1.1 People find it difficult to afford their energy bills.

Many tenants we interviewed individually spoke about how difficult it is to afford their energy bills. Many emphasized that they were doing their best to work and earn money, but simply couldn't make ends meet. Madison, a 69-year-old African American woman from the Prospect Hill neighborhood, explained— *It is difficult to sometimes pay the electric bill on time because its cost is so high and then I have to think about the other bills that comes first like food and like rent. Those are priorities.*

Some complained of unreliable employment income, or too few work hours. Clara, a 49-year-old white woman from the Quinpiac Meadows neighborhood, explained,

I'm struggling to pay my bills. All of my bills. But even like, the light and the gas, I'm literally struggling. I got shut off notices and I have a full-time job. You know, it's not like I'm sitting home and waiting for welfare. I really, I work. And I work hard. It's unfortunate. Right now, I'm out of work because of... something that had happened last month. But, you know, it's not fair that I get a shutoff notice in the middle of winter. Like, are you kidding me?

Quinn, a 36-year-old African American woman from the Westville neighborhood, said,

I have a light bill and gas bill. And I do have to pay for that, you know, it's not included in the rent. And I feel as though with how high the electricity and gas is right now, you know, it can be very, very expensive to pay, especially with being a single parent. You know, and just being a part-time employee, not being able to pay your balance on your light bill or on your gas bill. It can be very frustrating and very upsetting.

Some said that things have been particularly difficult recently as the cost of energy and other basic needs such as rent have risen. As Clara, introduced above, put it,

Energy costs are just... They're ridiculous. And let's face it... pay is not going up. But everything else is, especially energy bills. Like, I understand companies need to make money. But at the same time, people need to live, they need to be able to turn on their gas for heat, to feed their kid, everything. It's ridiculous.

Tessa, a 73-year-old African American woman, put it more succinctly— *Rent going up, bills going up, and your pay is staying the same. So, you know.* Jillian, a Hispanic woman from the Fair Haven neighborhood, said, *the oil is really expensive... We haven't even filled it up... last time we, which was a couple of*

weeks ago... it was like three something and it wasn't even full. Patricia, a 74-year-old white woman from the Beaver Hills neighborhood, was up to date with payments at the time of the interview, but afraid about what might happen later—*I'm concerned about what the UI bills will be, come summer. That's my issue.*

In the face of high utility bills, Jonathan (see story in Appendix I), a 37-year-old African American man from the Fair Haven Heights neighborhood, said,

Figure out how to pay so you can do it. That's what I do. You might have to sacrifice some stuff that you normally want to put some extra money on the bill, I guess. That's all I could do. There ain't no more I could do.

James, a 51-year-old man who identified as mixed-race from the West River neighborhood, said, *I was like, trying to pay something on the UI bill, still making sure I got groceries, then, you know, trying to muster up to pay a rent.* Winstone, a 62-year-old African American man from the Wooster Square/Mill River neighborhood, said, *I will cut back on certain things. Then...I started...hit[ting] the food pantries. So that offsets the amount of money that I have to spend on groceries.*

Some said that they must borrow from friends or family to get by. Mason, a 65-year-old African American man from the Fair Haven Heights neighborhood, said, *I borrow money from my family at times to you know, make enough.* Winstone, introduced above, said, *My friend lives in Meriden, I go up there to stay with her a day or two, so that's a day or two less for me using electricity.*

Tessa said,

You kind of try to divide and conquer, if you will, you know, you got to take from here and put here, and you know, hey, can I borrow some money and, you know, try to pay it back. Again, hair pulling, it's you know, and it's to the point where the people that I could normally call and ask for help. Unable to, because everybody is basically [struggling].

Devin, a 47-year-old African American man from the Newhallville neighborhood, said, *every month I always pay my bill somehow, you know, my auntie, come through and give me a little, \$30 here. And I gotta to pay her back for that, you know.* Seven participants had experiences of utility disconnection. Quinn described the hardship that she had experienced as a child,

I've experienced, you know, being a child or being a young girl, and not having lights or not having hot water because, you know, she's doing the best that she can. She's working one job, she's a single parent mom. And there will be times that we come home or will wake up, there is no lights, there is no gas, but you know, she would, you know, borrow from family members or you know, I guess take out a loan, but we never went out, like, a whole week without lights or water, it will probably be like a day or two... And you know, it's not a good situation, you know, it's, you never want to go through that as an adult, and especially as an adult with a child now, you don't ever want to put your child through that situation, you know. But it happens. It happens.

Laura, a 62-year-old white woman from the Newhallville neighborhood, explained how hard it can be to get reconnected after experiencing disconnection—

Catching up and...getting deposits to get your heat back on...I don't know if there's any place that will help you with your old past bills... or... a big deposit [to put the electricity back on]. And...those are things that you really don't have the money if you're in a certain bracket income bracket... If there's any other ways we can make it easier or to get it back on without having to

go through a lot of- the security deposits are pretty high. Everybody might mess up sometimes in their lives and like I said, we need to have a chance... lot of people don't want to see anybody not have heat and hot water. Those are stuff that's needed. It's electric, you know? All essential to live.

Some of the tenants we spoke to have their utilities included in the rent, but this did not necessarily mean that they weren't affected by the bills. Nadia, a 53-year-old African American woman from the Newhallville neighborhood, who lives in a rooming house, explained that while in theory utilities were included, in practice, the rent varied from month to month depending on the utility bill. *If the bill goes up or whatever, he goes up on the rent.*

Natalie (see story in Appendix I), a 53-year-old African American woman from the Hill neighborhood, said something similar; although her heat was included in the rent, the landlord was increasing the rent due to the cost of heat,

Yeah... anything that comes out of his pocket to pay for, then he's gonna raise the rent...Because the more he has to put out, the more the rent is gonna go up. I have to pay for it. It's not fair to me.

3.1.2 Energy assistance/utility hardship programs are essential but often inadequate.

Energy assistance and utility financial hardship programs are a vital resource. Katherine, a 45-year-old African American woman from the Dixwell neighborhood, explained that she regularly got help from energy assistance—*They always help me so, you know, that's where I go, for my help. If I need help with something I usually go to [Community Action]*. Raven, a 45-year-old African American woman from the West River neighborhood, was grateful for the matching payment program offered through the utility company—*That's the one good thing that they do have, the matching payment plan*. Patricia, introduced earlier, said, *I'm blessed to have oil assistance...I'm just thankful... especially when it's so high right now... if I didn't have that, as you know, I don't know what I would do.*

Some people had been protected from shut-off during the Covid-19 moratorium, and now faced high bills. Jade, a 33-year-old Hispanic/Latine woman from the Hill neighborhood, explained,

You know, they didn't cut me off at all, but I guess they let it pile up...when I noticed it was at \$1,000. And I freaked out because you know, I'm not on a winter protection program. I don't think I am, I don't know I got to look into that. But you know, if you don't pay your bill, they're gonna cut you off... So now I'm on a matching program. So, I'm watching the decrease.

Others explained that even when they got energy assistance, they still sometimes struggled to manage their share of the bill. Madison looks after her grandchild, who has had a kidney transplant and is immunocompromised, so she must take care to make sure he doesn't get sick. She said,

I have called the UI company to set up a payment plan so I could pay a little each month and that works for me, but still every month I'm getting behind because... we have to leave the heat on all day especially during the weekend. It's very high yeah.

Ethan, a 75-year-old white man from the Hill neighborhood, said, *I had to go to get the energy assistance... They helped take part of my bill...They don't cover up a great deal but they are some help.*

Samara, a 41-year-old African American woman from West Haven who used energy assistance, said,

You know, you still have to make a payment on a bill to show that you're currently, you know, keeping up with your payments for that to even go through. That is definitely frustrating, and on top of how high, you know, especially now everything is double, then how high rent is...

Danielle, a 54-year-old African American woman from the Beaver Hills neighborhood, explained that even though she had help from energy assistance, she still could not manage to pay her share, given her fluctuating income (her hours had been cut). She said,

They [energy assistance] gave me a part to pay, I wasn't able to pay that because like I said, my job that I was, keep dropping. So by the time I get paid, I'm paying my rent. You know, I'm paying my car note, ...they say the old saying, rob Peter to pay Paul. You know, just to keep my head above water.

Quinn similarly explained that they enter into an agreement to pay a certain amount every month, but then their financial situation changes,

Yeah, the gas bill, UI, which is electric, they do the same thing. They go according to what they feel as though you can pay what's manageable for you... They work with you... But... Sometimes you can say yes, this is this is good enough for me, this is what I can pay each month... [but] things come up, you know... So you may not be able to pay that following like, say two or three, four months from now...even though you agreed to pay that dollar amount because, again, you get sick, your kid gets sick, you're not able to work, you don't have enough time, you don't have enough Connecticut PTO time to replace the time or days that you were out. So, it's some months where you're not able to pay that amount that you agreed to in that contract. So, you know, that has happened to me as well.

Quinn also said that it can feel frustrating when, even if you can afford the monthly payment, your arrears is still there—

In so many ways, you're really not catching up because you have this bill, but then you have a bill that's already been processed for the following month. So you can be paying that bill for the following month, and you're still at that \$1,000 mark. So it's like you're never paying catch up.

Some said that they were unable to receive the assistance despite being eligible. Samara explained that sometimes the funds run out—

You know, it's like first come, first serve until the money runs out. You know, if you don't make it in time...by time you get a date, it's at least about a month and a half later because everyone needs the help.

Jillian said something similar—

For the oil... I was calling...Community Action... No help at all. I haven't get energy assistance in who knows how long because I never get through. So, they pick up the phone, but they will just tell you... They don't have an open program right now. So, I haven't got through. [It is frustrating] Especially when you got kids at home, and you try and then my husband's the only one working. I had the baby so he's two years old now but still, I'm home with him.

Some said that even if they were protected from disconnection, they still tried to pay. Nine participants had medical protection, meaning that their electricity could not be shut off given health conditions, but they still tried to pay. Talia (see story in Appendix I), a 49-year-old African American woman

from the Dixwell neighborhood, explained,

My doctor writes me a letter [for] the light company because I have an asthmatic... I have to have a certain machine at the house that my electricity for me and my daughter can't be cut off, but I try to put money on the bills, you know, a little at a time as much as I can [inaudible] you know my light doesn't get turned off.

Raven had developed long-term health problems after getting covid, and she explained,

So now I have like an emergency thing so that they have to, the light bill, they have to keep it on because when I catch a cold I use the machine, a breathing machine. So therefore, they can't cut me off. But then the bill still, you know, is still high because I got to pay it and sometimes, I don't pay because I don't have to, because I have to pay another bill. That's how it becomes what it is.

Not everyone who struggled with their bills used the available assistance. Bailey, a 64-year-old African American woman from the West River neighborhood, explained that they didn't want to have to get help—*maybe it would have helped on the gas bill, and the electric bill. But I was trying not to beat the system... I was just trying to be a, you know, a regular person, and just pay my bills.*

Similarly, Jonathan didn't apply for help, thinking that he might be reducing the support available to people who needed it more than him—

[It's for] somebody like my dad. What if a whole bunch of young kids, like myself or younger than me, I'm 37. I'm not that young, but what if a whole of 22-year-old kids who actually can get up and go to work decide to all sign up for the program and then the funding is limited, and stuff just becomes limited. Then people who really need it can't have it. So I just leave it for people who really need it.

Some explained that they felt they needed the help, but their income made them ineligible. Jade put it plainly—*I suffered a little bit from having too much income.*

Danielle told us,

It's been hard for me to really pay my bills you know, like now my bills like almost \$1,000. I went to get help at the Community Action, I got denied. They said my income, of course they go by gross you know, but I don't bring that home you know, see I'm saying so it's hard you know, the net pay I bring home was not even close enough.

She continued, *I wouldn't mind paying. You gotta pay your bills. You can't do live for free, so I don't mind paying bills, but I just didn't have the finances to pay... My gas bill shouldn't be 300 dollars.*

Kendra, a 61-year-old African American woman from the Dwight neighborhood, had become ineligible for energy assistance after her son dropped out of college and got a job. She explained,

Well, my, my energy bills have been rough. Um, I am no longer eligible for help from Community Action Agency. And that is because of my son's income, my son is 21... They've been helping me with my utilities, since forever, right? Because my, I'm a single mom, and...very low income and, and my baby was in school. Well, now he's working now... that made me ineligible for energy assistance for this year.... Which really is too bad...

Kendra felt that it wasn't fair that her son wasn't able to use his income to save and plan for his

future,

I don't understand how they expect for a 21-year-old to put all his earnings into paying utilities or paying rent, or whatever, you know, he is living with me. This is my apartment... I mean, he's still living at home. This isn't his apartment. He can't be held accountable.

3.2 Tenants' homes are not energy efficient

3.2.1 People know that their homes are not energy efficient, which increases their energy costs.

People struggling to afford their energy bills are keenly aware that one reason for their high bills is that they live in housing that is poorly insulated, with inadequate air sealing and drafty windows. Natalie was clear about what energy efficiency means—*It makes the bill go up when it's not. Yeah, so then the tenant ends up paying more than what they said. So it's very important that it's energy efficient.*

Talia explained that the cold air comes into her house through the drafty windows during the winter, and the cool air escapes in the summer,

There are supposed to be new windows when... I moved in, but the windows, they're not energy efficient windows either because wintertime... you could feel the draft around it. Like you could feel wind coming inside of it and it's closed... And then you know, obviously, you have to put your heat up. So that's going to make your heat bill go sky high, but you got to stay warm...

She went on,

I feel like in the summertime, I also waste money because... The insulation in the house is not tight. So whatever air that comes in is going back out because of the windows, because of the doors. So your money steady going out the window.

Jade also said her windows let the cold in and the heat out. She said,

I live on a ninth floor. So, it's like, the higher it is, the hotter it gets summertime. So, you have to have the AC on, you know, but come wintertime too like, the way they, I feel like they made the building of where I live at, the windows that they put in, weren't meant for that. So it does get cold in one of the rooms. So you know, the draft and stuff like that does kind of get the whole apartment cold.

Riley, a 51-year-old African American woman from the Hill neighborhood, said how cold she was during the interview over Zoom—*It's freezing in here, because I have a big bay window here. And it's not insulated. And then the bathroom is not, so it gets extremely cold in here. Ethan said plainly, the building isn't insulated. Yeah. Just not insulated.*

James, a 51-year-old man who identified as mixed-race from the West River neighborhood, emphasized that buildings need full insulation,

The structure of a building. How well is it built? How well is it insulated. That's key, too. Because if you build not well insulated and structures with good materials, yes, it's going to be a challenge for people to manage their uses. AC, heat, whatever... So now people are gonna be financially challenged... You know, so it's up to the developers of these buildings and make sure they're using proper effective building materials. Because who wants to be in a house and you're either sweating like, like, there's no tomorrow, or you freezing like a popsicle. You know, nobody wants that.

Jonathan had a newborn baby and was frustrated about the draftiness of his home. He explained,

I guess the place is really old because the doors – I guess these days when they bring the doors down, they try to get it to right there. Then they put a flap just in case. These are sitting up here, and there's nothing. It's an old wooden door. So, it's just a draft coming through the bottom of the door...there's always air coming down. It's just a really old place. They're nice, but they're old.

He had similar concerns about his windows –

[They] are from the 1970s or '60s or something. They're really old. So, these are the original windows from back then. They don't even have – it's not even double glass. It's the worse glass ever. [During the winter] it's sweating inside from me keeping it so hot, but the outside is so cold. So in between my windows, it's causing ice all around because you got the heat, and then you got the cold and the moisture just freezing. It's crazy.

3.2.2 People do their best to reduce their energy consumption.

Some tenants mentioned putting plastic on the windows to keep the heat in. Jonathan was desperate to keep his apartment warm for his newborn baby –

I had to put plastic around my windows 'cause I got a newborn that was born in December. So, it was bad. There was nothing we could do. I can't afford to just go out and buy new windows to put in an apartment that I'm renting. So it was bad. Running the heat and all stops just to keep it warm. So it's through the roof.

Riley said, *I keep a plastic over the window. This window here...the big window and the bathroom window. I keep plastic as well as curtains. You know year-round...* Evan, a 66-year-old African American man from the Newhallville neighborhood, said something similar – *put plastic up, that's for the winter.*

Many tenants spoke about their efforts to block drafts. Natalie explained,

If it gets too cold, I'll put on...put like something down on the door to block the draft. But it's a little difficult because ... sometimes even when it snows, there's snow that comes in because of the crack.

Devin had done his best to seal a leaky door,

There's big spots in the door where the heat actually escapes...when I brought my air conditioner, you know how they got the cushion thing that comes around the air conditioner inside the box? So, I use that... I recycled it. And I stretched it out. And I put it around the edges of my door. Went and got double sided tape. And I just made it work.

Raven said, *I put a towel under the door. Yeah, I got this thing from As Seen On TV, it's like, a door draft... that has come out of my pocket.*

Diana, a 71-year-old white woman from the Westville neighborhood, said,

I put towels in the windows. You know, I'll put a towel. And one of my doors, I'll do the same thing sometimes, put a towel around. But it's definitely drafty. It's an old house... I mean, I wear a sweater all the time inside.

Tessa said,

As far as heating, I try to, you know, block the doors and things of that nature. So that way. You

know, we can hold the heat in, you know, try to keep the blinds closed, things like that... but it's like I said, with the prices increasing, it's making it worse.

Willow, a 29-year-old white woman from the East Shore neighborhood, spoke in detail about the various ways they tried to keep their home warm,

We get really bad winds and our windows they're double pane, but they weren't installed properly. So we have use some tape to like, kind of tape off those. And then we also have like, caulked our windows ourself... And we also have added, like weather stripping to all of our doors to try to kind of keep that wind and that coldness outside of the house.

In addition to putting plastic on his windows, Jonathan also tried to block cold air from coming in the door. But ultimately, there wasn't much he could do to keep the apartment warm, other than turn the heat up higher. He said,

It's difficult for – imagine have a three-month-old right now and you got blankets at the bottom of your door, but you can't just get up and go 'cause I work here at the library as a security guard. I don't make a whole bunch of money. My wife is out of work right now. The baby is only three months. So, she go back probably in another month or two. So, the bills are piling up. You can't just afford to do certain stuff. I don't come from a rich family. It's not like I was inherited to money. I got to get up every day and go to work. So just is what it is.

People also told us about trying to minimize the amount of electricity used for appliances and lights. Devin explained, *I got a multi-plug with the red plug on it, where you could turn off multi things. I turn that off, I unplug my stereos, my television in my bedroom.*

Christopher (see story in Appendix I), a 57-year-old African American man from the Newhallville neighborhood, also said,

I don't plug everything up. The only thing I'll leave plugged is like the clock, the lamp, and stuff like that. I even unplug the TV when I leave. So, I unplug. I don't leave anything running no more.

Jillian explained that it could be a challenge to get her children to keep their electricity use down,

Yeah, I try to unplug wires. I mean, I don't know if they help. I haven't seen a difference, but I try to unplug, but then the kids with the games, and I'm always screaming, turn off the lights. You don't need light...

James said,

Shut the TV down and take a break. You know, cuz, like I said, it can be very financially challenging. He also tried to be out of their homes as much as possible, to minimize energy use. He said, I like going out. So, I'll go outside and take long walks or whatever. To minimize some of the usage of the utilities.

People aren't always able to control their energy use as Ethan explained,

I have a roommate. So, they don't... they're not conservative with the energy as well as I am. So, you know, and shutting things off, leaving lights on and so on, so forth. [I've tried talking]... several times... and it didn't turn out well.

Christopher said that the landlord had put the electricity bill in their name, saying that he would

cover it. He explained,

I had it in my name and the landlord wasn't paying it. Because right now it's still in my name, it's like \$1,000. Because I was staying [in] a room in a house at one time. And so, he asked me, if you can put the gas bill in my name. I put it in my name, and then the bill comes, it's not being paid. So that bothers me.

Samara told us that she was suspicious that she may have been paying for the electricity in common areas in a previous apartment. She explained,

I was living in a brick building, and at night I used to have these lights with these sensor lights to pop on people doors, certain people doors. I didn't even know that was connected to my UI until I was damn near moving out. Like certain things the landlord could have hooked up to your line that also generating on your bill that you wouldn't even know. And I didn't find out to you know, later down the line.

Nadia, who lived in a rooming house, wasn't able to adjust the heat, *because he has a lock on it... Sometimes I get an electric heater... but he don't know it.*

3.2.3 Tenants live in uncomfortably hot/cold conditions.

Even using the strategies described above to keep their homes comfortable at a price they could afford, many tenants described living in uncomfortably hot or cold conditions. Many people spoke about being uncomfortably cold in their homes (the interviews took place during the winter). Danielle said,

I do the plastic. The heat don't be on when I'm at work. I don't know what else, you know... if I have the heat off, I can feel the cold is coming through the vents... And that's when I turn the heat on, like I said, but just to get the coldness out... But don't have it all through the night because the bill gets so expensive.

Elena, a 63-year-old African American woman from the Dixwell neighborhood, felt so cold in her apartment that she called for help. She said,

I call 211 to get information to help me with you know, something. Something needs to be done. You know, just frustrated. I can't even sit in my living room because it's so cold. And I'm paying my rents. How can I not sit in my living room, you know? I have to sit in my room all the time in my bed all cuddle up, you know? I have to bundle up in sweaters. That's all I could do. Why should I have to go through that? I pay my rent.

Riley said, *I put on clothes. There, you know, like when it's extremely cold like that, I have a lot of sweaters on. You know... like I said, I stayed in the one room because that's the warm room.*

Willow said,

We leave the temperature at about 60 to make sure that the pipes don't freeze. And then we have a space heater and electric space heater that we bring with us to certain rooms that we're working in, or if we're watching TV or whatever.

Some said that they had to crank their thermostat very high to be able to keep out the cold. Brooke, a 60-year-old African American woman from the Dixwell neighborhood, said, *if I didn't turn the heat all the way up to the max, we wouldn't have felt no heat. You don't feel the heat when it's cold like that.*

Raven said something similar—

I have like old radiators in my house. So, I have to turn my heat up to like 90 in order for it to even click on or for us to feel anything. So, one that makes my bill go up high. Because like I don't need it 90, but if I put it on 70, you don't feel anything because the radiators are so old, as well as the windows.

Jonathan also said that it was hard to keep the house warm without keep the thermostat up high, given the draftiness of the apartment,

Sometimes in a normal house the house heat up to a nice temperature. You turn it down. You let the heat simmer for a little while. You enjoy heat. At my house, it's like as soon as you turn it off five minutes later, the cold air done took over. So, you just got to run it, run it, run it. It's bad right now. So, we're trying to move out of there soon.

One tenant spoke about uneven temperatures through their homes. Kendra explained how frustrated she was with the variable temperature in her home. She said,

My son's room is like an ice box... My house needs to be winterized. It needs to be weatherized. That needs to happen... Because my son that's where he spends most of his time is in his room. He has his gaming system in his room, he has his TV in his room. His bed, his books, his games, you know, he eats in his room. He sleeps in his room. He has a big recliner chair in his room. He lives in his room. And to have to sit there with a winter coat or a hoodie on. It just, that really, yeah.

To keep her son's room warm enough, she had to keep the heat up high –

I had to keep my heat on super, you know, on 72. I keep it on 72, 73 degrees in order for my son not to freeze to death in his room. In the meantime, in my room, I'm like, you know, like sleeping with no covers.

Some felt they had no option but to take further steps to keep their homes livable, such as leaving the stove on, or keeping a pot of water boiling on the stove. Brooke said,

I have put towels at the bottom of the door, I had to put sheets to cover the door because my doors don't fit my frame, they would take it from another apartment put it on to my apartment. And then I was stuffed with newspaper all the way up and all the way across. Because it was drafty in the cold air was getting in... We didn't feel no heat. So, at times I had put a pot of water on still.

In order to keep the temperature bearable in her apartment, Elena resorted to keeping the stove on –

Sometimes I have to put my oven on, I don't like doing it. But I have to keep myself warm. I'm [inaudible] hypothermia in there, you know? Yeah, I was sick. My nose was all dried, and my lips, you know.

3.2.4 Landlords often do not maintain properties.

Many tenants said that their landlords did not keep up with essential repairs. For example, Madison was very frustrated by the crumbling, drafty windows in her home, and by the refusal of the landlord to replace or repair them. She explained,

I've been here almost, going on 20 years and when I started my rent was \$450. I'm up to \$1100. Big difference with no improvement. My windows are horrible, they're fallen apart. I reached

out to my landlord several times to get them replaced because there's just wear and tear to just raggedy and nothing. Every year he goes up on the rent, but there hasn't been any improvement.

Clara told a similar story,

Unplugging things, we put plastic in front of the windows because we have really old windows, our landlord refuses to fix. And listen, I'm sure it's not easy being a landlord, but at the same time, I mean, come on. That's not fair to your tenants either.

Jason, a 61-year-old African American man from the Westville neighborhood, said, *he doesn't really help you with anything. No... He says I'll check on it later, and then he never come.*

Riley had a terrible problem – feces in her basement – but was not able to get the landlord to clean it up. She explained,

I have a river, a pond of shit floating in the basement... And I'm inhaling and breathing down on first floor. A lot of the times I come in here or I wake up in the morning, I smell crap. And I call, and I call, and nothing's being done....

Riley was desperate to move but said that it was extremely difficult to find a new place, especially with a subsidy. She said,

Just because I live in New Haven in subsidized housing, I shouldn't have to live like shit. Excuse my language. And that's how I feel... when you subsidize, you don't have no, to me, you don't have no rights. And that's not fair.

Some tenants said that their landlords do keep up with repairs, but some don't make larger needed changes. James said, *she [the landlord] will work with us... if it was something big, we would like right away tell her, and she would respond majority of the time very efficiently and effective.* Quinn said,

Oh, yeah. He wouldn't mind. I will just tell him, and he's like, okay, no problem. Like, he don't mind at all. It's basically like, when I say he's very good. He's very good. He's like, listen, this is like your house. So yeah, it's basically like my home. But he owns it.

Willow said that their landlord was responsive, though the repairs were often cursory, *they're very quick to respond when we have something big, like a roof leak or something like that. And they do like patch jobs really, like they, they don't totally fix things sometimes.* Some tenants told us that their landlords had responded to their complaints but had done shoddy work. Elena said, *it's drafty. I mean, I've complained to my landlord. He doesn't want to fix anything. He put plastic up [but] air is coming in, you know? So like I said, they don't want to do anything about it.*

Jillian similarly said that it wasn't hard to get small things repaired, but she didn't expect to see any larger scale repairs,

We have an actual maintenance guy that lives on the actual – lives out there, and you have his number to give him a call, 'Hey, my sink is stopped up.' He'll come over and fix it, but he can't change a window or change your doors. So that's as far as it goes... He comes in a day or two. He's pretty quick.

Some said it was hard to get in touch with their landlord. Jonathan said,

He got all these tenants. He don't communicate. They send e-mail, and you can barely even talk to these people. Some of them... last people that owned the building, they didn't live in Con-

necticut. They lived somewhere far, and they just owned it. That's really bad 'cause you never see them. You can never get through to anybody.

Jonathan said that it was always possible to find somebody to give the rent to, but much harder to talk to someone who could help with maintenance,

For the most part, I can reach out to the office and talk with somebody, but the actual people that deliver a message, I don't think they'll ever get back to you or something like that... You can talk to a secretary if you want to. There ain't no problem for the secretary to take your money to pay a bill, but it'd be a problem for a secretary to actually get this guy on the phone... [it's] frustrating.

Talia said, *I know... as a property manager, the person who runs the, the person I pay rent to, but I don't know the actual landlord of the complex.* Raven said,

[The landlord] lives in Coney Island, New York. He has like a slum guy who supposedly fixes things and comes and does everything. So, like when we call the landlord, he's like, call the [maintenance guy] because he's right there. But no, we need to call you because he's not working. He's not on it. And from what the maintenance guy saying, oh, I'm doing everything. So, the landlord's way up Coney Island collecting all this money and thinking that everything is fine down here when in actuality, it isn't.

Tenants were also frustrated that landlords or property managers responded by telling tenants to fix the problem themselves. Kendra said that when she complained to her landlord about the cold, he suggested that she fix it herself,

So when I confronted my landlord about how cold my son's room is. She says, 'Well, you can get the window kit from Lowe's or Home Depot.' And you can put plastic up to the window. I have to do this? Wow. Wow. Wow. Yeah. Yeah. You know, and stuff, and I'm disabled, you know. And it's, it's horrible. It really, is, it really is.

Bailey said that when she complained, the landlord sent a maintenance person who simply told her what to do — *he said, I got a trick. He said, he said, have your nephews and them to go buy a tarp and put it on the outside of the basement door... and see how it... you know, the coldness will work.*

Samara was also frustrated at having to be responsible for keeping their home weatherized,

I have to use all three as far as, you know, being on a payment plan, going into Community Action, and doing my own weatherization in my home. But like I said, that should not, should not, have to be... I'm still paying some type of... rent like it's not fair.

Samara had lived in an apartment previously where the landlord was even less responsive —

They, you know, [had] maintenance people and everything on hand, but no help. Crickets. You just used to surviving on your own. You used to, you know, your own home remedies... And techniques that you used to survive, to continue to live like that. It just becomes normal when they shouldn't be. I mean, we pay taxes just like everybody else, whether it's low income, middle class, whatever, like we should not be treated any different.

Tenants also told us about challenges they had getting their landlords to provide them with properly working, efficient appliances. Katherine said,

The frigerator don't work...[it] don't even get cold...Like I had to like, you know, throw away

my food most of the time when the fridge... I'm trying to get them to replace the refrigerator. But I don't know. They won't.

Christopher had trouble getting his stove repaired—

No, when I contact him, I'm gonna be honest with you, it takes about a week before I hear back. And the only thing he want is the money. He don't, he don't care about the house or nothing... He don't, he do nothing. He always say, you gotta deal with this. Like one time... The stove was broke for a whole eight months. Still, I mean, the oven part didn't work, the firing part, top working, eight months. Couldn't bake nothing, couldn't do nothing.

Clara had ended up withholding rent due to the failure of their landlord to replace broken appliances. She said,

Very, very frustrating with that. And like I said, I had to threaten to hold the rent. Because now, okay, now I don't have a stove or refrigerator, and they went within weeks of each other. I had groceries that went bad. They didn't care... And you know, and then we had, like, eat sandwiches and dinner, you know, out, because we didn't have a stove. And finally, I said, I'm not giving you the rent until I have a new stove.

Even when they did get new appliances, they were the cheapest ones. As Mason said, *they're looking to just buy pretty much whatever's on sale to save money... So... it's not gonna be an energy efficient refrigerator... They're not gonna... raise their cost to save you money. That's a simple fact.*

Winstone said,

You know, because if you have an old washer and dryer that's using a lot more energy than newer dryers and washer... It might cost more in the long run, I mean, in the beginning to pay for some, but in the long run again, you're gonna be saving money, and it's gonna last you long. Same with refrigerators, stoves, any appliances, get a good thing, if you buy good stuff, it's better for you.

Some tenants said that by themselves, they lacked the power to get their landlords to respond. Two people who had Section-8 said that they resorted to complaining to the Housing Authority in order to get even a minimal response from their landlords. Kendra said, *the only way I get results from her is I have to threaten her with calling my [Section-8] case manager. And then that like that really lights a fire up under her behind.* But most tenants had no-one to go to for help. Some also explained that they were afraid to complain, for fear that the landlord might raise the rent, or threaten to evict them. For example, Bailey had asked her landlord about having the home weatherized, but he never got back to her. When asked if she had followed up, she said,

He never got back to me... You know I try not to... sometimes you can't talk to landlords and push them about their property, because then they'll be next day... trying to send you an eviction notice. So, you know, I don't want to be... I don't want me or my niece or her daughter to be in the street, you know, so I just don't say too much at all.

Talia was interested in asking her landlord to take steps to make the apartment more energy efficient, but was afraid of upsetting him—*I would love for, you know, to do that. But you know, I don't want to get on the wrong page with my landlord.*

Willow was lucky enough to be in an apartment with very reasonable rent and was afraid that if

they asked for any improvements, their rent would be increased. She said, *our rent is pre-pandemic prices; they haven't raised our rent since 2019. And so we try to stay as quiet as possible to our landlords.*

Willow was also hoping to have their gas stove changed out for an electric stove, but was afraid of the consequences,

We have a gas stove. Gas stoves are shown to be really bad for your health. They're as bad as having like secondhand smoking within a house, especially for children. And we're looking to have children soon. So we'd love to like, get our gas stove out and get an electric stove. But as I mentioned, we're not trying to cause any ruckus with our landlords because they haven't raised our rent.

Riley, who had complained multiple times to her landlord about feces in her basement without any effective response, had largely given up trying. She was afraid that she may become angry and cause a problem. As she said, *I don't want to create a problem. I don't want the problem to be bigger because I know I can be disrespectful.* One tenant spoke favorably of their landlord regarding their home's energy efficiency. Kevin, a 57-year-old African American man from the Hill neighborhood, said, *the good thing with my landlord is that he will come... personally with me once or twice a month. He says, 'is there anything you need? How's the heat? Kevin also said, it's very well-insulated... My landlord just bought a new furnace this year also... I've got no problem with the windows leaking. I mean, escaping heat.*

3.3 Mixed Experiences with Energy Efficiency Programs

3.3.1 Experiences with and barriers to use of Energy Efficiency programs

About half of those we spoke to had heard about energy efficiency programs, and twelve had energy efficiency upgrades since living in their homes. Quinn said,

I know about energy efficiency because I've done it before, like years ago in the past... you'll have someone come in, and you know, like, basically weatherize your windows and your cracks underneath your doors and your windows and making sure like, they use like these little plastic films that they use on your window to keep the heat and the cool air in too.

James said something similar—

So, to the best of my knowledge, the energy efficient programs are based on... if I'm correct ...to insulate your... windows? You know, put the sealings around the windows or... seal around the door, you know, so that in the winter, you don't lose the heat. The heat doesn't constantly escape drastically.

Jonathan said, *they did all that there [in his previous apartment]. They even changed the – that's how I found out about the faucet heads. I said, 'They even got energy sufficient water faucet heads.' Wow. That was cool. When I moved, I don't have that.* Some felt that outreach could be better. Talia felt there should be more public information about what was available. She said,

I just wish there was more, you know, flyers or more communication on stuff like that, to also notify people to let people know, like me, I'm on Section Eight, that, you know, can I go and get this done? You know, have, you know, have them to come to my apartment and weatherize the house? Let me know what's what.

Some tenants told us that it is not easy to apply for the programs. Samara was under the impression that she had to apply online, which frustrated her (this was not correct— it is possible to call the Home

Energy Solutions program and have a form sent to your home). She said,

It's just a hassle, you know, even doing things like that online... You know, everybody doesn't know how to work a computer system or how to do, you know, an online. And that can be a hassle all by itself... I'm the type of person that I like to be face-to-face. Direct. So you know, there's no misunderstanding.

Devin said something similar — *they give you alternatives to get on the computer and type in www dot such and such and stuff like that, they don't give you a direct number to call.* Some tenants told us that after completing the application, they did not hear back, they had scheduling problems, there were health and safety barriers, or only minimal work was done. Raven said, *I did sign up one year to Community Action for weatherization, but never heard anything from them... They did come, you know, gave me plastic and stuff. But that was only the one time, other than that. That wasn't helpful at all.*

Natalie had applied but said that there was no follow-up.

Yeah, like every year, I sign up for the energy, and then they have what they call weatherization where you check off, but nobody never follows up with that. That's the problem. And then there's something that came in the mail that said, we can make your home efficient and then I had to fill it out, and then the landlord had to fill it out. When we both filled it out, and nothing happened. So, no follow-up. Then I called the person and said, Okay, we're gonna get somebody. They came. And stuff was half done. Somebody was supposed to come back. They never came back.

Patricia said that they had not been able to complete the work due to scheduling problems —

Coordinating times that I would be home for it and all that stuff... It's a three-family house, though we all got to be, you know, someone's coming into your house, you gotta be there and stuff like that.

Kendra said that they were not able to complete the upgrades due to health and safety barriers,

They said that because mold is transferred through the air... They are afraid to seal up the apartment, and you know, and fear that we might get sick from inhaling the mold and stuff like that, you know, and they are, they are legally bound not to winterize, weatherize whatever you want to call it any house that has any type of mold in it ...I said... I don't care about the mold, I said please. I said my gas bill is super high.

Finally, our focus groups with Spanish language speakers revealed a gap in knowledge about energy efficiency among the Spanish-speaking population in New Haven and a lack of outreach in Spanish regarding energy efficiency programs.

3.3.2 Landlord interest in energy efficiency upgrades

A few tenants said that their landlords had been willing to sign up for Energy Efficiency programs, or that they thought they would be willing if they asked. Natalie had spent time convincing her landlord to sign the form, reassuring him that he would not have to pay anything —

It's really important to let them understand what it's all about, and that it's not going to cost them anything. And then they won't have a problem signing off. That's what I had to do. He was like, at first, he was a little skeptical.

Patricia said that her landlord, who lived in the building, was interested, but had been ill, which meant nothing had been done,

My landlord was looking into new windows, which would help but that hasn't happened yet... this house is over 100 years old. So, windows. So, I guess he was looking into some kind of program himself because he's not rolling in dough. But unfortunately, he's in the hospital right now. So, he had to postpone whatever so. It hasn't happened yet.

Samara said,

I don't think he would have a problem at all. Most landlords own so many properties like it just takes time to get to everyone. And you know, like I said, that's why they have these programs that said that they will help out. But never do. I don't see why any landlord would have a problem with it. It's helping them as well as their tenant.

Diana said her landlord had talked about installing solar panels — *Now I had very good news. My landlord said they were interested in putting solar panels in, in the house.* But, when we asked whether she would be willing to ask her landlord about energy efficiency, she said,

I'll tell you the truth. My landlord has not raised my rent in eight years. And she said she was not going to raise it again. She was not going to raise my rent. And they're talking about putting solar panels in. So, I'm not one to, you know, I'd have to think it over.

Other tenants said it is difficult or impossible to get landlords to sign up for Energy Efficiency programs. Madison said, *I just want to be warm, and not be cold... I reached out to them several times about how bad the windows were and not getting a response. So, at this point, I really don't care what he feels, you know? Yeah.*

Riley was frustrated that landlord approval was needed, saying that in the past they could get upgrades without that approval —

[In the past], I was just able to sign up, and that was easy. But, like the last couple of years, they've been wanting you to get approval from the landlord... So, I just don't bother. It's just too much when I was able to do it without having to go get approval from them, and all of that I've done it. But with the approval now, I just don't even bother. I throw it out.

In the past, when upgrades had been done, Riley had noticed the difference,

It did help, you know... I saw the difference in the light bill... I saw a big difference in the air coming in and everything. You know, because they sealed everything... But like I said, to go through the landlord, and well, I'm dealing with a management company and... for me is, it's too much.

Others didn't see any point in trying. Devin said, *I don't know if they'll be supportive... because they don't really fix anything.* Brooke said, *They ain't no good. They bullies... They don't even live here. They just rent the apartments out in the area.*

Some tenants said that the biggest barrier to landlord approval was if they had to pay anything. Elena said,

We get letters or something with utility bills like for the weatherization, you know... But then... your landlord will have to, you know, sign up and he's not going to sign up for that, you

know? I know he's not going to do it. He doesn't fix your building. So he's not gonna, you know, pay for this.

Danielle said, *As long as he don't have to pay. He fine with it.* Laura said, *I don't know if he will, he probably would if as long as there's no cost....* Raven said, *I bet he would be supportive if he doesn't have anything he has to do.*

Jonathan, whose apartment complex had been owned by three different landlords in four years, said,

I guess whoever owns the complex makes the decision overall, but I don't even think these people have enough time to get to that. We had some people who owned it originally from day one... who was just, was stuck in their ways, and they was old... and they was like, 'These are the windows.' You know how that go. Then the second people came. I'm quite sure they had plans to do that type of stuff, but I don't think they realized how much it would cost to redo everything. So, they got rid of the complex, and now somebody new own it. Hopefully, they can do something. I don't know.

Jonathan wondered whether the size of the apartment complex might discourage the landlord from making upgrades –

I think [Energy Efficiency programs] are more for... like a single apartment, not a complex 'cause I have a lot of neighbors... there. It's a long complex, like that. So, I don't know... I think if they did that they would have to do it to 600 more houses, 500, something like that... So, I think he'll just avoid it at all costs. I'm sure of that... After this much time, you learn people. People show you who they are. He's not really doing too much. The best thing you can do if you wanna do energy sufficiency out there is move out to where there's energy sufficient. That's the best you're gonna get.

3.4 Possibilities for Collective Action

We asked the tenants to whom we spoke whether they saw any value in acting collectively with other tenants to advocate for energy efficiency upgrades in their homes. Many saw the potential value of this, and some were interested taking action. Many, however, even those who saw its potential value, were hesitant. Some said they, and other tenants, do not want to risk upsetting their landlords. Others said that they are too busy, or don't know their neighbors well enough to feel comfortable speaking with them about the issue. They also said that people aren't hopeful that they can make a difference even if they do get together. Some said they didn't have enough information in terms of what to advocate for, or what the goals of the collective action should be.

3.4.1 Tenants are interested in collective action and other forms of advocacy.

Most tenants see the value in and power of collective action and knowing their rights. Talia mentioned that when she was complaining about the lack of heat in her apartment, it would have helped if other residents of the building had complained at the same time. She said,

I can't just do it all by myself because they look at me like, oh, why are you complaining nobody else complaining and (inaudible) the same thing. And the reason why I said that too, because when my aunt's heat went out downstairs, the maintenance guy said 'Well, nobody else call and complain about the heat went out but you so it must be in your apartment.'

Raven had tried to work with her neighbors in the past, and while they had not been successful, she had seen the value of collective action—*It was multiple people. It was the three of us... and two girls on the second or third floor. And we all were in a group chat. Like I said, he's just unsuccessful on doing anything.* Christopher shared a positive collective action experience in a building he had lived in, in the past, when he and his neighbors in his building approached their landlord about not having access to regulating the heat in their homes. He explains,

We can't turn the thermostat on. He had to come and turn it on. He had it in a room that was locked to turn the thermostat on. Now, it's freezing. We gotta wait for him to come to turn the thermostat up. We had to wait three days. And then after that, we figured it out, how the thermostat would never be locked no more.

When asked to explain the steps of the solution, Christopher states,

We approach them together. All of us. So that's... that's basically the only way to get things done. See, one individually ain't gonna do it. So more of us, you know, like, we even threatened the rent. It's not just me threatening rent. It was all of us. So therefore, you not going to do this, you're gonna miss all this rent. Not just one person. You missing five peoples' rent. That's a lot of money... We wasn't nasty or nothing, but you know, it was a group thing. So, it worked out. Then we all got along at the end, but the thing is, we had to stay together to do it, or else it wouldn't get done.

Natalie also talked about bringing her neighbors together—

I would probably want to see how many people are aware of Home Solutions [the local energy efficiency program], and have they ever put an application for it. And if not, then maybe we should, you know, get together. Let's do this and see how this works. Work as a team, like did anybody get any response or how to discipline. You know, this way. We're all aboard. There's more than one person that's on board that we can get this done because, like they say, squeaky wheel gets things done, right.

Other tenants expressed their interest in tenant unions. When asked if collective action would be a good approach to addressing energy inefficient homes, Willow said,

Yeah, I think that tenant unions... collective action with tenants is a great way to practice like democracy basically, right? There's only so many things to say actually here in Connecticut that we get to vote on, we don't vote on policies, we vote on people getting into office. And so having, like, a tenant union is a way to participate in that political action and get our voices heard, especially since we don't have the same level of like political power as homeowners do.

While tenants spoke of the competing priorities that could make it challenging for tenants to participate in collective action (see more on barriers below), they shared their desire to share information with their family, friends, and neighbors. Winstone said,

If there's anything that you need me to do as far as the survey, even if it's not money involved, but I'm available... I'm wanting to learn more. I wish I'd done this a long time ago because I've helped a lot of people, definitely along the road, because, you know, I learned, so I like passing it on. I always leave a trail.

Other tenants spoke about other ways to get involved in advocacy. Jonathan expressed the power of giving testimony by stating,

We [legislators and tenants] come from two different worlds if I can't afford what you afford and just be able to fix what you can fix. Two different things. So that's a good thing with testimony. It gives people insight on things they don't get to see.

Another tenant, Quinn, described the value of giving testimony to ensure each tenant has a voice at the table,

More so, I'm not more of the protest type. I'm more of like a testimonial type of person. That's something I feel like that they should put out there. And to, you know, to have more people be more engaged in and participate in. Just so that their voices can be heard. And we don't have to speak amongst each other, you know, with family members, coworkers. I feel like they need to, they need to put more... I don't want to call it activities. More programs, where you can go to your state legislator, and or speak to your house rep. Just to let them know how you feel. I think there, there needs to be more of an outlet of that.

Tessa explained that she believed the law needed to change to ensure that tenants were able to live in energy efficient homes. Expressing the belief that landlords should be mandated to keep rental units up to date and energy efficient, she said,

In my opinion, it should be, you know, part of our law, if you will, you know, because if we need a license to drive, you know, you got to keep up with it, you should do the same. You know, what I mean, with your home, or the home that you're establishing, you know, for somebody else.

3.4.2 Tenants described significant barriers to collective action.

Some tenants said that they would be interested in talking with their neighbors, but felt they lacked the necessary knowledge and information to start talking to others. When asked about the value of working with other tenants, Jillian said, *it's frustrating. Because you don't know what to say or what to do... Because I don't have much information. I don't have much information to give.*

Clara talks about the challenges of getting people to listen, *I mean, getting the people to listen. You know what I mean? Like, maybe I'm not, I don't know, maybe I'm not aggressive enough... But you know, maybe I don't have all the information like what they want to know.*

A lack of knowledge about shared landlords makes it difficult to work together. Raven said that she would be interested in organizing with other tenants, *if I knew them, yeah. If I knew... I'm not sure what buildings he owns, you know?*

Many tenants explained that they avoid participating in collective action out of fear that they will make waves or upset their landlords, given their power to evict tenants or raise rents. Ethan talked about a time they attempted to hold a meeting with other tenants in their building, saying, *I try to get people together to have like a general meeting. And they think, oh, no, we don't want to get him, the landlord, mad.*

Elena said that she tries not to complain to her neighbors too often,

Because you don't know, somebody might go back to the office and say, oh, you guys ask your questions. You know what I mean? Some people are like, you know, yeah, scary. So, that will make it hard for me because my landlord might raise up my rent for talking too much.

Elena also suggests that because people are afraid to speak out, they are unaware that other tenants have similar concerns,

Well, it seems like people are afraid. I want them to work with me. The more people is better. But they always tell me, I'm the only one that's complaining in this whole building. I said, that's not true. But I didn't tell him that I been seeing all the neighbors, you know? That I've been talking with them, you know? Because they're afraid.

Some tenants said they are too busy to get involved in collective action; they don't show up when meetings are held with other people living in their buildings. Talia said,

I really don't know. I will hope that we all can get together... but when I do have meetings... no one really shows up for the meetings... I said to you know, couple of tenants, you want things change, but you gotta come to the meetings when they have them to address the topics that's you know, that you have concern on, but no one shows up really. So, to answer your question on that one... if I went and talked to the tenants, some might, some won't. I just, I don't know.

Some spoke of the barriers elderly tenants face in accessing information. Jade said,

I could share the knowledge with them, but half of them are, you know, a little older, disabled, and things like that. So, I'll probably have to take, you know, to their caregivers at the time or, you know, just put something in a community room in regards to that.

Quinn understands the importance of spreading information saying,

I feel like, it will be helpful and vital for people to do that. Because you have elderly people that don't know how to navigate and use their cell phones, when they're stuck in a house or their only time that they're able to go out is to, you know, a family member or a MyRide that they have set up through Medicare and Medicaid, just to go to appointments. So, they may not know nothing about these programs. So, this is something that and you know, elderly people, they have a newspaper, they watch the news all the time. So, I feel like this is something that should... It will be a great idea for them to do. Just so that they will be able to see it and hear it.

Some tenants explained that they are not connected with their neighbors. Some said that their neighbors tend to stick to themselves for various reasons. Riley discussed her experience where unfamiliarity with her neighbors led her to avoid speaking to them as the safety of her children comes first. She explains,

The people upstairs, they don't like me. And I say that to say one night when we first moved in, they knocked on the door, I don't know them. I was living here with my young children. And I don't support what nobody else got going on that to me, my number one is the safety of my children, and then the safety of me. I didn't open the door.

Devin states that while he is cordial with his neighbors, he rarely speaks about issues such as energy efficiency,

Well, me and my neighbors, we pretty much are alright. But you know, they do they thing, I do my owns, I'm a single individual in my building. Sometimes, I may knock on the door and offer them some food or whatever, you know, just to try to break the ice on a lot of things. Other than that, we all mind our business, I mind my business.

He continued, ... *Because I done tried it before, and everybody's kind of independent on their own movement.*

Winstone showed hesitation in approaching others in their building,

Well, sometimes too, some people can live in a building with you or a housing place or and you might live there three, four years and don't even know their name... Never even know your name. And now we're gonna get together to get an issue taken care of, you know the more, there's power in numbers, and I'm gonna come to you well, you know, you never speak to me before, and now you need my help?

Some people have little hope that change will happen through collective action and pin their hopes on moving to a new place. They said that they have been discouraged by previous attempts or a belief that nothing will ever change in their situation. Natalie mentions, *and like I said, people not even thinking about it. They're like... it's been like this, and nobody done anything. So, they feel like, they give up. They don't think to do anything.*

Christopher said that things had changed over time. He grew up watching his community solve issues together but says that is less common now –

See, when I was younger, there was unity in the community. Each one, teach one, and all that. Now, it don't seem like that. You gotta go through a struggle just to get one little point through, today. But back in the day, like you said, like our parents, they all was like, together. For the better, for us kids. And it worked. No violence, but they stood their ground. And they spoke to the head of people who can fix things. But now, it's like, they've pushed us to the side, ignore what we got to say, and don't care and just do that. It's like, nobody cares.

When asked about what might be holding them back from participating, Jade says, *I'm just, you know, trying to save my money so I could, you know, find somewhere else... I just kind of over it now at this point.*

4. Landlord Perspectives

It is important to acknowledge that while many tenants told us about their landlords' lack of support for energy efficiency, some landlords are genuinely interested in pursuing energy efficiency programs. However, even when landlords are interested, they still encounter challenges, which include difficulties in coordinating appointments with their tenants and the programs, managing the initial financial costs, and navigating the available program resources. In this section, we share the perspectives of four landlords based in New Haven and their personal experiences with state energy efficiency programs. All these landlords owned no more than three units, and were either owner-occupiers, or lived very close to the buildings that they rented out. This is not typical of New Haven landlords.

Doug had recently purchased a home and became a property owner and landlord; he is an owner-occupier, living in one unit of the house and renting out the second unit. This is the only unit that he rents out. For Doug, buying a home was more of a long-term investment in his family and community than an effort to make a quick profit. He is also committed to making the building as energy efficient as possible. During the interview, he stressed that he sees himself as different from large corporate landlords; he said that, unlike those landlords, his goal was to ensure that the house ran smoothly. As he lives in the building, keeping it well-maintained affects him personally. When Doug first purchased the home, he realized the electrical system was in poor condition; it was the first problem he addressed. otherwise the house appeared well-kept, and the appliances were in good condition, though Doug was unsure of how energy efficient they were. Doug had recently learned about energy efficiency programs, specifically, I Heart My Home, and was interested in applying. However, he said that before applying, he would have to consider his family, their expenses, and their budget. He anticipated that the most sig-

nificant barrier would be appointment coordination between the tenant, the program, and his schedule. Doug also expected that finances would be another main barrier to participating in the program. Still, he is willing to take out a loan or use his savings to make the home energy efficient, given the eventual payoff. Becoming a property owner was challenging for Doug, but ultimately, he believes it is all worth it because he invests in relationships with tenants and the neighborhood.

Brianna rents out a 3-unit house close to her own home. She describes her investment as a not-for-profit. After performing energy upgrades on her own home, Brianna, well-versed in environmental and energy efficiency topics, decided to upgrade her rental property and signed up for the Neighborhood Housing Services of New Haven's I Heart My Home program. She received guidance and support about where to apply, how, and what to do if unsure. Brianna stated that navigating these resources without help can be overwhelming. She said, *even though all those materials are out there on the web. Yes, it's a black hole, or a green hole.*

She said that she had an excellent experience working with I Heart My Home, and wished it would be available to more landlords. When discussing energy efficiency programs, Brianna spoke about the free energy audit from Home Energy Solutions, which guided what upgrades benefit her the most. She also discussed referrals for windowpanes at a lower cost with income-eligible tenants and solar panels. Even with help from I Heart My Home, engaging with some resources was difficult. For example, Brianna said she received a referral for a solar company, but their staffing changes made working with them challenging. She stressed that she would have disengaged if this had been her first experience interacting with solar companies and she didn't have I Heart My Home to guide her. Brianna said that landlords like herself may be more motivated to pursue upgrades if they can simultaneously address multiple issues, such as replacing single-pane windows when windows are already worn down and have lead paint issues. Brianna also said landlords should know that if you have income-eligible tenants, then it can reduce the price of upgrades. She recommended that the state offer an incentive of \$50 incentive or something to tenants to apply on behalf of the landlord. She shared how she encouraged her tenants to be engaged by retroactively passing the saving from energy efficiency upgrades to them because *it would be a shame if they didn't even benefit*, after going through the hassle and invasiveness of having the energy efficiency upgrades. Brianna's interest in the environmental benefits of energy efficiency and the financial support available from state-funded programs and their timeframes motivated her to continue the process. Like others, she recommended more advertising and incentives for landlords and tenants, especially with energy efficiency technology continually changing.

Diane lives in one unit of a 2-family home that she owns and rents out the other. She has her own personal experience of utility disconnections. When she started running her daycare center from her home, keeping the heat on during the winter left her owing around \$1000 monthly. Through her experience with high-cost utilities, Diane learned about energy assistance programs. She became familiar with budget billing and matching grant programs. She came across energy efficiency programs online when she was looking for ways to save money on her utility bills. Since Diane resides in the same building as her tenant and they share the energy bills, she is personally motivated by the savings on utilities. She had used the programs several times because, as she put it, *every little bit helps*. Though Diane said it was *'simple and quick'* to go through the energy efficiency programs, she said the primary barrier was a lack of effective marketing. She recommended, *they could advertise, let people know. Because they really need it most. A lot of people, really most people, need it.* She now attempts to pass the word about these programs to other homeowners she knows, who often have never heard of them. Another barrier that Diane

identified is the disconnect between tenants and these programs. She understands it is challenging for landlords who don't live in the same building as tenants to request these programs themselves since the problems and their solutions do not directly impact them. Especially when benefits for the tenant are not immediate, and they cannot take retrofits and upgrades with them when they move. Diane reiterated that bills are simply too high, both for tenants and for small owner-occupier landlords like herself.

Scott, from the Newhallville neighborhood, rents out a three-unit house; he does not live in the house himself. This is the only property he owns other than the home he lives in himself. Scott is personally committed to addressing climate change and is working with his tenants to make the home more energy efficient. The house has a mixture of gas and electric appliances throughout the building, but he is working to replace most with energy-saving substitutes. Scott is familiar with and engaged with energy efficiency programs. He said he likes participating in these programs because they are *good for the house, good for the tenants*. Despite his good intentions to participate in these programs, his willingness to keep engaging has lessened. About a year prior, Scott applied to participate in an energy efficiency program that replaced single-pane windows; however, while they measured his windows to prepare for the replacement, they then told him that the program had run out of funds so the work could not continue. Scott was encouraged to apply again for the new program cycle; however, after applying, he was informed that the incentive had decreased, so his co-pay would be double what he anticipated. Scott understands the value of the programs, like when they replaced the water heaters and insulated his home for free, but he was not willing or able to commit the level of financial resources required. Another barrier that Scott identified was his communication with the programs and between the program and those completing the work. Getting the support required active engagement on his part, including many follow-ups and unanswered calls. Overall, Scott wanted the process to be more straightforward, specifically the access to funds. He said, *the availability of financing or other incentives to help make it much more straightforward for those landlords, I think, is important*. These funds, he believes, need to be increased. Finally, Scott suggested that there be more intentional coordination between tenants and landlords, such as disseminating information to those who may not know about the programs or are uninterested, to increase overall participation.

5. Activists Perspectives

We also interviewed seven activists with interest and experience in organizing around tenant energy justice, housing justice, and legal justice for low-income tenants. As described above, numerous barriers prevent tenants from engaging in collective action; lack of information, bandwidth, fear of landlord retaliation, not knowing their neighbors, and lack of faith that anything can change. The activists suggested ways to overcome some of these barriers.

5.1 Getting people involved, making it easy and relevant, and taking small steps.

Activists suggested ways to bring tenants together, acknowledging the many real barriers they face. They emphasized that coming together should be easy and enjoyable as well as useful and emphasized the community aspect, such as through providing food. Tania, an activist based in Hartford, works on energy and other justice issues in her community. She explained that she puts a lot of effort into getting people involved from the start. She said,

So [I] started to reel them (potential participants) in with like food, of course, that always helps, and then teaching them Zoom... it's a lot of invisible labor and training to get folks engaged in a level that you need to be depending on the information that you're trying to give them

though...

Mia, an organizer working on housing issues throughout Connecticut, said,

Making it a community event and then making the education component kind of secondary and a little smaller, I think, is important, right? Because I'm sorry, no one wants to spend their Saturday going to some presentation about something.

Betty, who has expertise in utility issues and works on energy justice, explained that it is essential to offer support that addresses immediate needs, such as helping to pay bills and prevent disconnection. Betty had been busy trying to make sure that people knew about the pending changes in utility protections –

Many of those clients, customers, have, just like they didn't pay their rent during COVID, they didn't pay for lights and heats. So, one having huge bills, terrified about confronting it, not understanding what's going on. The utility company is not properly communicating. It's going to be horrible. And that protection goes away May 1st.

She said that many tenants focus on these immediate concerns, possibly diverting attention away from organizing/advocacy efforts around energy efficiency. Mia also emphasized prioritizing people's basic needs and providing relevant support, which will make people more likely to engage long-term. She said,

The big thing that we focus on is lowering utility rates because that's something that affects people's daily life. That affects their bottom line, how much money they have to spend on their families, and stuff like that. [...] So I think it's important to keep first and foremost the human aspect of it.

Patrick, a housing justice organizer, stressed that tenants must lead in defining their immediate problems. He said,

So, I think being very receptive to listening, because often also, with research and stuff I find and also again with working within the legal framework every day, what you think works on paper is not the reality in real life.

He said he always begins by asking tenants, *So, what's been going on?* In Patrick's experience and other participants, grounding the organizing and advocacy agenda in tenant voices is critical to engagement and ensuring efforts accurately support tenants' needs.

Relatedly, activists spoke about the need to be patient, and to have tangible and achievable short- and medium-term goals, taking small steps to create the building blocks for larger actions. Kamila, a housing justice organizer, explained that people need to see tangible progress before they will be willing to show up regularly. She said,

Weekly tenant union meetings have been a site where even folks who are very much embedded in the work and want to do something about it can't necessarily show up every week, especially not if it's amorphous as to what showing up will accomplish and what they will accomplish after showing up.

Similarly, Patrick described the snowball impact of small organizing actions. He said,

So, it starts with one person, and then it's two people, and then it's three people, and then maybe

it's a whole building, and then it's the next building. But if you don't have the building blocks of activated tenants, it doesn't really work. It's not a top-down process.

Activists also said how important it is to share information in a way that is digestible and makes sense to people. Tania suggested using hybrid event options, live streaming, and taking advantage of social media to share information. Mia emphasized keeping results and information sharing concise. Betty described how her work involves making information from utility companies easy to digest for clients. She stated,

I spend a lot of my time rewriting notices from the utility companies that supposedly explain these programs, [...] The flyers that I distribute are very basic because I want clients to understand what they say. Call. Tell them, you're eligible for winter protection. You should be on a \$50 a month payment plan.

Patrick acknowledged that many people simply don't think it's worth getting involved as they don't believe things can change. As well as making it fun and easy to show up, he suggested sharing examples where collective action around energy efficiency has been successful— *I always find that when you're talking to individual people, you're talking to tenants, it's really helpful to say what's possible and point at alternatives and successes.*

5.2 Identifying and addressing broader, intersectional challenges.

All the activists we spoke to said that it is important to recognize that the problems that tenants are facing around energy efficiency are linked to the broader housing and economic system, in which landlords hold considerable power, vis-a-vis tenants. Mia said,

Landlords have a lot of power. There's a lot of landlords in office and not a lot of systems holding them accountable. [...] We could convince all the tenants, yes, you need this energy efficiency, this is why it's good for you, whatever. At the end of the day, the landlord owns that property.

Kamila said,

Almost half the country rent their homes, and that number is increasing [...] This is a conversation that needs to be had and one that I think can't be had without acknowledging that it is uncomfortable.

Patrick said,

Often, people are facing harassment from the landlord. Often people are facing retaliation for organizing. That's a big thing that we organize around, which is illegal, but harassment and retaliation is something that's pretty difficult to prove because it can be super nebulous.

Betty summed up the difficulties of bringing about change in a context where tenants have so little power,

[They] don't have control over energy of where they live. They don't have control over their heating systems, they don't have control over multifamily properties with old equipment. So they just know they want to keep their children or their sick family members warm.

Patrick sees some nuance when it comes to landlord-tenant power. He said, *There are real-life small landlords who cannot afford to do certain things and who are actually also being screwed over by corporate landlords.* For Patrick, the smaller landlords who do not have the same economic resources as the corporate

landlords are unable to compete in the housing market. For Patrick, small landlords are essential stakeholders in the housing market and energy efficiency organizing/advocacy efforts. Some activists also emphasized that it is important to acknowledge that the power of landlords emerges from the broader economic system, including the commodification of housing and energy. Kamila said,

I see the commodification of housing as this key site where the commodification of human life itself intersects with people's real immediate, tangible needs and the tangible conditions that they're facing in the day-to-day.

Kamila suggests that we should not rely on the private sector to provide housing because it is a basic human need. She implies that it is because of its privatization that there is such a scarcity of affordable and safe housing options. In the specific context of New Haven, Kamila mentioned the complicated relationship between Yale University and the surrounding New Haven community. She explained how Yale subsidizes housing for anyone affiliated with the university. In contrast, other New Haven communities pay rising prices for poor housing options because of the university's role in the housing market. Betty also discussed how the commodification of energy leaves tenants struggling to afford their bills and leaves them indebted to utility companies. She suggested that given their emphasis on making a profit from energy, utility companies have no incentive to share information about options that customers have to reduce their energy costs or consumption. She said,

[Utility] companies don't even tell people what they need to know about not getting shut off or how to maintain service without paying their entire arrearage. [...] you cannot get [a] discount rate, or that higher discount rate, if your energy usage is over a certain amount.

Given that organizing and making change related to energy efficiency is related to the broader housing and economic system, activists told us that organizing for energy efficiency must be done in an intersectional way, alongside anti-racist and housing justice activism. This requires collaboration between different groups. Tania shared how her organizing work brings together energy justice, housing justice, and the Black Lives Matter movement. She said,

So, we've always been doing BLM organizing. So, I think it was just a non-issue, when I think a community member who was a BLM member started to complain about slumlords, and then we started to advocate to have meetings, and I think Connecticut Fair Housing was a part of it. So, then we got roped into that right to counseling language with DSA and everyone else.

Other activists described ways to discuss these intersections with tenants. Kamila used the example of tree planting to describe how conversations can open the discussion to more significant systemic problems. She said,

Having regular meetings to talk about why it's important to plant trees about the fact that red line neighborhoods are five degrees hotter on average year-round because of the lack of greenery. How that is a tangible impact of systemic racism and class violence and class struggle and how a way to push back against that actionably is to plant these trees and talk about them.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

We heard from low-income tenants in New Haven that it is a daily struggle to afford energy bills, especially in the face of rising rents and energy costs. While Energy Assistance programs are a lifeline, they are often inadequate to meet the need. Tenants know that one reason their bills are so high is because their homes are not energy efficient. They do what they can to reduce energy consumption and make their living spaces energy efficient, but there's not much they can do when buildings are poorly maintained, with leaky windows and inadequate insulation, and appliances and heating systems are old and inefficient. Too many people live in conditions that are uncomfortable – even dangerously – hot or cold.

Many tenants have heard of energy efficiency programs, and some have used them. Some had good experiences, some less so; the most common complaints were lack of follow-up, scheduling difficulties, and the inability of the contractors to install the energy efficiency upgrades due to health and safety barriers (mold, etc.). Many tenants said that they don't believe their landlords would be interested in signing up for energy efficiency programs; others said their landlords may be interested, but only if there is no financial cost to them.

Only landlords, as property owners, can make the significant energy efficiency upgrades that so many buildings need. Some landlords are committed to providing safe, healthy, and energy efficient living conditions for their tenants, and are doing what they can to make that happen, navigating the different programs and making the necessary financial investments as they are able. But currently, too many landlords do not conduct even basic repairs in a timely fashion, let alone invest in essential upgrades to housing conditions and energy efficiency. Many tenants keep quiet about these problems fearing that their landlord may increase the rent or evict them if they complain too much; even those who complain often give up when nothing changes, and simply put up with the situation, or try to find a new place.

Until tenants have more power vis a vis their landlords, we are unlikely to move the needle on energy efficiency in low-income rental housing. More power comes through collective action. The tenants we spoke with are interested in collective action and other forms of advocacy, including giving testimony, but say that they need help with that. They want to know more about energy efficiency to be able to share information with their neighbors, and they need to know which tenants share the same landlord so that they can organize effectively. People are busy with their lives, making ends meet, and taking care of their families, so they need quick and easy ways to get involved. They also need immediate assistance with their rent and energy costs so that they don't have to worry so much about those things; worrying about basic needs gets in the way of getting to know neighbors, coming to meetings, and engaging in collective action.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research and three community feedback meetings with Community Advisory Board (CAB) members, community members, and participating tenants, landlords, and activists, we conclude with the following recommendations, focused on steps that low-income tenants and their allies can take to ensure that more people live in energy efficient, affordable housing.

1. Prioritize energy affordability. It may be hard for people to think about energy efficiency upgrades if they are unable to afford their utility bills. Know where you can find information in both English and Spanish (and other languages) about energy affordability so you can share with others.
 - a. Find information about energy assistance at the [Connecticut Energy Assistance Program \(CEAP\)](#). Operation Fuel aids with utility bill payments; [apply here](#).
 - b. Find out more about [affordable utility payment programs](#) and [how to avoid termination of service](#). Contact Bonnie Roswig at the Center for Children's Advocacy for more information – broswig@cca-ct.org or 860-566-0836.
 - c. Educate yourself about energy affordability. See research reports from Operation Fuel [here](#), including maps showing state energy affordability variability [here](#).
 - d. Operation Fuel provides information about [how to get involved in advocacy for energy affordability](#), including recommendations for rental units.
 - e. If you have a complaint about a utility, you can complain to PURA [here](#), or email pura.information@ct.gov, toll Free Number: 1-800-382-4586.
2. Know where you can find information in both English and Spanish (and other languages) about energy efficiency so you can share with others.
 - a. CT energy efficiency programs are the [Weatherization Assistance Program \(WAP\)](#) and Energize CT's [Home Energy Solutions-Income Eligible \(HES-IE\)](#) program.
 - b. Connecticut's [I Heart My Home](#) program can help you to navigate the different energy efficiency programs.
 - c. The [TEA website](#) summarizes what we learned about barriers to energy efficiency. Tell us if you need briefs about specific issues – we can help!
3. Build relationships with and work alongside housing justice groups including tenant unions, ensuring that all resources are provided in both English and Spanish (at least).
 - a. Support efforts to build tenant power so that tenants are not afraid to make a complaint to/about their landlords:
 - i. Work with tenant unions in Connecticut – visit [CT Tenants Union](#).
 - ii. Find out and publicize information about landlords of different properties so that tenants can easily find other tenants with the same landlord.
 - iii. Support efforts to improve tenant rights, including expanding [Good Cause eviction protections](#), and expanding [Fair Rent Commissions](#).
 - b. Help get energy affordability and energy efficiency on the housing justice agenda (resources at the TEA website may be helpful):
 - i. Encourage activists working in housing justice to learn about how energy affordability relates to housing justice; if people can't afford their energy bills it makes it even harder to pay the rent.
 1. Inform housing justice activists about programs that help tenants afford their utility bills – see recommendation #2 above.
 - ii. Educate housing justice activists about how energy efficiency relates to housing justice; buildings that have energy efficiency upgrades are healthier to live in and have lower

utility bills.

1. Inform housing justice activists about energy efficiency programs targeting low-income tenants – see recommendation #2 above.
4. Build relationships with and work alongside climate change activists:
 - a. Get energy efficiency on the climate change activism agenda (resources at the TEA website may be helpful):
 - i. Educate climate change activists about low-income tenants' understanding of and expertise in home energy efficiency.
 1. Inform climate change activists about energy efficiency programs targeting low-income tenants – see recommendation #2 above.
 - ii. Educate climate change activists about the importance of energy affordability when advocating for more energy efficiency; being able to afford energy comes first.
 1. Inform climate change activists about programs that help tenants afford their utility bills – see recommendation #2 above.
5. If organizing meetings about energy efficiency, try to do the following:
 - a. Emphasize community building – meet your neighbors! Provide food!
 - b. Ask people what is most important for them.
 - c. Provide information about energy assistance and energy efficiency programs (see recommendation #2 above.).
 - d. Give examples where collective action has been successful in making change.
 - e. Suggest different ways to get involved including contacting legislators, writing testimony, or testifying at hearings (generally can be done remotely) – provide templates for support for specific bills.
 - f. Ensure that different language groups are welcomed, and interpretation provided.
 - g. The [TEA project](#) can help with materials, templates, and ideas – email annie.harper@yale.edu.

7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix One – Participant Stories

Natalie is a 53-year-old African American woman living in the Hill neighborhood of New Haven. Her current home is not well weatherized, and she cannot keep the rooms warm; snow sometimes even enters the room. This leads to exorbitant heating bills during the winter. To combat this issue, Natalie uses strategies such as stuffing the gaps under her doors and applying plastic over her windows. She has extensive knowledge about energy efficiency programs offered by her utility company and the benefits of receiving these upgrades. Natalie shared that she has a strong rapport with her landlord and worked hard to convince him to support her applications for energy efficiency, explaining the dual benefits and making him feel comfortable with the situation. For the past three years, she has diligently completed paperwork and submitted applications for the Home Energy Solutions program. However, she states that she has never received any response or follow-up regarding her applications. Recalling a previous experience, a couple of years ago, Natalie had anticipated receiving a new refrigerator through this program, only to be informed that there were COVID-related delays that prevented the installation. Three years later, and despite many follow-up calls, Natalie states that she still hasn't received a response. In the interim, she signed up for Operation Fuel's energy assistance program to cope with the rising cost of energy but explains that she encountered similar experiences of non-responsiveness with this program as well - *they have a program at energy where you can sign up for it's called Operational Fuel. So, some families, but a lot of families don't know about this. I just learned about this myself this year, that they can help with your, your light bill. Okay, so you go, and you apply, but now you hear nothing. Again. That's just as bad as the energy efficient program. You give them all the paperwork, and then you don't hear anything. Like, they have to do better with programs like that.* The process of applying for energy efficiency programs involves getting her landlord's signature each time she submits the paperwork, which adds to her frustration. As a result, Natalie made the decision to give up applying to the program, feeling disappointed in the lack of response and support.

Talia is a 49-year-old African American woman living in the Dixwell neighborhood of New Haven. In her current home, the cost of heating is included in her rent, and the system runs on oil. Due to this arrangement, she has not sought out energy assistance from Community Action in the past seven years. Whenever a maintenance issue arises, Talia must reach out to receive maintenance through a management company, as she does not communicate with her landlord directly. However, her full-time work commitments often mean that by the time she gets home, the office is closed, and she has to wait until the following day to make necessary maintenance calls. Unfortunately, the management company is not responsive and often fails to properly address maintenance issues. Talia highlighted an example of their negligence where the management company sent someone to change the oil in her heating tank, but when she returned home from work that day, her apartment smelt strongly of oil. This raised concerns that there may have been an oil spill since her living space was situated directly under the boiler. However, she was not able to contact the management company until the following morning to request a clean-up. When someone from the maintenance department finally came to clean it, they said that maintaining the oil system was becoming increasingly expensive and suggested that the management company replace the entire system and switch from oil to gas. While this may be beneficial for the management company, Talia is afraid that if they make the change, she will be responsible for paying her own heating bills, creating a new financial burden.

Elena is a 63-year-old African American woman residing in an older housing complex in the Dixwell neighborhood of New Haven. She has a section-8 voucher which helps her pay her rent. Her living conditions present several challenges. Gaps along the perimeter of her living room allow not only drafts but also mice to enter her home. The situation in Elena's home has been so unmanageable that she has felt compelled to seek assistance. She

called 211 to complain about the problems and was put in touch with New Haven's Livable City Initiative (LCI), which forced her landlord to address the housing issues she faced. Elena has a deep-rooted sense of community and actively participates in collective action. She demonstrates this commitment by delivering food to her neighbors from local food pantries and volunteering with a local food insecurity advocacy group. When she experiences housing problems, Elena takes it upon herself to knock on the doors of other tenants in her building complex. She asks if they too are experiencing similar issues, aiming to create a sense of solidarity. Elena willingly shares her knowledge and information about energy assistance through Community Action and energy efficiency programs with her neighbors. However, she has observed that most of her neighbors are hesitant when it comes to taking action against their landlord, as they are afraid. Despite these obstacles, Elena said that she will continue engaging her neighbors in conversations about their housing situations and advocating for change, with the firm belief that collective action is essential in bringing about meaningful improvements.

Jonathan, born and raised in New Haven, works as a security guard for the local municipal government. He supports his family of four, including a newborn, with a single income, as his wife stays home with the children. They struggle to pay their energy bills; Jonathan says his gas bill, which covers heat, as the most challenging because the home is very drafty, and keeping his house warm is expensive. Jonathan says he has no choice but to figure out a way if his bills become challenging to pay. He has never accessed energy assistance and would rather not receive support from these services. He feels others are more deserving of financial support than himself, such as the elderly and young renters, especially when funding is limited. Like other low-income tenants in New Haven, Jonathan lives in a multi-unit apartment complex owned by a large management company. In the four years that he has lived there, the complex has changed owners three times. Jonathan believes that although his apartment is in dire need of energy efficiency upgrades, they are unlikely to happen given the constant change in ownership. Jonathan believes that the management would be reluctant to allow his apartment to undergo the upgrades as they would then be under pressure to upgrade the other 500 - 600 units in the complex. Though Jonathan has lived in the complex for four years, he had only ever said hi to his next-door neighbor. Jonathan says that things have changed and that no one knows each other nowadays, unlike when he was growing up. He described the sense of community eroding through the years. Jonathan was unfamiliar with the term advocacy but understood its impact and value. When discussing efficiency upgrades and advocacy, Jonathan understood their importance but struggled to think of the best way to be involved and make change happen.

Christopher, a 57-year-old African American man living in the Newhallville neighborhood, has had experience with successful tenant organizing; he is now advocating for safe living conditions in his new home. Christopher is trying to figure out how to pay the gas bill from his previous rental situation. The landlord of that property had asked Christopher to put the bill in his name even though utilities were part of the rent. Now, Christopher is receiving non-payment notices from the gas company, including \$1,000 in fees. Unsure of what he will do, Christopher is also having problems with his current landlord, who is unresponsive and has repeatedly left him living in unsafe conditions. He has experienced broken stoves and burst water pipes, as well as asbestos exposure for months. Christopher is still waiting for his landlord to address the asbestos problem. Christopher's living situation has been challenging despite contacting the health department for enforcement support. In the past, Christopher worked collectively with his neighbors to make needed changes happen. He recalled an instance where he and his neighbors opted to withhold their rent payments, aiming to gain control over the thermostat rather than continuing with a centralized system run by the landlord. After this success, Christopher believes there is power in numbers and that one person would not make as much of a difference as many tenants advocating for the same issue. However, Christopher understands things have changed; no one wants to be the problem tenant. Tenants are

worried about the consequences of organizing; Christopher understands that appropriate organizing can protect tenants from harsh repercussions from landlords.

Miranda, a 66-year-old woman born in Puerto Rico, primarily speaks Spanish and has lived in her current residence for almost a year. She plans to move because her landlord has not responded to her maintenance requests. In addition, Miranda's monthly utility bills have increased by about \$300- \$500. Miranda believes this is because the landlord has not insulated the basement properly; when she sets the thermostat high, it is still slow to warm the apartment. She shared, *I have to put it [the thermostat] at 80 (degrees Fahrenheit), and it doesn't heat up.* Though the bills are high, Miranda does not want to reduce her energy consumption as she is afraid of being cold. Miranda has not had a good experience with her landlord; whenever she needed maintenance in her home, the landlord would tell her the house was haunted and that no matter what they did, things would not function. Therefore, Miranda feels very resentful toward her landlord. As a result, she does not want to participate in energy efficiency upgrades; she just wants to move out. Miranda said, *they [Community Action Agency] explained it to me, but as I'm telling you, if I start fixing it now as I'm going to move, then he's going to benefit.* Miranda has had such a terrible tenant experience with her landlord, she knows she will leave soon and does not want to go through the hassle of the upgrades when she isn't there in the future, and only the landlord will benefit.

7.2 Appendix Two - Useful Links

- [TEA Project Website](#): The project's database for information and resources are located here, including All briefs summarizing what has been learned about barriers to energy efficiency, help with energy affordability and energy efficiency, and state energy efficiency programs.
- [Utility Guide](#) and [Utility Assistance](#): Information on how to apply as a hardship customer for heat and electricity, affordable utility payment programs, and applying for energy assistance programs.
- [Weatherization Assistance Program \(WAP\)](#): Breakdown of the Weatherization Assistance Program in Connecticut, including eligibility criteria, how to apply, and other options for those who are ineligible.
- [Home Energy Solutions – Income Eligible \(HES-IE\)](#): Information on EnergizeCT's state energy efficiency program, including eligibility criteria and applications.
- [CT Tenants Union](#): Learn about and support tenant unions in Connecticut.
- [Good Cause Eviction Protections](#): Learn more about the efforts from CT Fair Housing to expand good cause eviction protections in Connecticut.
- [Fair Rent Commissions](#): Learn more about the efforts from CT Fair Housing to expand fair rent commissions in Connecticut.
- [2024 PURA Q1 Newsletter](#): Subscribe to the quarterly newsletter for information on upcoming and recent PURA dockets.
- [PURA Stakeholder Group Compensation Program](#): Apply to the Stakeholder Group Compensation Program. Launched in January 2024, the program awards funding to groups to organize around PURA proceedings.

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