

Celebrating HOME Line

A 20 year retrospective



HOME Line provides free legal, organizing, educational and advocacy services so tenants throughout Minnesota can solve their own rental housing problems. HOME Line works to improve public and private policies relating to rental housing by involving affected tenants in the process.

HOT LINE • ORGANIZING • ADVOCACY • HOT LINE • ORGANIZING • ADVOCACY

Hotline History

HOME Line's tenant hotline began in 1992, serving the suburbs of Hennepin County.

It has since expanded to cover the entire state of Minnesota (including Minneapolis now, with a low fee service).

In 1992, the hotline helped 2,226 callers. In 2011, we helped 11,442. In total, we have helped over 143,000 rental households throughout the state. This graph shows how calls have increased over time and how much Minnesota tenants have grown to depend on this service.

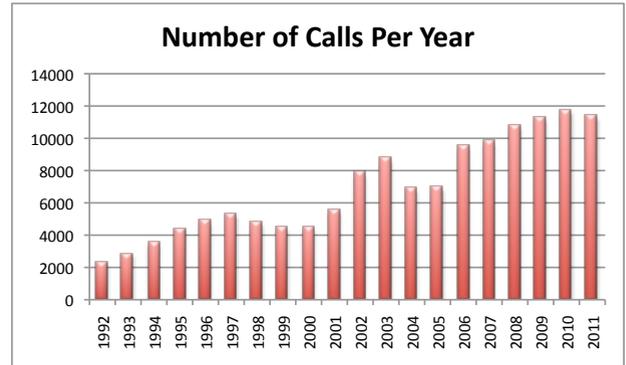
The reasons that renters call us have varied over the last 20 years, but these are the most common issues that tenants have called the hotline.

When tenants call the hotline, they are given advice on how to proceed based on their

Charlie Warner, HOME Line Founder & Top Volunteer



situation. Over the last 20 years, HOME Line has tried to follow-up with renters to determine whether the advice helped. In 2010, Craig Rolling, a PhD candidate from the University of Minnesota did a complex statistical analysis based on these follow-ups to figure out what the hotline accomplished. The numbers are staggering. **The hotline has helped to prevent over 10,000 evictions and helped renters recover over \$18 million in wrongfully withheld deposits or rent abatements (refunds for living in substandard conditions).**



MOST COMMON TENANT CALLS

1. Repairs	22,854
2. Evictions	17,861
3. Security Deposits	15,419
4. Notice to Vacate	10,090
5. Break Lease	10,016
6. Landlord Foreclosures	5,308
7. Lease Questions	5,171
8. Privacy/Intrusion	4,464
9. Application Process	4,044
10. Fees	3,871



Invaluable volunteers work the phones during another busy day.

Hotline Volunteers

Volunteers have always been a critical component of the success of the tenant hotline. Since 1992, there have been 1,113 volunteers who have donated over 36,000 hours of their time. The four area law schools have been the primary source of these volunteers (and the Minnesota Justice Foundation continues to play a key role in sending volunteers to work on the hotline). Here are the 10 volunteers who have volunteered the most time to HOME Line:

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Charlie Warner | 4. Katherine Kelly | 8. Susan Anderson |
| 2. Walt Shaw | 5. Adam Van Alstyne | 9. Joseph Cox |
| 3. Andy Schmidt | 6. William Mose | 10. Korina Hackert |
| | 7. Matt Clementson | |

Thanks again to all of the volunteers who have made the hotline the success it is!

January 1992

HOME Line founded as part of Community Action for Suburban Hennepin, provides free tenant hotline service to renters in suburban Hennepin County.

September 1992

HOME Line organizes its first tenant meeting.

1995

Right to Privacy enacted after HOME Line document the many abuses of privacy from landlords. Residents organized successfully for this law.

August 1995

Community Action for Suburban Hennepin publishes the 1st annual Section 8 report, Dimished Choices: The Shrinking Market for Section 8 in Suburban Hennepin County.

1995-1996

Tenant Screening protections enacted.



Organizing History

Organizing helps tenants come together and work toward solving common issues. HOME Line's program focuses on preserving federally subsidized apartments and developing tenant leadership to empower those affected to become spokespeople for themselves and their neighbors.

Since 1997, HOME Line has helped preserve more than 8,000 units of affordable housing. We have also adapted our organizing to work with renters to prevent the loss of affordable market-rate housing and to respond to emergency and ongoing repair and substandard housing situations.

Via our tenant organizing program, HOME Line has:

- Organized tenants in a variety of low-income and subsidized apartment complexes across the state, developed leadership to preserve affordable housing, get repairs made, and stop bad management practices. Thousands of Section 8 and Rural Development affordable

rental units have been kept affordable for low-income Minnesotans as a result of tenants speaking up.

- Created an inventory of all the federally assisted privately owned housing in Minnesota and identified properties at risk for loss of affordability.
- Door-knocked thousands of apartments to inform tenants of their rights and engage them in public policy issues relating to their housing.
- Conducted an annual Section 8 survey 16 years in a row to determine landlord acceptance of Section 8 vouchers in the marketplace.

Some 2011 Victories Include:

- Organized residents over several years involved in a multi-building lawsuit that preserved 131 Rural Development units.
- Organized residents at Shingle Creek Towers to ensure a HUD foreclosure sale resulted in affordable rents and a professional owner.

Tenants and housing advocates rally in front of the Minneapolis HUD building to oppose 2004 federal cuts to housing.



1997-1999

Major preservation campaigns; hundreds of tenants organize to protect thousands of units of affordable housing.

1998-1999

HOME Line is part of a legislative task force that revises many of Minnesota's tenant/landlord laws to make it more understandable and better protective.

Tenant leader & MTA Member Linda Hymes speaks about her experiences at a 2008 HUD Rally to defend Section 8 funding.



May 1999

- HOME Line becomes an independent nonprofit corporation.
- Tenant Hotline expands to Anoka and Dakota counties.

1999

HOME Line organizes tenants to secure "PARIF" funds for preserving subsidized housing in Minnesota. Millions of dollars in yearly appropriated state funding continue to help preserve affordable housing statewide.



Tenants Peggy Larkin & Melissa Lenart testify at a Senate Committee hearing in support of the MN Tenant Bill of Rights.



Franklin Lane tenants in Anoka meet with MN Senator Jungbauer for help saving the Renters Credit.



MN Tenants Alliance members meet with Congressman Ellison to keep HUD assisted housing funded.

Public Policy Advocacy

Through this program, HOME Line builds tenant leadership into local, state, and federal efforts focused on affordable housing policies.

On the state level, HOME Line has influenced a variety of legislation:

- Provisions in the 2010 Tenant Bill of Rights make Minnesota law more tenant-friendly and save tenants millions of dollars through revisions to policies on tenant screening fees, late fees, attorney's fees, and security deposits.
- The Tenant Impact Statement, a one-year notice before owners terminate federal subsidies, along with an annual appropriation of \$10 million to preserve affordable housing.
- The Tenant's Right to Privacy, establishing legal standards for landlords entering an apartment as well as other laws strengthening tenant screening protections.

- Since 2004, we have organized to successfully preserve and protect the Renters Credit property tax refund, a program to keep Minnesota's tax system balanced.

On the federal level HOME Line helped influence important laws and programs:

- Enact legislation that created the National Housing Trust Fund, a tool to develop and preserve thousands of units of affordable housing nationwide.
- Advocate for full funding of public housing, voucher and project-based Section 8 programs, and rural rental housing.
- Work on a grassroots level to involve low-income tenants in discussions with the Department of Housing and Urban Development on recent proposals to overhaul all major federal rental housing subsidy programs currently known as the Rental Housing Revitalization Act.

Name: Dorothy
 Phone number: _____ 17A

This is how I use my renters' credit: First I look
second is my once a year trip to a dentist. I'm a
old senior w/ being renters, so I carry a senior copay policy
Cost me \$316 by a month. I put what I can of my rents to
help pay this in winter months.
Don't know what to live if I wasn't available.

Stories give power to policy

HOME Line knows the power behind storytelling in our grassroots organizing and policy work. Tenants like Dorothy across the state bring their own power to the table by offering a different perspective from the narratives that dominate housing policies—both public and private.

Stories from renters provide authentic, concrete feedback to policy makers and have remained the key ingredient to HOME Line's successful campaigns. Stories drive change.

2000

Senator Wellstone, after hearing from organized renters in Minnesota, introduces and successfully passes a federal law that requires landlords to provide advance notice to tenants when they intend to end their housing subsidy.

2001

- 10,000 students reached via high school speeches.
- HOME Line expands statewide, providing free legal services to all Minnesota renters (outside of Minneapolis & St. Paul).

2003

Over 3,000 apartment units affected by HOME Line's organizing campaigns.

2004

- Tenant Hotline answers the 50,000th call from a renter.
- 20,000 volunteer hours.
- HOME Line founder Charlie Warner retires.



Tenant leader Michelle Spencer & Organizer Lindsey Twin canvased for support for Park Street tenants at the city's fair.

Treadmill-A-Thon



HOME Line provides a unique service by educating renters about their rights and responsibilities.



I believe we as a community must invest in the social infrastructure needed to maintain security and opportunity.

Policy, Organizing, & Legal help Maintains Homes for Many

In 2008, HUD's budgetary shortfall meant that landlords across the country were receiving delayed rent payments (by several months) from HUD, putting tenants at unprecedented risk of homelessness. While leading a grassroots response to this disaster, HOME Line received a story from a Park Street tenant who wrote about the importance of affordable senior housing in Cannon Falls. It turned out that her landlord was exiting the Section 8 contract at her building as well as two others in Minnesota. Housing advocates feared a mass exodus of landlords from this critical program.

This grassroots policy work led organizers to work with Park Street tenants to address concerns about affordability with their landlord and his plan to convert their apartments into assisted living units. This meant that the owner intended to deny residents their federal right to section 8 vouchers, and require those eligible to shed their assets in order to apply for county assistance and receive assisted living services whether they needed them or not. Ineligible residents would be forced to move out of their homes, although many had lived at Park Street for as many as 28 years.

Outraged tenants formed an association, "Park Street Apartments--Home Sweet Home," and requested support from the city, Minnesota's Congressional Delegation, local businesses, churches, and other city residents to help them stay in their homes. Residents even wrote articles for the local paper, *The Beacon*, explaining their issue and rallying their community for support.

Tenant leader, Michelle Spencer wrote, "With the support of fellow tenants, our community, HOME Line, and its partners, we saved our homes. This team effort brought our work here to a success. We are safe in our homes, and residents have grown even closer together than we were before."

While simultaneously addressing concerns with building repairs and learning their rights as renters, Park Street Apartments--Home Sweet Home saved the Section 8 in their building as well as for one other complex of the owner's in Lake City.

Section 8 Report

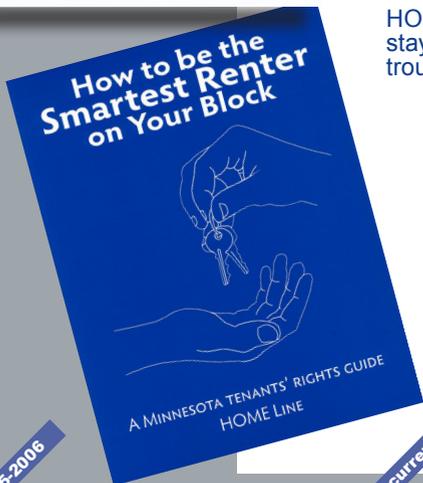
In 1995, HOME Line set out to investigate the effects of Congress's proposed restructuring of HUD programs in a housing market experiencing 2% rental vacancy rates. HUD had reduced its Fair Market Rents (FMR's) by 3%, further reducing access to affordable, decent homes to families all over Minnesota. The thought in Washington at the time was to convert all of HUD's housing programs to Section 8 Vouchers without regard to the realities of the housing markets or the barriers that low-income families face when striving for stability.

HOME Line's survey of area rents and landlord acceptance of Section 8 revealed substantial lack of access to decent housing due to high rents and discrimination against voucher holders. We continued to conduct the survey over the next 15 years, which has allowed us to better understand broader trends in the rental housing market.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS & TOOLS FOR TENANTS

HOME Line has worked to develop tools that renters can access to help them stay better informed and equipped to prevent or mitigate their rental housing troubles. We created:

- Blogs on Public Policy & Landlords in theNews.
- An online list of cities with heat codes with rental inspector contact information.
- Low-cost legal representation for tenants seeking greater support for their housing problems.
- Our first tenants' rights book, *How to be the Smartest Renter on Your Block*.
- Low-cost webinars & CLE's for Minnesota attorneys seeking continued legal education.
- A wacky & successful annual fundraising campaign, the Treadmill-A-Thon, to help keep our services available to tenants.
- Landlord trainings.



2005-2008

- HOME Line organizes renters affected by the condo conversion crisis; helps enact tenant protections for Minneapolis renters.
- 20,000 students reached via high school speeches.
- Tenant Hotline expands to St. Paul.

2007-current

Landlord foreclosure rate soars. HOME Line adds foreclosure focus to hotline & successfully lobbies for stronger tenant protections on state and federal levels.

April 2008

Tenant Hotline answers the 100,000th call from a renter.

2010

HOME Line partners with Legal Aid & passes provisions of MN Tenant Bill of Rights.

February 2011

HOME Line publishes *How to be the Smartest Renter on Your Block*.