



Public Affairs Committee

Thursday, September 19, 2024 | 8:30-9:30 am

Board of Directors Meeting
Austin, Texas | Fall 2024

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS



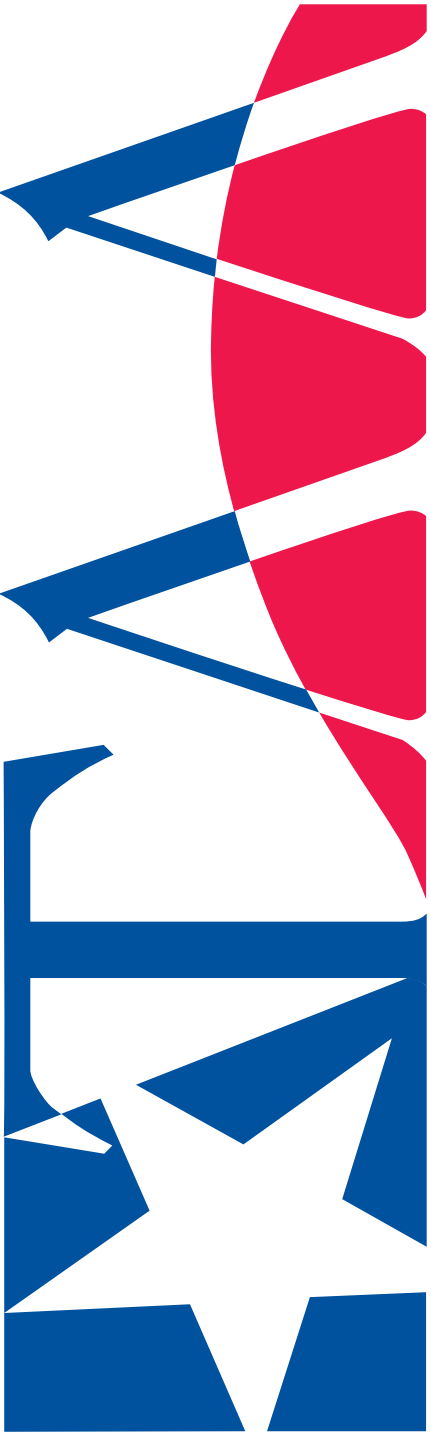
WeDoTrash
Camp Construction Services
Yardi
Century Air Conditioning
FSI Construction

Impact Property Solutions
Blue Moon Software
CORT
CSC ServiceWorks
Sherwin-Williams



Smart Apartment Data
Zillow
Cweren Law Firm, PLLC
Entrata
The Guarantors
Massey Services Pest & Termite
Red Elephant
AAA Plumbers

Comm-Fit
Dixie Interiors
G5, a RealPage company
Gemstar Construction
Genesis
LeaseLock
The Liberty Group
MRI Software/MRI Apartment Data



Welcome



Christy Rodriguez
CAPS

Judwin Properties
Houston



PLUS Communications

Sam Taylor

*Managing Director,
Public Affairs*



Responding to Media Inquiries



Deciding Whether to Respond



"Three things can happen when you throw the ball, and two of them are bad."

-Darrell Royal

Key Questions:

- Who is your audience?
- What are your goals?
- What are the benefits/drawbacks of engaging?
- What story is the reporter trying to tell?

Key Objectives:

- Correct misinformation/misperception
- Establish credibility
- Tell your side of the story
- Mitigate negative public perceptions
- Prevent adverse legislative/regulatory actions



Setting the Table

Establishing Ground Rules for Reporter Conversations

■ Off the Record

- *Mutually agreed upon, reporter may not use information, may not attribute information to you*

■ On Background*

- *Reporter may use information, not attributable to you, no direct quotations.*
- *Use publicly available sources/information when possible*

■ On the Record

- *Reporter may use direct quotes, attributable to you/your organization*



**Certain reporters/outlets may have varying policies on use/attribution*



Six Media Inquiry Hypotheticals

- 1. Overbearing Property Rules**
- 2. Delete Online Negative Reviews or Face Eviction**
- 3. Are Rent and Property Taxes Related?**
- 4. Why Do Landlords Charge Junk Fees?**
- 5. Mold & A/C Repair**
- 6. Squatters/Eviction Reform**





Media Considerations

Format

- Print vs Digital
- Radio vs. TV
- Zoom/Phone/Face-to-Face/Press Conference?

- Message vs. Soundbite





Media Considerations (continued)

Remember to:

- Communicate Your Points
- Stay on Message





You decide:

- (1) Go / No Go?**
- (2) What's the message?**
- (3) Off the Record? On the Record?
Background?**
- (4) Interview or Statement?**



1. Overbearing Property Rules



“Hello, I'm a staff writer for the Dallas Observer. I'm working on a story today that I'm trying to turn in around by 3 p.m. about bad or overbearing apartment complex policies and was hoping to speak with someone at the association about this.

I only have three main questions and wouldn't need more than a few minutes of their time. You'll have to forgive me for reaching out so late in the day. I was trying to get in touch with the local association all day but didn't have any luck so wanted to reach out to you.

Below are the questions. I can also take emailed responses if that is easier. Just let me know. Thanks!

1. How do you balance keeping an apartment complex safe and nice while also providing a quality living experience without overbearing rules?

2. Are there any rules the association wouldn't recommend? I've heard about rules prohibiting tenants from congregating or requiring them to be inside their unit after dark, for example. Is this a standard policy? If not, why might this policy be enacted? Would the association recommend against this policy? Why or why not?

3. What do you say to people who feel that some apartment complex policies treat tenants like criminals?”





How Did TAA Respond?

DALLAS
Observer[®]

Bad Apartment Policies Treat Tenants 'Like Absolute Children'

August 14, 2024 – *“Through his work helping people facing evictions, local attorney [Mark Melton](#) has seen a lot. He’s witnessed families unjustly removed from their homes and tenants living in poor conditions. Melton has also come across some bad apartment policies that can make home feel like prison...”*

“...In a post in the locally popular Facebook group Reform Dallas, we asked people for examples of overbearing apartment regulations. Those who responded complained about hidden fees, mandatory rental insurance, really bad WiFi and not being allowed to smoke or vape on the premises or to walk around the apartment complex...”

No Response

- **Clear bias**
- **Loaded questions**
- **Not objective journalism**
- **Premise based on activist claims**

2. Delete Negative Online Reviews or Face Eviction



“I’m a staff writer for the Houston Chronicle. A tenant at Boone Manor recently shared a letter with me that was sent to them by the property’s management. It basically demanded that they delete all negative reviews and posts on social media or face eviction.

Can you comment about the legality of something like this?

Does anything in a lease explicitly prohibit tenants from exercising their right of free speech?”





How Did TAA Respond?



Tenants at Boone Manor spoke out about crime at the complex. Then came the threat of eviction.

August 10, 2024 – *“...A representative for Boone Manor confirmed the letter had been sent by their legal team but declined to address its contents directly.*

“We share the concerns of our residents and take matters regarding criminal activity at our property seriously,” the representative said in an email. “In addition to fully cooperating with investigating authorities, we implement measures to deter criminal activity at our community.”

Buchalter provided the Chronicle with a copy of her lease agreement. It makes no mention of social media posts but does include a clause forbidding residents from “making bad faith or false allegations against us or our agents.”

No Response

- **Reporter questions too broad**
- **Facts specific to property communication with resident**
- **Attempt to draw TAA into conflict with property management**



3. Rent & Property Taxes



“I’m a reporter at Community Impact news. I’m reaching out because I’m writing a story on what it would mean for renters if property tax rates increase.

I was wondering if I could discuss this topic more in detail with a representative at TAA. I would need about 30 minutes, and it could be a phone interview.

My main question is: what would it mean for renters if property tax rates increase?”



How Did TAA Respond?



On the Record Response:

“Increasing property taxes will negatively impact housing affordability, as they are typically the single largest operating expense for rental property owners in Texas. However, there are a number of factors that impact housing prices, including the supply and availability of rental units, insurance costs, and the cost of labor and supplies, which have risen sharply in recent years due to inflation. With this variety of factors in mind, it is especially important for policymakers to ensure a predictable and consistent tax process across the state, and TAA supports continued property tax relief for Texas property owners.”

- Chris Newton, TAA Executive Vice President



4. Why Do Landlords Charge Junk Fees?

San Antonio Express-News

“My name is Madison Iszler and I’m a real estate reporter at the San Antonio Express-News.

I’m reaching out because I’m working on an article about a report published by a professor and several students at UT Law about so-called mandatory junk fees that tenants pay, such as charges for pest control, cable connections and trash pickup. They contend tenants often are not aware of such costs until they’re signing a lease or making their first payment, and that the fees often exceed the actual cost of the service or benefit. [Here is a link to the report.](#)

I’d like to get landlords’ perspective on these fees and the purpose behind them, and was wondering if it would be possible to speak with someone from the TAA or to get comments via email.

Why are rental housing owners imposing more of these fees, and what are they used for?”



How Did TAA Respond?

San Antonio Express-News

On the Record Response:

“Rental fees are used to defray expenses for amenities and services provided to residents. For this reason, TAA has provided a nationally-recognized model lease document that directs rental property owners to highlight any additional rental fees that renters may incur on the first page of a lease. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has cited TAA’s model lease as an example of a best industry practice, as it enhances transparency of rental fees and ensures that prospective residents can make fully informed decisions before they sign a lease.”

- Chris Newton, TAA Executive Vice President

Information provided On Background:

The HUD reference noted above can be found here:

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/policy-and-practice-publication-2023-july.pdf#page=2>

5. Mold & A/C Repair



“I am doing a story on a woman who says she has a bad mold problem in her unit at a local apartment complex. I am also hearing from other residents that the complex has not repaired the A/C unit as summer temperatures remain above triple digits. Is anyone from TAA available for an on-camera/zoom interview for my story? My questions are as follows:

- *What rights do renters have if their health is in danger in their apartment?*
- *Do I have the right to withhold rent if I feel my living space is unhealthy?*
- *If I feel that my health is in danger, what are my options?*
- *What rights do renters have when it comes to my apartment complex repairing my AC?”*





How Did TAA Respond?



“Under Texas law, residents have the right to request repairs for conditions that materially affect their health or safety. The law provides a basic presumption that 7 days is a reasonable time for these repairs. However, the repair length time can depend (for example in the case of mold remediation) on a number of factors including finding proper labor, the type and severity of the mold, insurance issues, and the availability of parts and materials.”

“If a full repair to the A/C unit is needed and the situation is serious enough to materially affect the health or safety of the resident and requires additional time, a temporary condition such as a portable air conditioning may be necessary. With the complexities of modern HVAC systems, it can take multiple attempts to resolve an issue, which the law also factors in through the diligent effort standard and the reasonable time for repair.”

“In Texas, residents do not have the right to withhold rent unilaterally if they believe their living space is not healthy or if they feel a repair is not being timely made. However, they do have the right to request repairs for conditions that materially affect the health or safety of the ordinary resident. It's important to provide notice per the lease agreement about any issues that need to be addressed. The timeline for a repair begins when a resident makes a written request for repairs.”

“If certain repairs are not made within a reasonable time, you may have the option to terminate your lease or pursue other legal remedies. However, the first step is communication with management so they can resolve the issue quickly and effectively.”



6. Squatters/ Eviction Reform

Defense vs. Offense



“Can you tell me more about the legislation TAA is supporting to address the issue of squatting?”

How is TAA and its membership approaching proposals that would reform eviction laws in Texas?



How *Should* TAA Respond?



Topline Message:

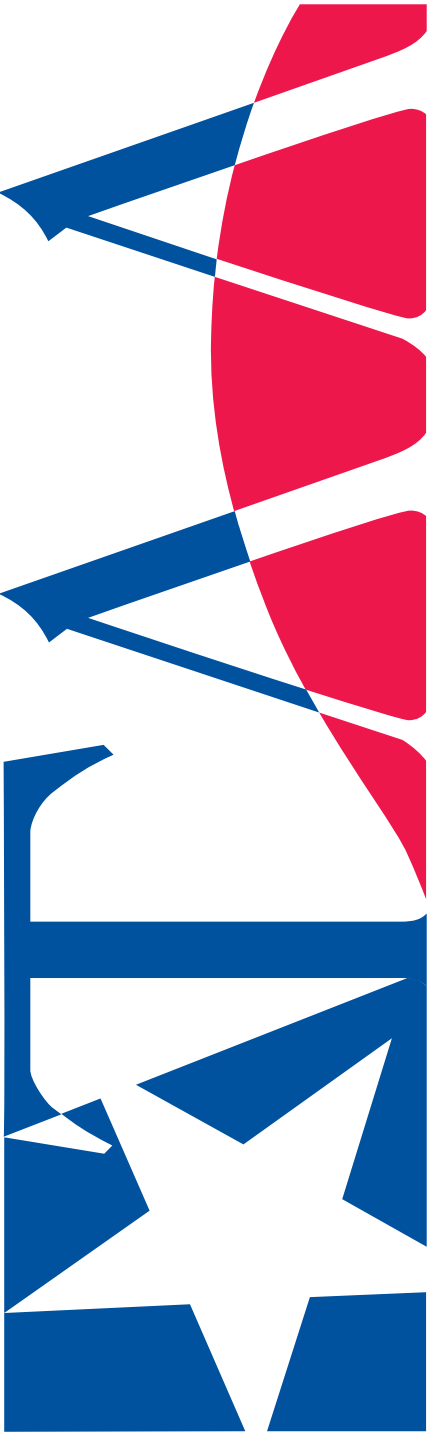
- **The eviction process must be consistent, efficient and straightforward to ensure legal claims are timely resolved.**

Supporting Messages:

- **Evictions are difficult, costly and not undertaken lightly. The eviction process is the only legal remedy for property owners to regain possession of their property when rent is not paid or a lease term is violated.**
- **Eviction cases are now taking three to four months to complete in Texas' largest counties.**
- **Unpaid rent and property damage can cause a significant financial burden for property owners – especially small businesses.**
- **Allowing residents to remain on property who refuse to pay rent or abide by the terms of a lease takes away housing options for those in need.**
- **Squatters present unique threats for property owners, their employees and other residents.**
- **Texas needs to adopt an expedited approach to protect property owners from squatters and ensure the safety of our communities.**



PLUS
THANK YOU



TAA Message House:



<https://www.taa.org/resources/taa-media-talking-points/>



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