

Wi-Fi Network: Downright Conference



Password: downright25

Public Affairs Committee Meeting



Downright Austin



February 6, 2025





TEXAS APARTMENT ASSOCIATION

2025 Sustainers

PLATINUM



GOLD



SILVER

CAMP Facility Services
Century Air Conditioning Supply
Comm-Fit
CORT
CSC Serviceworks
Cweren Law Firm, PLLC

Dixie Interiors
Entrata
Ferguson Facility Supply
FSI Construction
Gemstar Construction
Genesis

Green Mountain Energy
Guardian Construction
Impact Property Solutions
The Liberty Group
Redi Carpet
Rent.

RentDebt Automated Collections
Sherwin-Williams
Smart Apartment Data
Spherexx
Yardi
Zillow Rentals

BRONZE

AAA Plumbers
Airbnb
BANYAN Utility

Blue Moon Software
Foundation Specialists
Massey Services, Inc.

MRI Software
The Guarantors
WeDoTrash

2025 Public Affairs Committee Chairs



Alan Ross

*Committee Chair,
Bob Ross Realty*



Katya Watson

*Committee Vice Chair,
Cushman & Wakefield*

Agenda



01 Welcome

02 Committee Job Description

03 TAA Message House

04 Media Update–
PLUS Communications

05 New Business



Committee Job Description

- 01** To enhance members' understanding of the media's portrayal of the rental housing industry and how this portrayal reflects media trends and influences policy makers
- 02** To establish an informed media strategy for TAA that helps redefine current media narratives and enhance public perception of the rental housing industry
- 03** Share media strategy, messaging and other deliverables with TAA stakeholders to provide a consistent response to media inquiries

The TAA Message House

TAA's Message House is how we share media strategy, messaging and deliverables with our stakeholders.

The Message House is available online and updated regularly to reflect current media trends.

✓ *TAA Message House currently includes messaging on:*

- Evictions / Squatters
- Housing Affordability & Property Taxes
- Property Owner – Resident Relations
- Floods
- Fire Prevention
- Winter Storms & Insurance

Media Update – PLUS Communications



Sam Taylor

*Managing Director, Public Affairs
PLUS Communications*



Recent Coverage and Commentary: Squatters/Eviction Reform

San Antonio Express-News

Texas' squatter problem requires immediate, comprehensive reform

"Private property rights are a cornerstone of our state's values and legal tradition. Perhaps no other private property right affects Texans like the right to their housing, be it housing they occupy or lease to others.

Today, though, this right is being challenged by squatters who seek to occupy properties that they have no legal right to, coupled with a prolonged eviction process that can delay the return of property while costing owners thousands of dollars in expenses and lost rental revenue."

- Chris Newton, TAA Executive Vice President, [December 11, 2024](#)

Recent Coverage and Commentary: Squatters/Eviction Reform

San Antonio Express-News

- *“Texas lawmakers should act during the upcoming legislative session to **reform the eviction process and prevent squatters from upending property rights.**”*
- *“Lawmakers should **establish specialized dockets in justice of the peace courts** dedicated to expediting cases involving squatters and those eviction cases where there are no contested issues.”*
- *“Lawmakers should also consider **simplifying the eviction process**, providing procedural options for property owners to seek redress and streamlining the appeals process to prevent frivolous delays.”*
- *“The Legislature can **ensure the eviction process strikes the appropriate balance between the rights of property owners and residents**, while ensuring squatters cannot abuse the judicial process.”*
- *“A **uniform, statewide overhaul of the judicial eviction process** would strengthen our state’s commitment to property rights and address a growing public safety concern.”*





One-Pager:

Reform Civil Eviction Laws to Deter Squatting and Protect Property Rights



The Problem: Texas property owners are facing a burdensome and costly judicial eviction process when trying to regain possession of their rental properties from persons not entitled to enter, occupy, or remain in possession of their property.

The Solution: The Texas Apartment Association (TAA) urges the Legislature to enact **comprehensive reforms to streamline the eviction process** through legislation to be filed by Senator Bettencourt and Representative Button.

Key Legislative Reforms


- **Simplify Notices**
- **Expedite Hearings**
- **Reduce Delays**
- **Curb Frivolous Appeals**
- **Increase Efficiency**



One-Pager:

Reform Civil Eviction Laws to Deter Squatting and Protect Property Rights

REFORM CIVIL EVICTION LAWS TO DETER SQUATTING AND PROTECT PROPERTY RIGHTS



The Problem: Texas property owners are facing a burdensome and costly judicial eviction process when trying to regain possession of their rental properties from persons not entitled to enter, occupy, or remain in possession of their property.

The Solution: The Texas Apartment Association (TAA) urges the Legislature to enact comprehensive reforms to streamline the eviction process through legislation to be filed by Senator Bettencourt and Representative Button.

Key Legislative Reforms

Simplify Notices • Expedite Hearings • Reduce Delays • Curb Frivolous Appeals • Increase Efficiency

- 1. Service of Process & Venue for Evictions**
 - Allow any law enforcement officer or certified civil process server to serve eviction petitions and any law enforcement officer to execute writs of possession (currently both are restricted to constables).
- 2. Notice to Vacate Options**
 - Give property owners flexibility to issue either: a "Notice to Pay Rent or Vacate" (opportunity to cure) or a standard "Notice to Vacate" for nonpayment cases, and eliminate mandatory notice requirements for all other cases, including squatting.
 - Align federal CARES Act 30-day notice requirements with the state eviction process timeline.
- 3. Expedited Disposition**
 - Allow expedited rulings for cases with no factual disputes (e.g., squatting or unpaid rent with no defenses).
 - In cases with legitimate disputes, require JPs to issue a judgment or schedule a hearing within 10-21 days, ensuring prompt resolution.
- 4. Appeals Process Enhancements**
 - Require appellants to affirm under penalty of perjury that the appeal is in good faith.
 - Mandate payment of rent into the court registry during all appeals to avoid abuse of the system and protect property rights.
 - Establish consistent timelines for hearings and judgment enforcement at both JP and county court levels.
- 5. Additional Measures**
 - Clarify non-lawyer representation rights for both parties in JP court.
 - Ensure local government funding for eviction-related legal representation is matched by funding for tenant relocation assistance.
 - Replace terms "Landlord" and "Tenant" with "Plaintiff" and "Defendant" in the Property Code to enhance neutrality and clarity.

These reforms will equip property owners with the tools to efficiently and fairly resolve unlawful occupancy issues, fostering a predictable and consistent legal framework statewide. By enacting TAA's proposals, Texas

Responding to Opposition Commentary: Squatters/Eviction Reform

The Dallas Morning News

**Texas landlords say they're after squatters, but it's
real tenants who will be affected**

“Squatters are like Sasquatch; rarely seen by anyone in the wild and often confused with something else...”

“...Under current law, evicting a tenant is easy. You give them one notice. Then you file a form with the justice of the peace. If you can prove to the court you gave the notice correctly and that the tenant breached the lease, you show up with the constable and remove them and their things. It's not hard.”

-Mark Melton, Dallas Eviction Advocacy Center, [January 4, 2025](#)





Responding to Opposition Commentary: Letter to the Editor

“The Dallas Morning News recently published an op-ed by tax lawyer and eviction advocate Mark Melton regarding the eviction process and incidences of squatting. As an apartment manager in the DFW area, I have personal experience with both squatters and the effects of a prolonged eviction process. Squatters not only endanger my livelihood, but the safety of my employees as well as my residents.

“Mr. Melton may believe these incidents don’t happen, but I have had to hire 24/7 security at several of my properties, spend time and money rehabbing apartments that are no longer inhabitable and hire attorneys to move these cases through the civil eviction process. Squatting does happen, it’s costly and time consuming to address and is symptomatic of a civil eviction process that takes too long and has too many loopholes.

“Current law does not provide property owners with effective tools to address squatters, and as a result they are able to exploit the process, causing costly delays that allow dangerous conditions to escalate. A faster civil eviction process is critical to addressing this problem. The Texas Legislature needs to fix this problem this session and restore property rights.”

- Char McCurdy
Dallas, Texas



TAA Statement: Gov. Abbott Prioritizes Legislation to Address Squatting



TAA's Statement on Governor Abbott Making Legislation to Address Squatting a Priority Issue:

"Squatters and others who take advantage of current law threaten housing availability, affordability, and community safety. We appreciate Governor Abbott's leadership in making this issue a priority and thank Senator Bettencourt and Representative Button for championing efforts to pass meaningful reforms. These reforms will streamline the eviction process, reducing unnecessary delays and ensuring a fair, efficient system that protects both property owners and residents."



Recent Coverage: Property Taxes & Housing Affordability

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

**Texas Republicans want more property tax cuts.
Here's how they may do it.**

"...Unlikely to see direct tax relief are the state's 4.2 million renter households. Though tenants pay property taxes via a portion of their monthly rent, Texas doesn't provide direct tax relief to renters as some other states do.

Rental property owners saw relief from the 2023 cuts, according to figures from the Texas Taxpayers and Research Association — and tax-cut proponents have argued that landlords pass along benefits to renters to stay competitive."

[February 4, 2025](#)



Taking On Media Interviews

Key Questions:

- Who is your audience?
- What are your goals?
- Why is it important to engage?
- What story is the reporter trying to tell?
- Are you *the story*, or just a part of it?

Key Objectives:

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



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*



Media Considerations

Format

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

- Message vs. Soundbite



Communicate Your Points, Stay on Message

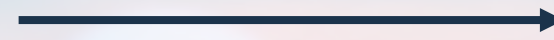
DO'S AND DONT'S

X Don't be intimidated by reporters.



✓ Maintain a friendly, respectful and mutually beneficial relationship.

X Don't answer all questions delivered in a rapid-fire manner.



✓ Choose only the questions that allow you to deliver your message.

X Don't get thrown off by interruptions.



✓ Practice, practice, practice.

X Don't allow the reporter to put words in your mouth.



✓ Restate the message in your own words.

X Don't get angry or hostile with the reporter.



✓ Remain calm, ignore attacks, and repeat your message.

X Don't let the conversation become about your personal opinions.



✓ Steer the conversation back to your messages.

X Don't speculate.



✓ If you don't know an answer, circle back.



Case Studies: Mock Interview Scenarios

December 6, 2024 – Austin, TX

1. Squatters/Eviction Reform
2. Landlord-Tenant Issues
3. Housing Affordability/Rent Prices





Mock Interview 1: Squatters/Evictions

INTERVIEWER: Statehouse newspaper reporter who primarily covers the Texas legislature

TOPIC: Bill proposed to would streamline the judicial eviction process in Texas and address problem of 'squatters'

QUESTIONS: Respond to criticisms from activists who claim the legislation erodes tenants' rights and that squatting is not a significant problem in Texas



Key Questions:

Mock Interview on Squatters/Evictions

Reporter: *Austin American–Statesman* reporter covering legislation to address squatting and streamline eviction process.

- Why did it take 6 months to evict squatters?
- Why weren't you able to call local law enforcement to just have these folks removed?
- How much did it cost your organization to enforce this eviction through the court process and get the end result you were seeking?
- The opponents of this bill say there's no actual data demonstrating this is a widespread problem, and that the situation is somewhat isolated in a state of 30 million people. How do you make the argument this is necessary when there's no data to back up the idea that this is a widespread problem?
- With the current housing crisis and anxiety surrounding housing in Texas and across the country, do you think now is the right time to be advocating for a bill that could displace people from having roofs over their head?
- How do you balance tenant protections and the need to protect property rights?
- As a property owner, what kind of advice do you have for other property owners or managers around the state who might be dealing with something similar?



Key Responses:

Mock Interview on Squatters/Evictions

Interview Subject: Dallas-area apartment complex manager who dealt with squatters through “parking lot leasing,” resulting in an unsafe situation for residents and a 6-month eviction process to remove squatters.

On the legislation: *“Had we been able to speed up the entire eviction process, we could have perhaps evicted and secured possession of our units faster, thereby deterring the need for additional security, deterring the need of having to turn these units, meaning make them ready...and most importantly would have created housing availability to those that are on our waitlist.”*

On broader ‘squatting’ phenomenon: *“One squatter for any one owner is more than enough to secure that owner’s rights...every property owner should have a right to take possession of the unit, especially when someone has illegally taken possession...You have some owners that this is their bread and butter – this is how they feed their families.”*

On ‘displacement’: *“I wouldn’t consider this displacement because, as I mentioned earlier, there are several families that are in need of affordable and quality housing that are waiting for these homes, and they can’t because we cannot enforce our lease we cannot actually take possession of a unit that we have residents that are not paying or squatters that are not paying and we wanna be able to house those that are ready and willing to come in and take care of their home and pay their rent like everybody else does, and we can’t do that.”*



Mock Interview 2: Landlord-Tenant Issues

INTERVIEWER: Local TV news reporter who produces a weekly 'watchdog' segment

TOPIC: Feature story about local renter who says her A/C unit has not been fixed for 2 months during peak of summer heat

QUESTIONS: Explain apartment complex's policies regarding maintenance and repairs, and protecting the health and safety of residents



Key Questions:

Mock Interview on Landlord–Tenant Issues

Reporter: *KXAN* 'Watchdog' investigative reporter doing a story on tenant who claims A/C has been out for 2 months, resulting in health issues for her and her family.

- Can you give us an explanation of what's happening, what's going on?
- How long did it take for you guys to get there? Because Ms. Jacobs says she's been without A/C for two months.
- Once you guys found out and received e-mails from Ms. Jacobs in the inbox you monitored, how long did it take you to act?
- Were you able to identify any other units in your complex that are undergoing the same exact issues as Ms. Jacobs?
- What would you tell Ms. Jacobs, if you were speaking to her about the discomfort that she had to suffer over the last two months?
- How would you respond to the idea that your management companies are treating some of your residents in an inhumane manner?
- What steps have you taken since then to prevent future incidents like this to ensure other e-mails reporting broken A/Cs or broken heaters are actually being read?



Key Responses:

Mock Interview on Landlord-Tenant Issues

Interview Subject: Austin-area apartment complex manager whose staff acted to repair a reported broken A/C unit after tenant sent maintenance request to an unmonitored e-mail inbox.

On what happened: *"In this particular situation, unfortunately Ms. Jacobs was e-mailing to an e-mail address that was not monitored. Clearly we have an obligation and a vested interest in being highly responsive to our residents and...in this particular situation, it does seem like there's been a failure of communication. But since this has been brought to our attention, we've provided Ms. Jacobs with access to a furnished unit that does have working HVAC while we work to troubleshoot the situation in her particular system."*

On responding once staff received request: *"We were out there within 24 hours, which is pretty much the standard. That e-mail came in about 3:40 in the afternoon and we were out there the very next morning."*

On what manager said to Ms. Jacobs: *"I'm certainly very, very sorry that we were so slow to respond. We have messages that go out – as many organizations do – from unmonitored e-mail addresses and responding to those e-mails creates delays in responsiveness. We reminder her about how to communicate these types of issues and, just like every other residents that follows the procedures in the lease, we want to be highly responsive."*

On 'inhumane' charge: *"I would certainly disagree. We can only remedy the situations that we're aware of, and when we become aware of these types of situations, we do respond promptly."*



Mock Interview 3: Housing Affordability

INTERVIEWER: Local Newspaper Reporter

TOPIC: New data published by think tank shows rent prices remain elevated despite increase in housing supply

QUESTIONS: What are the drivers of high rent prices in your market, and how can property owners take steps to make housing more affordable?



Key Questions:

Mock Interview on Housing Affordability

Reporter: *San Antonio Express-News* reporter writing a story about high rent prices in Texas, with a focus on San Antonio housing prices and the market overall.

- Even though rental prices have come down since the pandemic, they're still up overall. Can you give us a sense for what's happening in the market, and why we're still seeing high rent prices in San Antonio?
- What's driving high rent prices? Is it purely inflation, or is there something else happening?
- Are landlords seeing what's going on and deciding to raise rents?
- Tens of thousands of people in San Antonio are paying for homes or apartments they can't afford – what can be done about some of the high rent prices?
- Does your organization anticipate that this trend will continue, and we're going to see higher rent prices generally?
- What kind of assistance might be out there for rents in Bexar County and San Antonio? How can renters defray some of the cost increases they're seeing?
- We're seeing an increase in housing costs and there's a direct correlation between that and the increase in evictions – is there any silver lining for renters moving forward?



Key Responses:

Mock Interview on Housing Affordability

Interview Subject: San Antonio–area property owner providing the industry’s perspective on elevated rent prices, cost of building and maintaining properties, options for financial relief for local renters.

On drivers behind housing costs: *“We’re not immune to the same cost drivers that everybody in society has been affected by – inflation. Cumulative inflation is still over 20%, and we’re no different... Property taxes continue to be a main driver of housing costs, while my rents may have gone up 20% on average. In the past 4 years, my property taxes have probably gone up 60% during that same period, my insurance cost has gone up 200%. Everything I buy – from labor to materials – has gone up 20 to 30%. All that reflects in the price of rent – the cost of inputs go up, the cost of the rent goes up.”*

On developing new housing across affordability spectrum: *“Obviously we want to continue to build supply, which we’ve done a decent job of in the past few years. We need to continue that train rolling, to develop new housing. One thing I like to say is all housing is affordable housing. Anything you do to increase the stock of housing – whether it’s called affordable or not – helps in all price ranges. The second thing is that we need to understand that housing providers are subject to the same economic environment that everybody else is. So, the more expensive it is to provide housing, the more expensive that housing is gonna be.”*



Key Responses:

Mock Interview on Housing Affordability

Interview Subject: San Antonio–area property owner providing the industry’s perspective on elevated rent prices, cost of building and maintaining properties, options for financial relief for local renters.

On higher prices correlating with increased evictions: *“Eviction is never the first step. I think that you’ll find that housing providers want to work with their residents to make sure that they can stay and pay the rent because we don’t make money by evicting people, we make money by providing housing. So, if evictions are up, it’s because people are unable to pay – and that isn’t the landlord being a victimizer, it’s a landlord operating in an environment that we’re all in.”*

On market demands: *“If housing pricing is still going up, it’s because our input costs are continuing to go up and we’re paying our employees more and we’re paying more to labor on the market, so it’s gonna catch up eventually...whenever the market changes, everything changes with it.”*



Key Takeaways: Mock Interview Training

- Take advantage of open-ended questions – tell *your* story, not the one the reporter may try to ‘bait’ you to tell.
- Don’t be hesitant to disagree with the premise of the question – if question ‘setup’ is inaccurate, correct the interviewer immediately and pivot to key talking points.
- Tell personalized stories and express empathy for impacted people – whether tenants or property owners impacted by squatters.
- Offer details when advantageous to help tell your story.
 - In crisis response, a detailed timeline of events helps establish credibility and transparency.
- Emphasize that property owners have livelihoods and respond to market pressures like any other business owner/operator.
- Emphasize commitment to providing housing options for those who need it.



PLUS
THANK YOU



New Business

Thank You

Meeting Adjourned



TEXAS APARTMENT ASSOCIATION

2025 Sustainers

PLATINUM



GOLD



SILVER

CAMP Facility Services
Century Air Conditioning Supply
Comm-Fit
CORT
CSC Serviceworks
Cweren Law Firm, PLLC

Dixie Interiors
Entrata
Ferguson Facility Supply
FSI Construction
Gemstar Construction
Genesis

Green Mountain Energy
Guardian Construction
Impact Property Solutions
The Liberty Group
Redi Carpet
Rent.

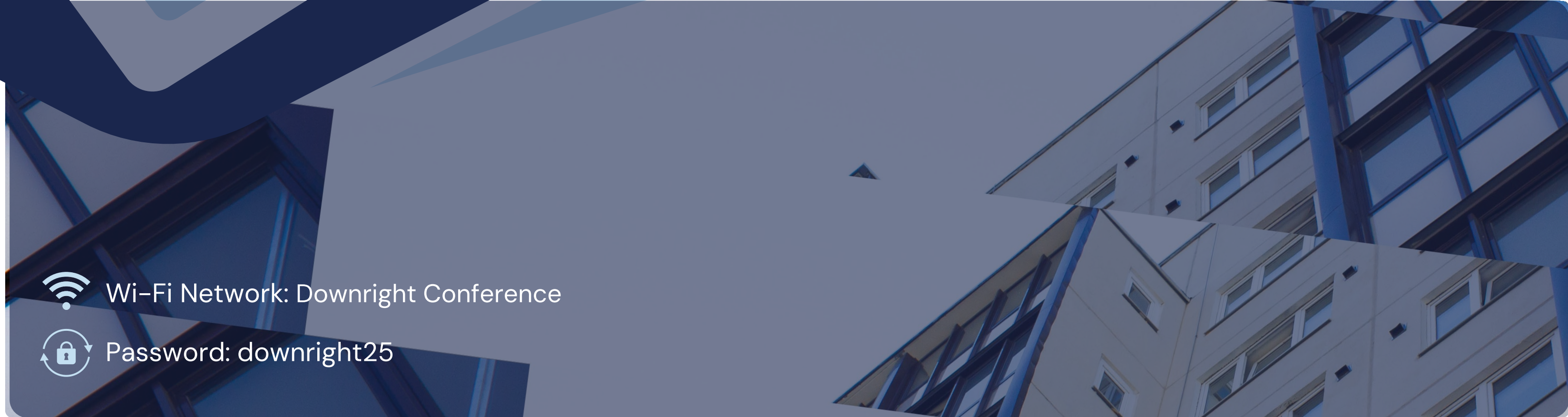
RentDebt Automated Collections
Sherwin-Williams
Smart Apartment Data
Spherexx
Yardi
Zillow Rentals

BRONZE

AAA Plumbers
Airbnb
BANYAN Utility

Blue Moon Software
Foundation Specialists
Massey Services, Inc.

MRI Software
The Guarantors
WeDoTrash



Wi-Fi Network: Downright Conference

Password: downright25

Public Affairs Committee Meeting

 Downright Austin

 February 6, 2025

