

Portland Tenants United - 2021 Renter Survey



Organizing Committee
April, 2022

Introduction

Portland Tenants United (PTU) conducted our second annual survey of Portland area renters throughout the month of January 2022. Nearly 200 people responded. Participants have lived in their homes from several months to 31 years, and live in housing owned by landlords whose property portfolios range in size.

Rent deferral due to COVID was reported by 28% of respondents. Of those, 41 were not displaced from their homes, 8 were, and 5 had pending cases at the time of the survey.

41% of participants experienced conflict with their landlord or manager in 2021, as compared to 47% throughout their entire tenancy. Additionally, 65.5% faced some kind of issue with their housing in 2021. The rate of resolution for these issues was unacceptably low (see page 4). **Notably, nearly 30% of all participants reported experiencing harassment from their landlord or manager in 2021.**

This report provides an overview of our findings, including insights on tenant harassment and constructive evictions. It illustrates an urgent need for effective tenant protections and support, including passing PTU's [anti-harassment ordinance](#) and expanding and strengthening the Rental Service Office (RSO).

Type of landlord	% of Tenants
Large landlord (owns 31+ homes)	40.00%
Small landlord (owns less than 5)	31.18%
Medium landlord (owns 5-30)	24.12%
Lives on the property	2.35%
My family	1.76%
Hotel	0.59%

Top three policy priorities for survey participants:

1. "Real" rent control, with a much lower cap on annual rent increase than what is allowed by state law.
2. A Right to Counsel (free legal representation in eviction court).
3. A Rental Services Office (RSO) that can process and investigate complaints, and collect and track landlord data.

PTU has several [working groups](#) that work collaboratively to build tenant power in the Portland area using different strategies. To learn more about our work and out how you can get involved, visit our website, pdx.tu.org. To contact someone about this report, please email Comms@pdx.tu.org.

Housing Issues and Harassment

Survey respondents were asked to select issues they experienced in 2021 from a list of landlord/manager behaviors in the proposed [Tenant Protection Ordinance](#) (TPO), with the addition of an 'other' box that allowed a text answer. Of the nearly 200 respondents, 68 (34.5%) did not experience *any* of these issues. **Of those 129 tenants (65.5%) who did, 58 felt that they were being harassed.** Here are some experiences they shared:

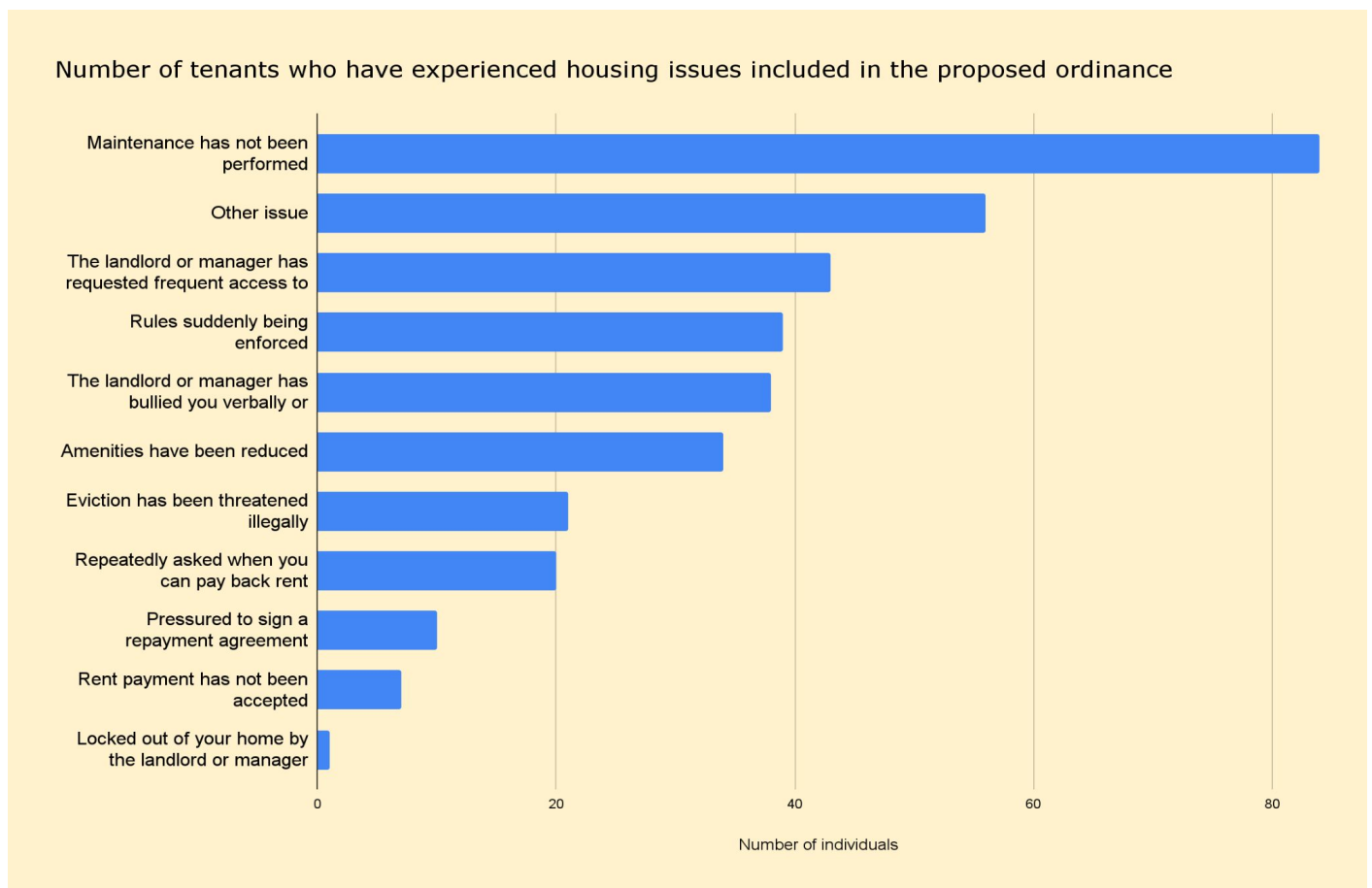
"I think they want to move me out so they can raise rent further for a new tenant."

"Constant calls and text over the same issue of rent. Showed proof but that didn't seem to matter. Told me I couldn't have anyone over at my house."

"It was a form of harassment, in that I was being completely ignored. Many of the other tenants I spoke to experienced the same."

"Landlord is doing everything possible to get me out without actually evicting."

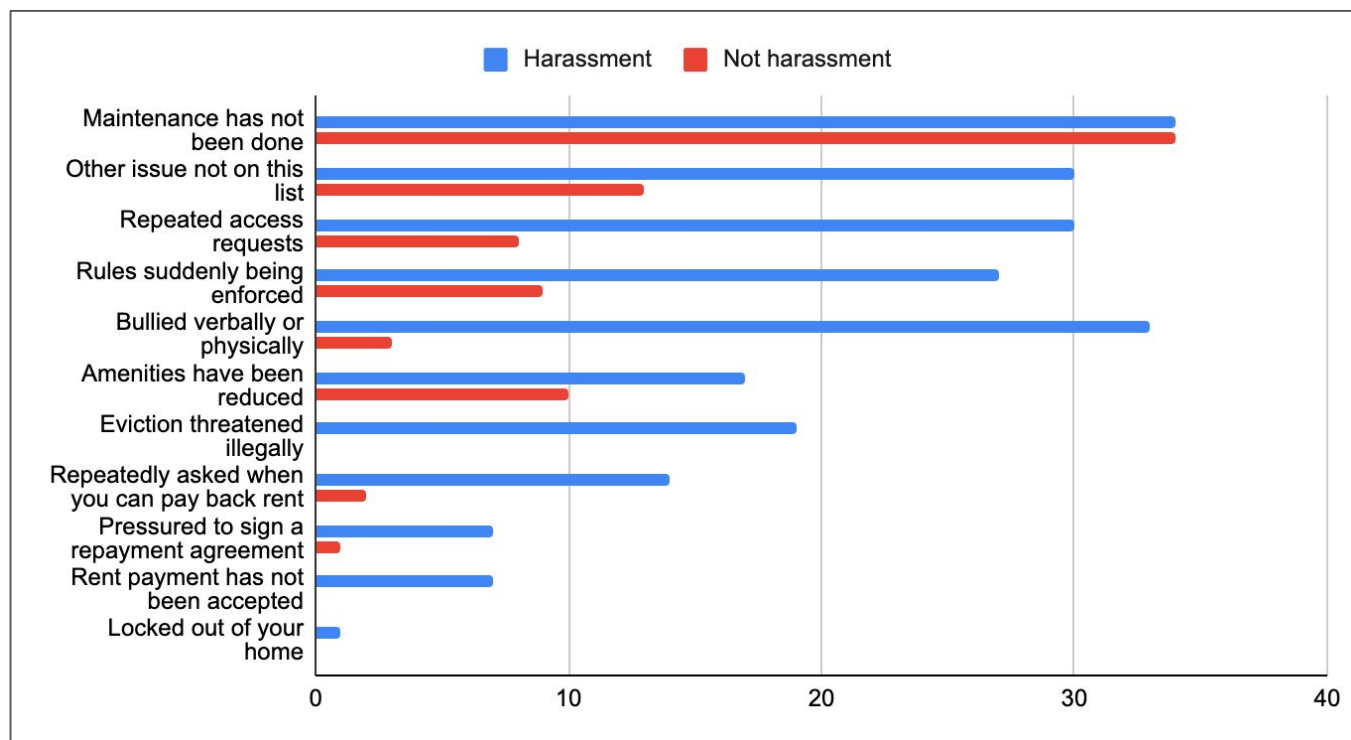
Additionally, **of the nearly half of respondents who experienced some kind of threat to their housing stability, one third indicated that harassment** from the landlord or property manager was one of the reasons they experienced precarity in 2021.



When we look at the perception of harassment disaggregated by individual issue some themes emerge. Firstly, harassment (usually defined as acting in ‘bad faith’) is the predominant interpretation for every housing issue except maintenance, where it is equal with non-harassment. Given that slightly less than half of respondents who reported one or more of these issues feel they are being harassed, this means that **harassment cases usually include multiple housing issues**. This is consistent with how the TPO recognizes harassment as a holistic behavioral pattern and intention, rather than a specific action like reducing amenities or failing to perform maintenance.

Second, there were some issues where harassment was *significantly* more likely to be the behavioral interpretation than others. These are a. rent payment not accepted, b. eviction threatened illegally, c. rules suddenly being enforced that were not previously enforced, d. repeated request for access beyond what seems reasonable, and e. bullying.

Whether or not tenants who experienced a specific housing issue feel they are being harassed overall

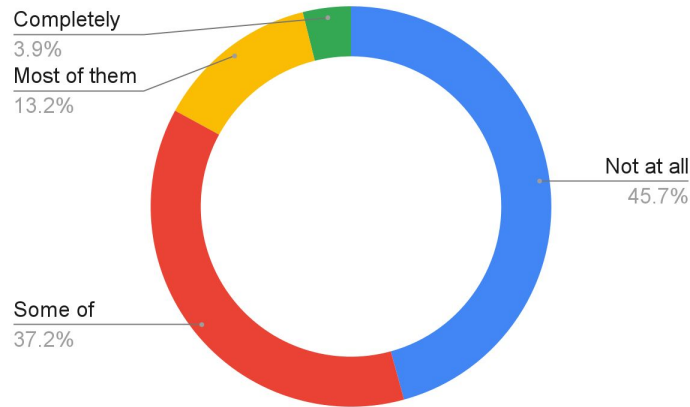


Resolving housing issues

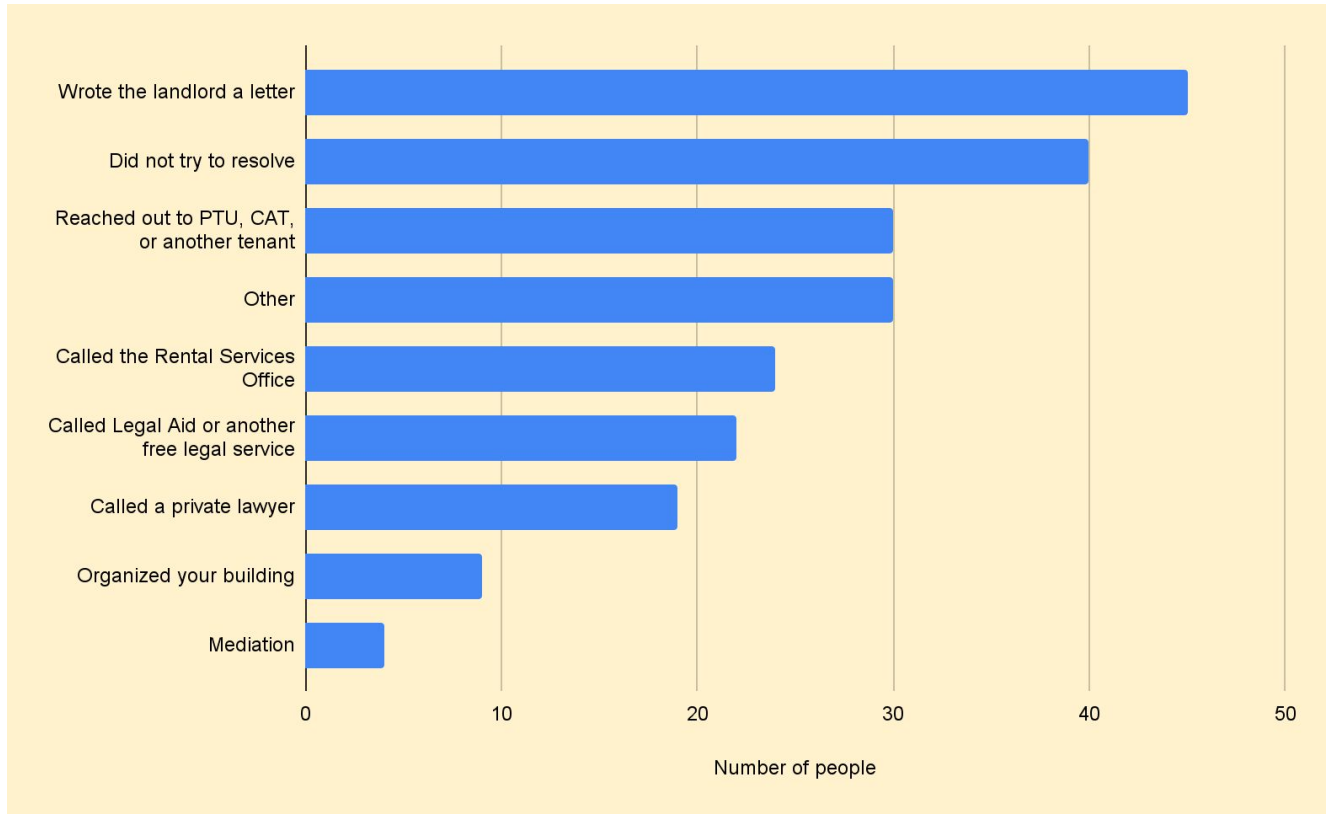
Respondents selected as all methods they engaged in attempting to resolve their housing issues. Notably, 31% did not even try to resolve them. Some of the ‘other’ category responses include contacting the landlord or manager through channels other than a formal letter; acquiescing to the landlord or manager; and reporting issues to the Bureau of Development Services. The rate of success was low, with **only 4% of the above housing issues being completely resolved, and 46% not being resolved at all**.

The first figure on the following page shows the total rate of resolution, the next shows the methods used, and the last disaggregates the methods by the rate of resolution. The latter shows that ‘not at all’ is the predominant outcome for every method except the RSO and ‘other’, for which ‘some of them’ is the highest. Notably mediation, organizing the building into a tenant union, and engaging a private attorney offered no complete resolutions.

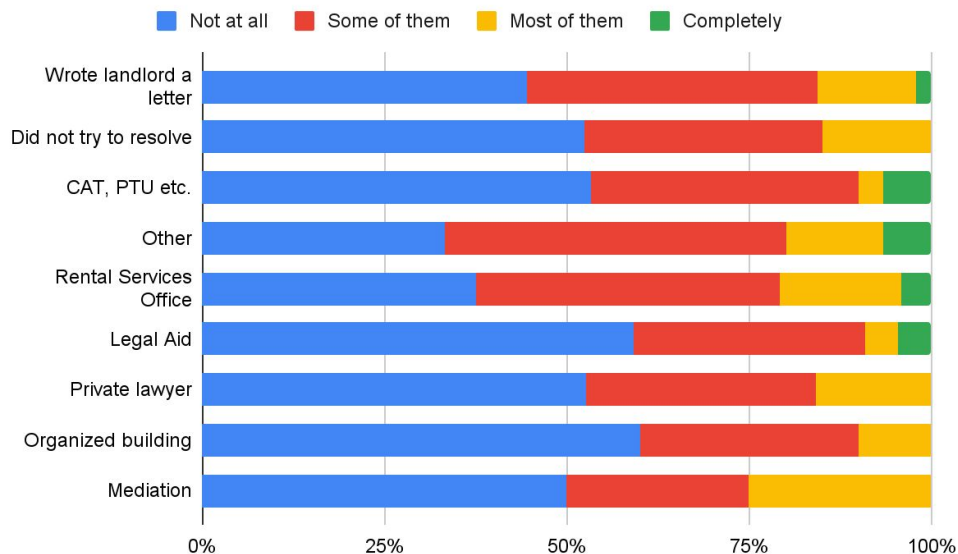
Extent to which housing issues were resolved for each tenant (N=129)



How people tried to resolve housing issues

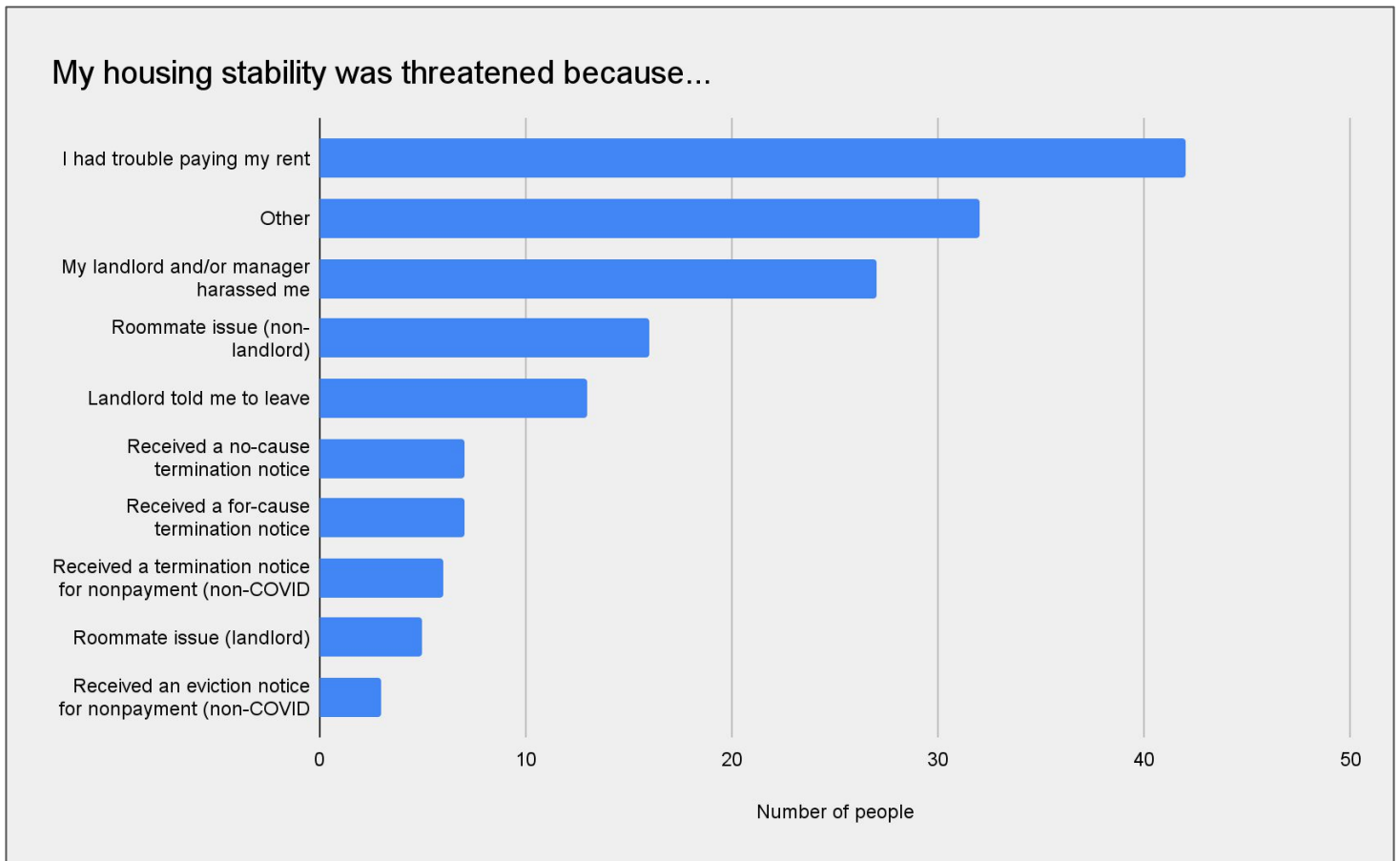


Resolution by method

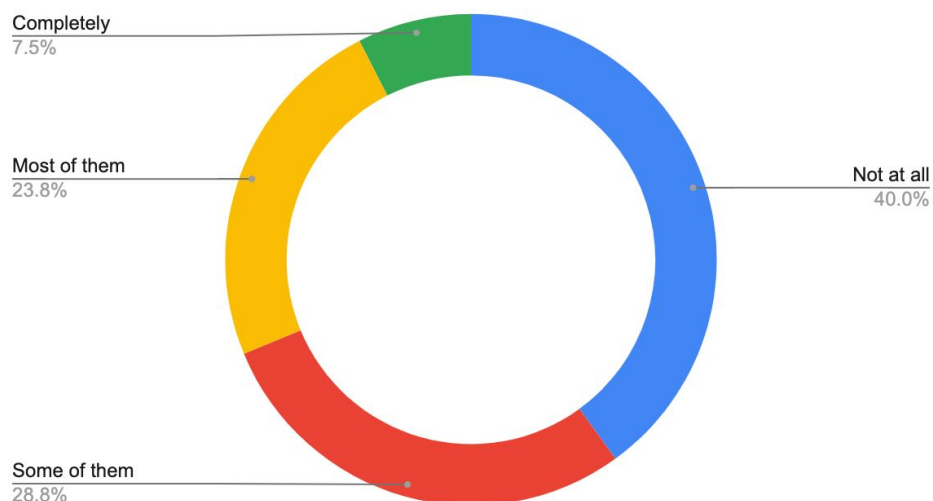


Housing precarity

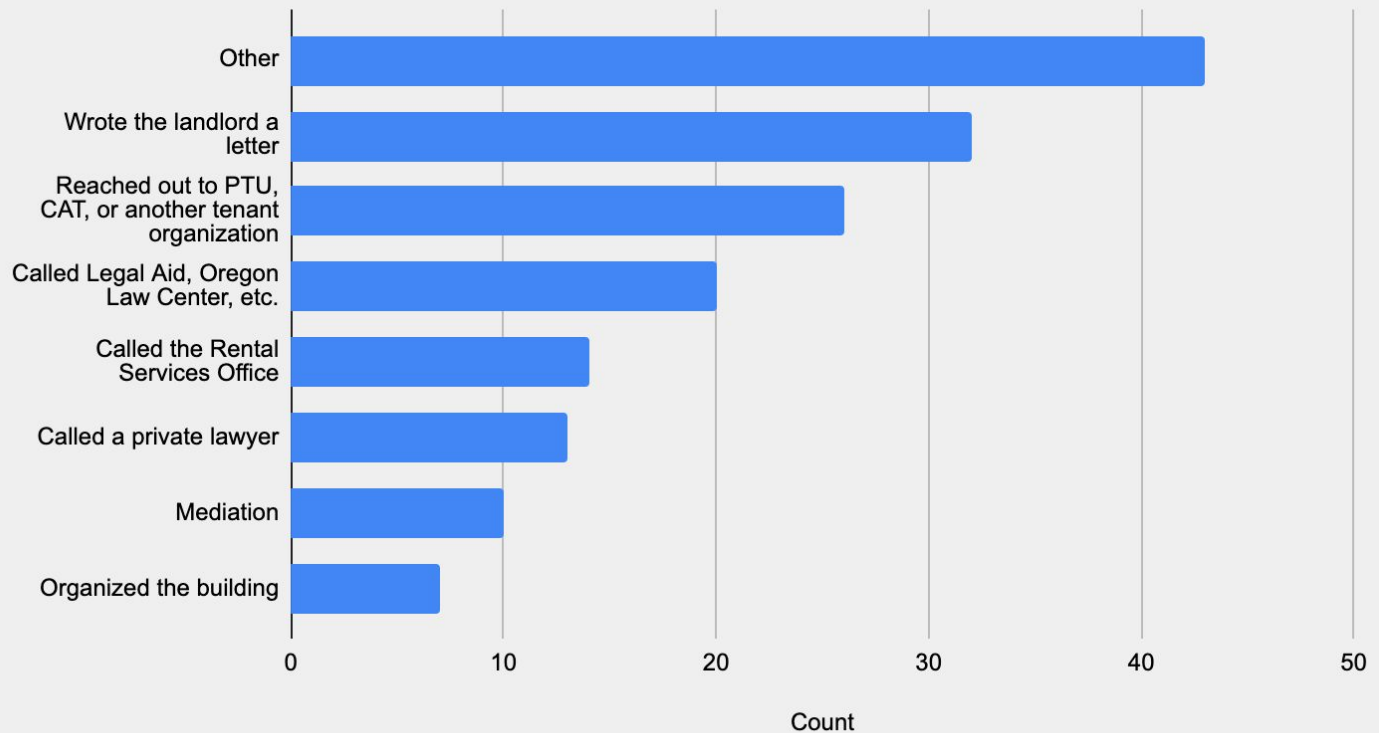
Roughly half of all tenants who took the survey reported experiencing some kind of direct threat to their housing stability in 2021. Of those who selected 'other' and provided a text response, the most frequent answers were a. harassment or conflict with a roommate or building neighbor, and b. a rent increase. As with housing issues, the rate of resolution was not high.



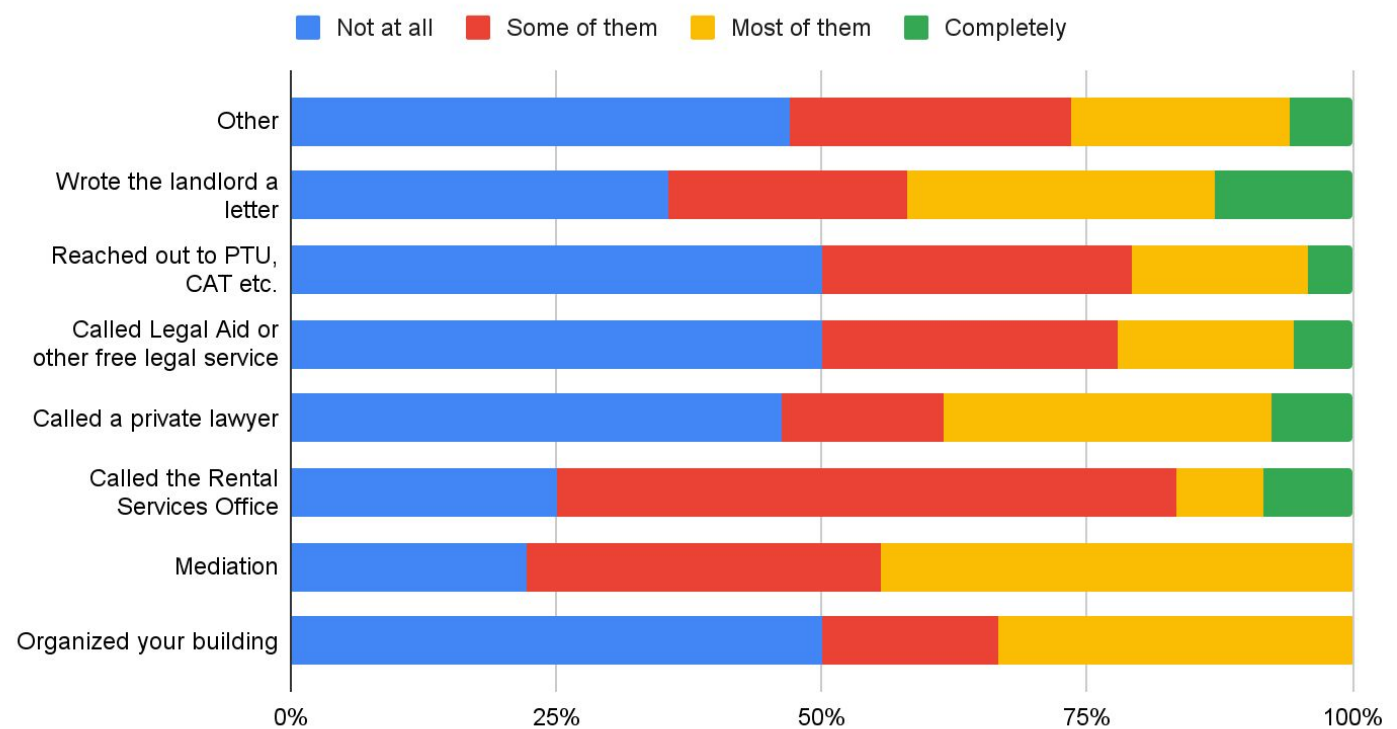
Extent to which housing stability issues were resolved



How people tried to address housing threats

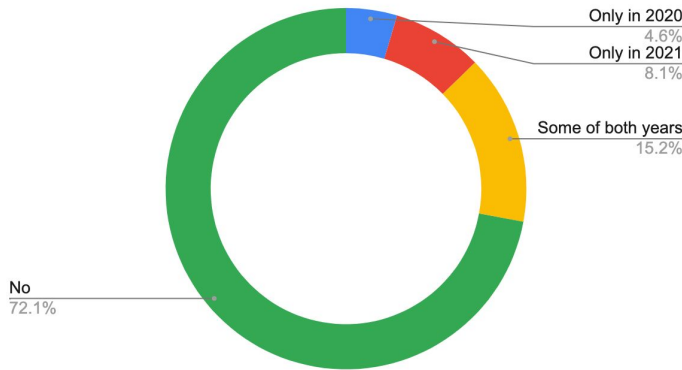


Resolution by method

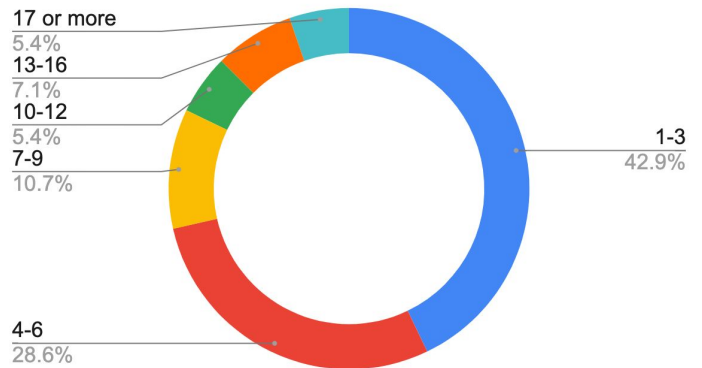


Overall, 28% of respondents (55 tenants) have had to defer rent payment due to COVID related income loss at some point. The majority missed rent payment in the one to six month range. Receiving rental assistance from the state's OREAP program was the main way this was addressed, followed by working out a payment plan with the landlord or manager. However, eight people were displaced from their homes, and five had pending cases.

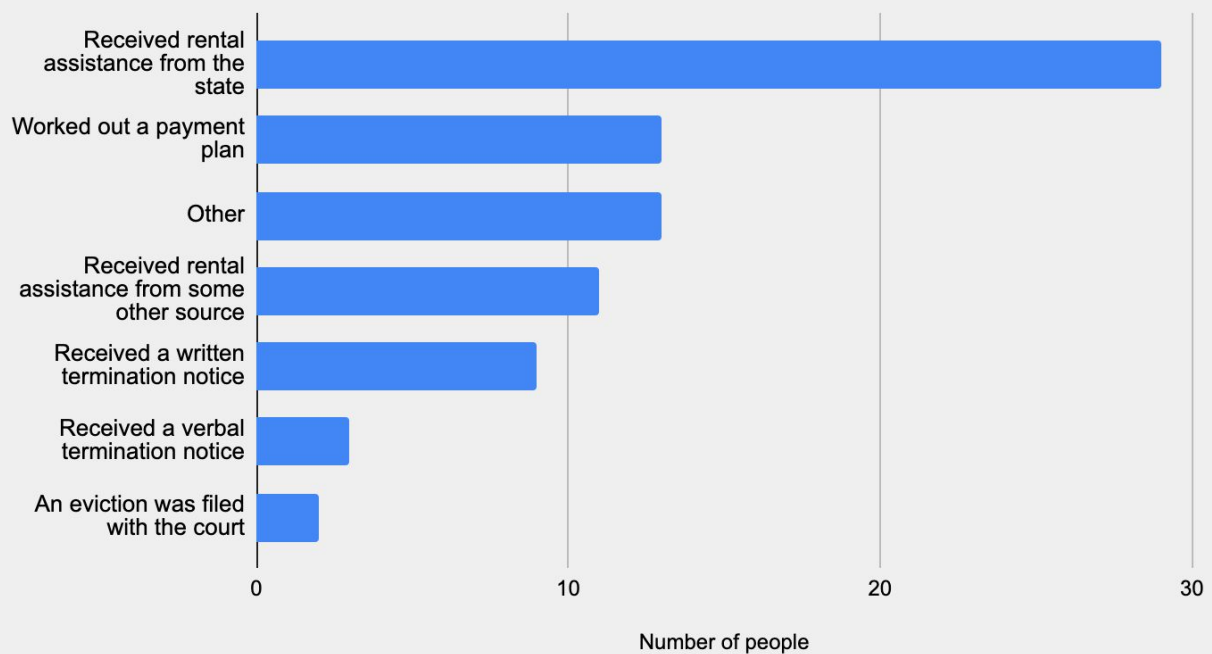
Have you had to defer rent payment due to COVID?



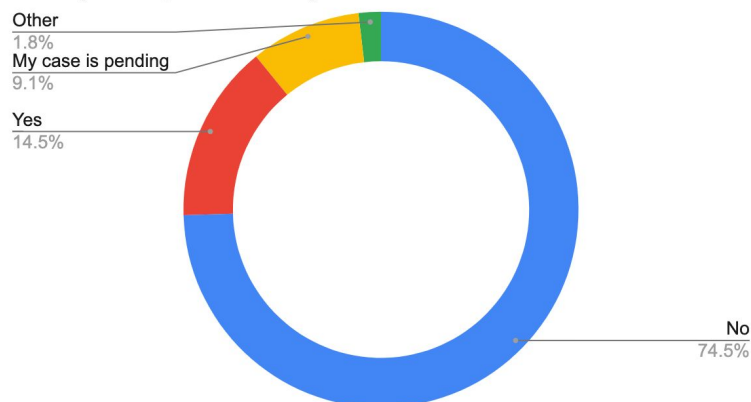
Number of months made partial or no rent payment (N=55)



How were COVID related payment issues resolved



Were you displaced from your home as a result?



Concluding remarks

These survey results illustrate that renters in the Portland area experience a myriad of issues common to residents of both publicly owned and private market rental housing. However, unlike other cities that are guided by progressive values, **support to resolve these issues for the peaceful and quiet enjoyment of their homes is inadequate.** When asked to select their top three policy priorities for 2022, **32% of respondents selected “a Rental Services Office that can process and investigate complaints, and track landlord data.”** An anti-harassment ordinance combined with a well-resourced, robust RSO is crucial to the stability and wellbeing of Portlanders who rent their homes.

We close this report with the words of our fellow tenants:

“I really wish there was more consistency in housing laws and rules. I wish that moving didn’t involve a gamble in knowing whether maintenance issues would be resolved without conflict.”

“It’s been absolutely awful. Unit is unlivable, I cannot secure a tenant lawyer due to demand and lack of money. I feel absolutely stranded and without support.”

“There is not enough help available to people experiencing these issues.”

“I moved, after being unable to fight the for-cause termination because of cost.”

“Landlord lied to me about lease agreement and tried to force me to leave and wouldn’t back off until threatened with a lawyer. I’ve dealt with bullying from the landlord and punitive raised rents, despite already being well above fair market value.”

The Tenant Protection Ordinance to address harassment and constructive evictions is proudly endorsed by:

- The Community Alliance of Tenants
- Oregon Renters in Action
- SEIU Local 49
- Self Enhancement, Inc.
- Portland Metro People's Coalition
- Portland: Neighbors Welcome
- Portland Jobs with Justice
- Lents Strong Housing Team
- 350 PDX
- BerniePDX
- Economic Justice Action Group of the 1st Unitarian Church
- Hunger Free Oregon
- Impact NW
- Oregon Progressive Party
- Party for Socialism and Liberation (Portland)
- PDX Alliance for Self Care
- SFGPD + Stop Zenith Energy - Cedar Action Network
- SURJ PDX
- Uptown Renters Association
- Sisters of The Road
- Defense Fund PDX