

# Portland Tenants United - 2021 Renter Survey

## *Harassment and the Rental Services Office*



### 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 tenure lengths ranging from several months to 31 years, and live in housing owned by landlords whose property portfolios range in size (see Figure 1).

Rent deferral due to COVID was reported by 28% of respondents (see Figures 2 and 3). 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.

**Nearly 30% of all participants reported experiencing harassment from their landlord or manager in 2021.** This report provides an overview of our findings on tenant harassment and constructive evictions, and illustrates the potential for the Rental Service Office (RSO) to fill a critical gap in offering support to tenants in crisis.

#### Contact:

Lauren Everett ([laurene@pdxtu.org](mailto:laurene@pdxtu.org)) or  
Leeor Schweitzer ([leeor@pdxtu.org](mailto:leeor@pdxtu.org))

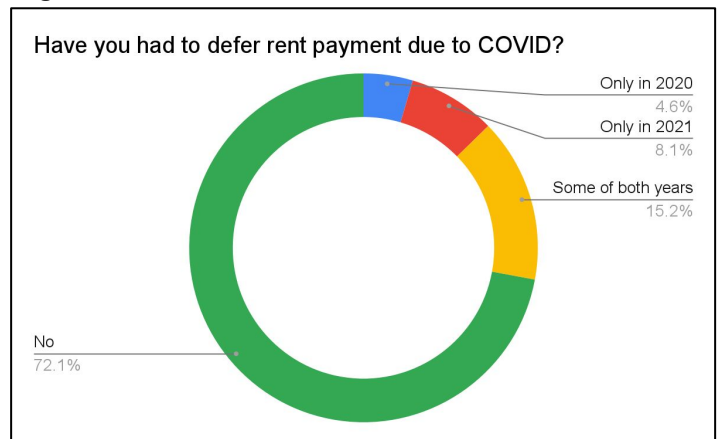
#### To learn more:

<https://www.pdxtu.org/tpo>

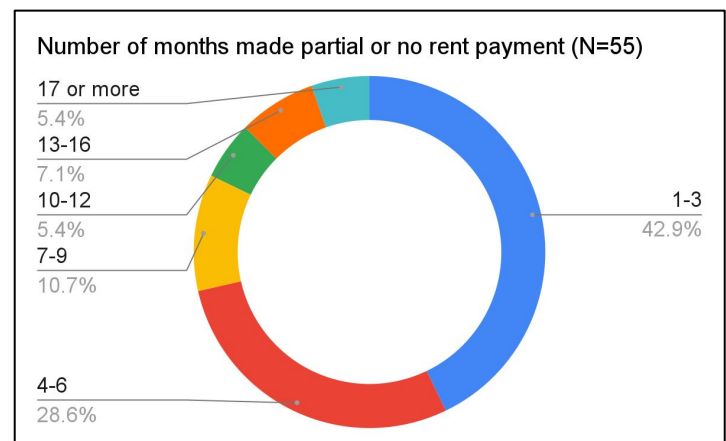
**Figure 1: Type of landlord (N=170 with this knowledge)**

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%

**Figure 2: COVID-related rent deferral**



**Figure 3: Duration of COVID-related rent deferral**



## Housing Issues and Harassment

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

"Landlord harassed & bullied me to move, then hired an attorney and filed a bogus complaint for for-cause termination that I had to get dismissed on the terms that I would move, even though I had already leased another apt to get away from the harassment!!"

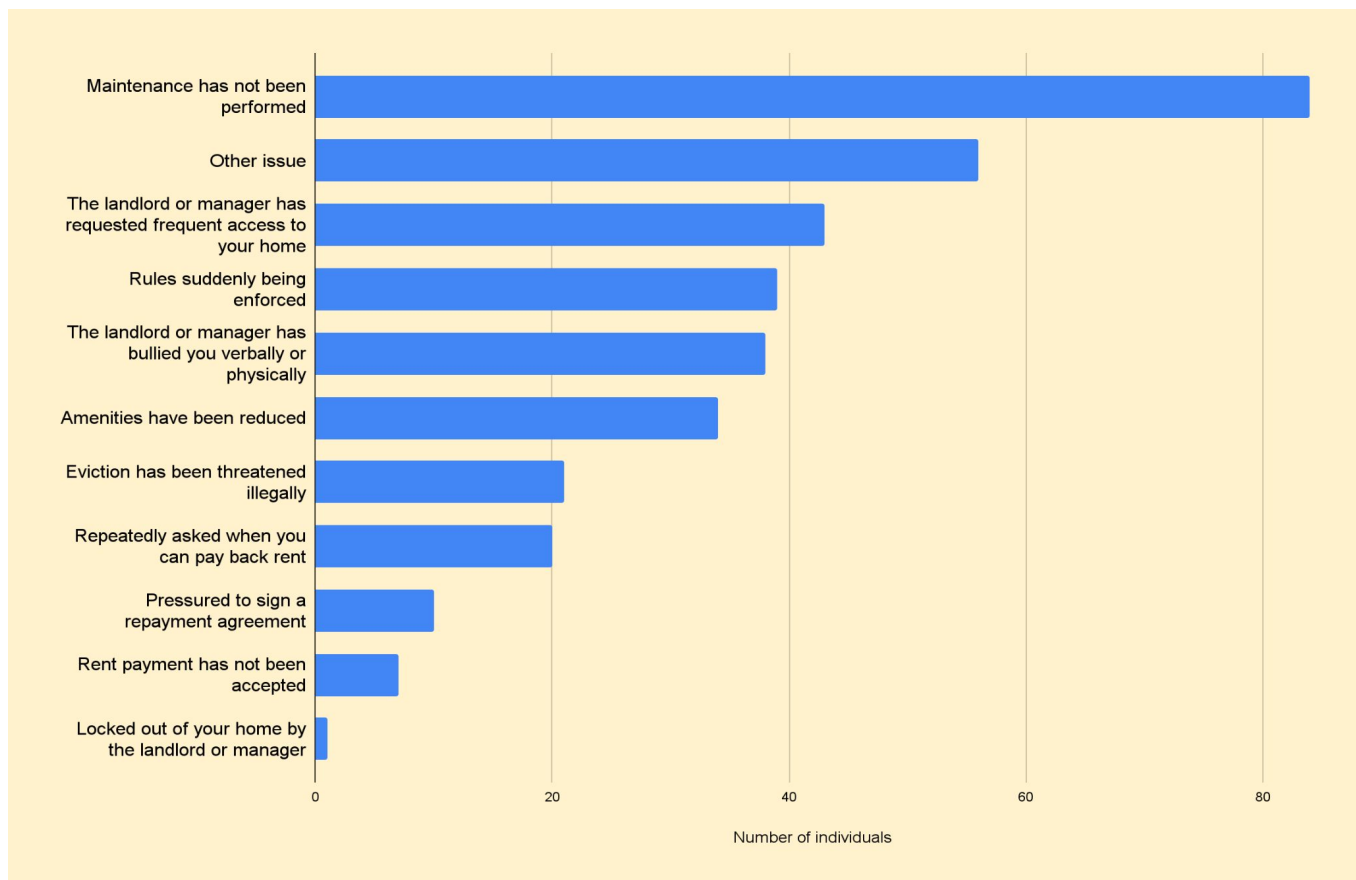
"I think they want to move me out so they can raise rent further for a new tenant."

"It seems as though my landlord is a true sociopath and enjoys threatening the tenants. I felt trapped. I did however move towards the end of 2021 and have felt so relieved to not be the victim of a sociopath on a power trip anymore."

"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.

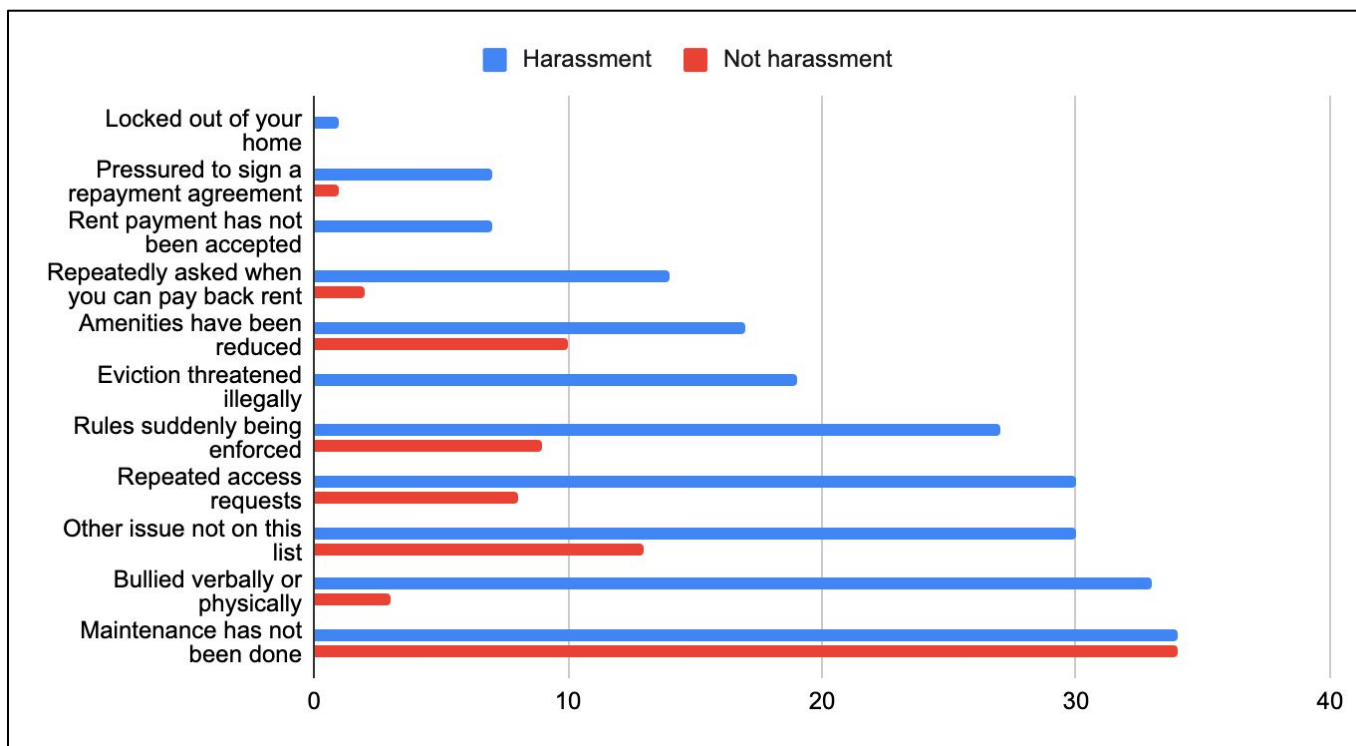
**Figure 4: Number of tenants who experienced housing issues included in the proposed ordinance**



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 less than half of respondents who reported one or more of these issues feel they are being harassed, this means that **harassment cases usually entail 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.

**Figure 5: Whether or not the tenant’s housing issues (holistically) feel like harassment**

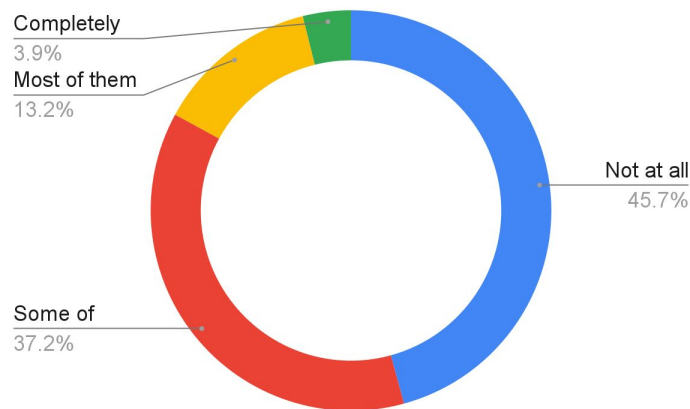


## Resolving housing issues

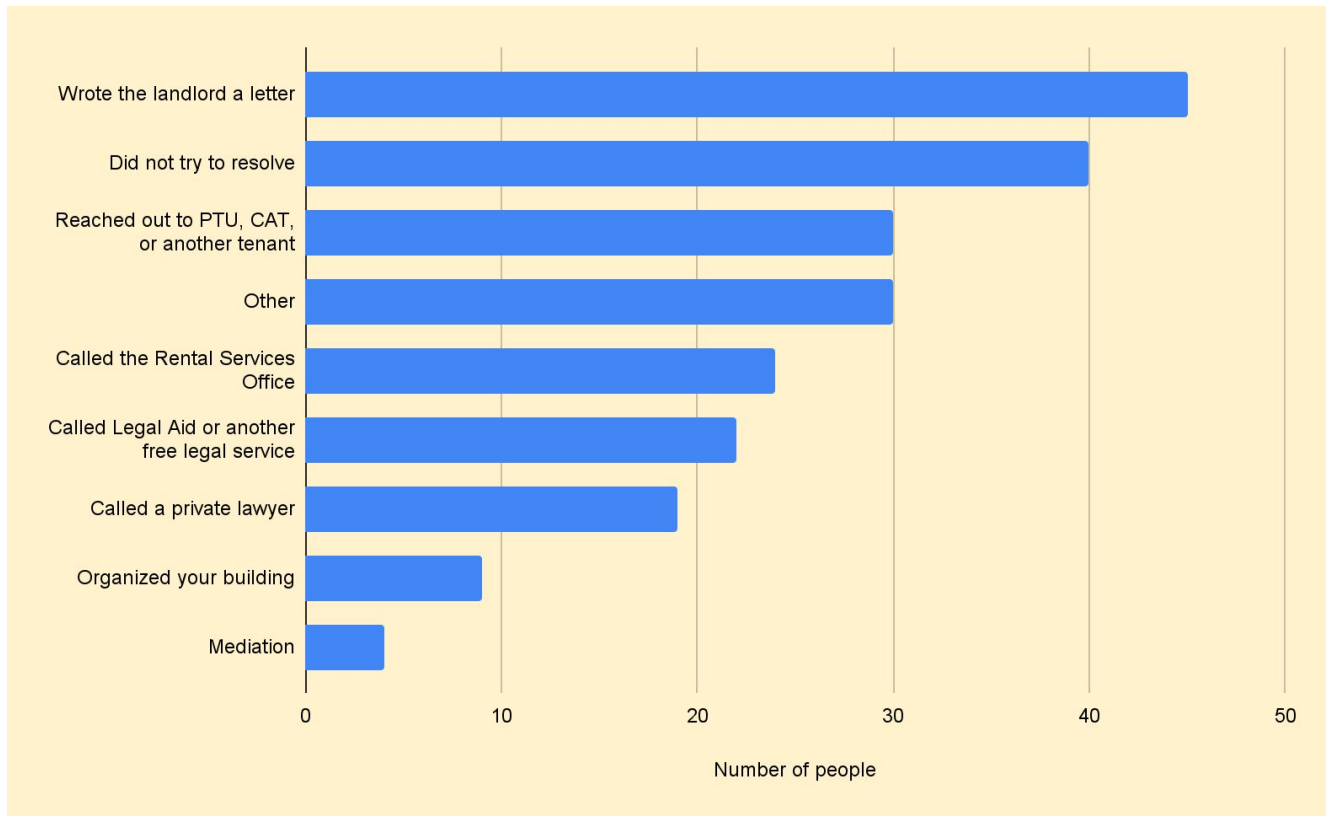
Respondents selected as all methods they engaged in attempting to resolve their housing issues. Notably, 31% did not even try to resolve them. Some of the ‘other’ category responses include contacting the landlord or manager through channels other than a formal letter; acquiescing to the landlord or 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**.

Figure 6 shows the total rate of resolution, Figure 7 shows the methods used, and Figure 8 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.

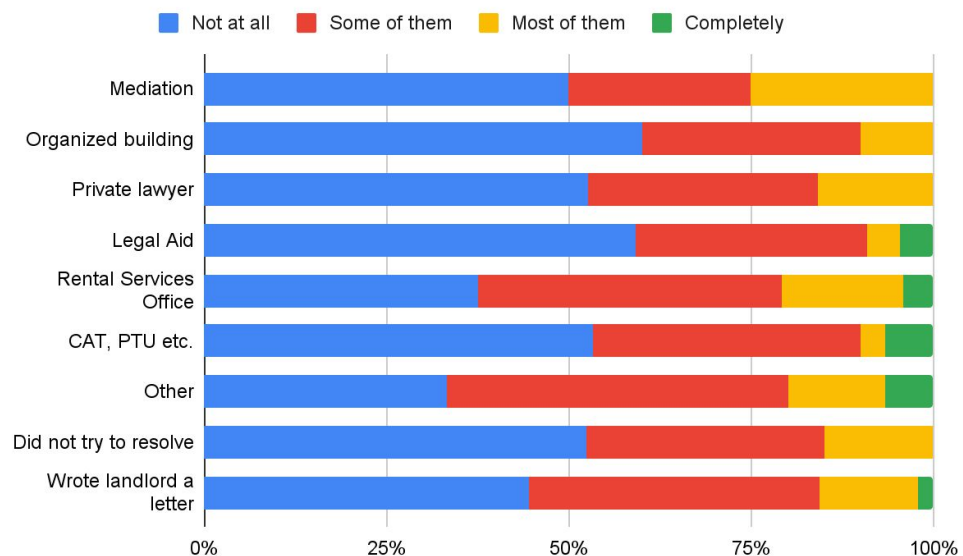
**Figure 6: Extent to which housing issues were resolved (N=129)**



**Figure 7: Resolution methods**



**Figure 8: Resolution by method**



## 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.”** This is an even higher number than for expanding or extending COVID eviction protections, and is superseded only by support for a Right to Counsel (35%) and rent control with a much lower cap (63%). In conclusion, 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 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.”

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