

Your Information

Name Doug T

Title Member of SOS Coordinating Committee

Campaign Information

Name of Formation

Stomp Out Slumlords

Formation's Mission Statement

We fight evictions and support tenant organizing throughout the Washington metro area.

What work have you done so far?

Almost five years ago, we started canvassing tenants threatened with eviction to educate them about their rights and encourage them to defend themselves in court. Since then, we have gradually focused more and more on organizing tenant unions and going on the offensive to demand concessions from major landlords and developers and to build tenant power in the Washington area.

During the pandemic, we committed to the movement to cancel rent and expanded our organizing efforts into more than 25 buildings in and around DC and supported rent strikes. Since the Spring of 2020, we have mobilized hundreds of people to protest politicians and landlords and stop illegal evictions through direct action. We believe the political pressure we put on city leaders and economic pressure we put on the landlord class were instrumental to extending DC's eviction moratorium into the Fall of 2021 and preserving important emergency tenant protections until the present day.

During Spring 2021, on the first business day after a weekend protest we held outside the home of Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development John Falcicchio, DC finally rolled out its rental assistance program - STAY DC. We immediately rushed into action and built a program to help tenants complete the program's difficult online applications. We worked with Councilmember Janeese Lewis George's office to organize STAY workshops in the community. Dozens of DSA activists helped hundreds of tenants secure millions of dollars in relief. Meanwhile, we continued to mobilize tenants for protests demanding a simpler and more accessible application and faster distribution of funds. In the months after we began our STAY DC campaign, the online application was translated and simplified and the DC government began setting up infrastructure to help people request funds. DC has now disbursed a higher share of its emergency rental assistance funds than almost any state in the country, while eviction filings remain much lower than they were before the pandemic.

In the past year, six buildings where we were organizing were sold, and we have helped tenants exercise their rights under the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA). We are helping one tenant group move towards buying their building as a limited equity co-op. Others are using their TOPA rights to collectively bargain with a new landlord to win better conditions and protections against rent hikes. If we are successful, we will carve out nearly 300 units of affordable housing in gentrifying Northwest neighborhoods.

In the course of the struggle to cancel rent, we built a committee of leaders representing buildings where we were active who met to discuss the direction of the movement and to conduct training and political education. We also started publishing a newsletter to share stories and strategies across buildings and to supporters in the wider community.

How many active members do you have?

We have about 50 dedicated volunteers, including organizers who are embedded with a building as well as people working on logistics, communications, finance, and data.

What is your plan for 2022 if this formation is chosen as a priority?

In 2022 we will keep building tenant power in buildings across the city. We will continue to fight against the resumption of evictions, both by organizing for continued legal protections and more relief money, and by renewing our tenants rights canvassing. As the threat of mass evictions recedes, we also want to shift from defensive strategies to offensive ones. We want to politicize ongoing fights against housing conditions, especially by demanding accountability for slumlords that received huge bailouts in the form of STAY DC funds.

This past summer in a meeting with SOS members and regional tenant leaders, we decided to continue to build up the regional tenant leader structure, give it a more formal identity and name and experiment with neighborhood-level groups. We will continue to work towards this goal in 2022.

Does your formation have structure or leadership roles? Who holds them?

SOS has a coordinating committee of 10 senior organizers. All active organizers check in with a coordinating committee member on a regular basis. Organizers and leaders from tenant committees meet on a monthly basis.

How will your formation help build capacity across the chapter, specifically for branch Working Groups engaging with similar work?

During the pandemic, we developed a new organizer training program with the support of some experienced local union organizers. This training was essential to expanding our capacity and allowed us to respond to the explosion of interest in anti-eviction

organizing in 2020. We especially concentrate on helping organizers build relationships, conduct effective one-on-one conversations, and move people to action. These skills are the most fundamental tools for union organizing, and we believe every socialist should be familiar with them.

To increase our ability to mobilize chapter members, we will publicize our work in more locations next year. We will work with comms to distribute our newsletter. We will also create a short “job description,” with contact information, of what tenant organizing entails. Sharing that job description in the Washington Socialist, pinning it in a message on #tenantsrights, and/or collaborating with the Member Mobilization Department of a Member Engagement Committee will make it easier for chapter members to get involved.

We have increased the regional reach and integration of our work in the past year. We now organize at two complexes in Alexandria, VA, one complex in Chillum, MD and one complex in Greenbelt, MD; we have led anti-eviction canvasses in Alexandria and Fairfax, VA, and in Adelphi and Greenbelt, MD; and our leadership includes organizers from the NoVA and Prince George’s County branches. The NoVA tenant organizing working group and SOS work in sync, and we have made efforts to recruit organizers in the MoCo and PG County branches. We plan to keep increasing the depth and breadth of our branch organizing in the coming year, as well.

We think our most important contribution to the chapter is training members into effective organizers. We have seen people who have gone through our training use what they learned beyond the tenant struggle, in organizing at work and in the wider community.

How will your formation recruit for the chapter?

SOS believes one of the best DSA recruitment tools is actually winning power. When people see the success of our organizing, it raises a natural curiosity, who are these “democratic socialists” and why are they at the center of these successful struggles? We have recruited many working class people to engage in explicitly “political” struggles, some of them for the first time in their lives. SOS offers an on-ramp for DSA curious people to a serious and often intensely personally transformational organizing project to dive into, which can lead to a lasting commitment to the org that otherwise would have never been fostered. Recruitment for us is about fostering class struggle and building class formation. We believe the growth of the chapter is an outgrowth of this primary struggle. We are not shy about talking about our organization or our political analysis and we look to do more political education in the coming year.

Are there any recurring or one-time expenses that your formation does not currently have the money for but would purchase if it became available? (This is for expenses like projectors, large union printed banners, software, targeted FB ads, food at meetings, or outside training).

Funding from the chapter has been instrumental to providing professional Spanish-English interpretation at our committee meetings. Since many of the tenants we organize are monolingual Spanish speakers, interpretation is essential for bringing leaders together. Continuing that work would be our top priority for any additional funds from the chapter.

If our significant translation resource needs were fully funded, and there was an excess amount of chapter funds available, we would be interested in additional money for printing our newsletter, bigger equipment for demonstrations and outdoor events, such as a large tent and improved PA, and in our biggest reach, a passenger van/small bus. The Autonomous Tenant Union Network is also planning an in-person conference next year and we may want assistance to send a delegation.

Additional Information on your 2021 Priority Request

Our website: <https://www.stompoutslumlords.org/>

Our report on our work in 2020:

<https://www.stompoutslumlords.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/No-Job-No-Rent-Stomp-Out-Slumlords-Feb-2021-Report-1.pdf>