



THE HIDDEN HEIST **TENNESSEE**

***Airbnb and the Corporate-Driven
Housing Crisis in Tennessee***



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INTRODUCTION

State Bans and the Rise of Corporate Power

Communities across the U.S. today face growing threats to our physical, environmental, and economic survival, along with increasingly brazen corporate and authoritarian power grabs. While the second Trump regime has pulled back the curtain on egregious levels of corporate and billionaire control over our democracy, decades of “business as usual” corporate interference (in both red and blue states) got us here. Long before Trump entered office for a second term, corporations have worked through industry groups to covertly buy, bully, and bamboozle lawmakers and the American public in order to rig the rules of our economy and democracy to line their pockets — while they hide in plain sight. And as scholars have noted, the deeply unequal economic conditions that corporations have shaped and continue to benefit from in our country are essential conditions enabling authoritarianism to take root.¹

An important but largely invisible piece of the corporate quest to control American homes, workplaces, and democracy has been the rise of state laws — pushed by corporations and their lobbyists — that prevent communities from passing local policies protecting us at work, at home, and in our neighborhoods in the face of corporate greed. Through the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and industry lobbying groups, corporations have proliferated state bans at a rapid scale in recent years.² Corporations have pushed these sweeping state bans — also referred to as “preemption” in some spaces — in all 50 states.³ These state bans undermine democracy and block local leaders and residents from working together to pass policies addressing basic needs for working families. Under state bans, essential protections like reasonable caps on rent, paid sick leave protections, incentives for affordable housing, and higher minimum wages have been stolen from millions of people.⁴

State bans have their roots in a white supremacist history, in which Southern white elites used state laws to suppress the political power and freedoms of Black people and thwart local efforts to advance more participatory, multiracial democracy. And this legacy continues in the racialized impacts of state bans today.⁵ Corporate-driven state bans harm the health and wellbeing of working people — especially working class communities of color — in myriad ways.⁶ The case studies in this report focus on state bans blocking local housing and workplace protections, which have disproportionately impacted communities of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, immigrants, and disabled people.⁷ And increasingly, ideologically driven politicians, their corporate allies, and billionaire donors are pushing state bans to overtly target the safety and fundamental freedoms of all of these groups in ever-more oppressive ways.⁸

Corporations have also used state bans — and the arena of state government — to test tactics they are now unleashing at the federal level to assert dangerous levels of control over our democracy while demolishing checks on their power and profit. Understanding this stealth strategy of corporate power — including the corporate actors behind these bans, the tactics they use, and how these bans have blocked our freedoms and derailed our democracy — is critical to fighting back against the corporate-backed authoritarianism harming us all.

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Banning Affordability: Tennessee and the Corporate Stranglehold on Housing

There are few places where corporate control is felt more acutely than in housing. Corporate tactics to solidify control over housing and housing policy across the country have driven escalating rents, deteriorating housing conditions, and waves of evictions,⁹ especially over the past six years.¹⁰ Thirty-three states ban local rent stabilization.¹¹ Meanwhile, corporate talking points against rent ceilings and tenant protections are often treated as fact and parroted by lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to justify state bans and prevent communities from passing sorely needed local housing solutions.

And in city after city, debates about housing scarcity and how to increase supply obscure the reality that corporate landlords, real estate interests, and private equity firms have very often manufactured scarcity and driven escalating affordability crises that they profit from at every step of the way. They buy up available stock to create luxury housing in gentrifying neighborhoods or short-term housing for tourists.¹² They collude to raise rates far beyond inflation.¹³ And they evict tenants in favor of higher paying residents.¹⁴ State bans on rent stabilization and other local solutions to ensure affordability and protect tenants have been a key strategy to advance corporate control over our housing. And these bans perpetuate a cycle of crisis to the benefit of corporate returns, while communities suffer enormously.¹⁵

This is especially evident in states like Tennessee, where corporate landlords across the state — alongside Airbnb and its allies — have bought, bullied, and bamboozled state lawmakers into siphoning off sorely needed rental housing into short-term rentals, while banning local solutions that would support the preservation and creation of affordable housing. The corporate lockdown on housing solutions has pushed housing prices to the point where many longtime working families in cities across the state are simply unable to find an affordable place to live. Between 2019-2025, rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Knoxville, for example, increased more than in any other metro region in the United States — by a glaring 56%.¹⁶ Across the state, due to the corporate-driven ban on rent stabilization, 912,950 households¹⁷ live in units with unlimited rent hikes. Meanwhile, state bans on inclusionary zoning and tenant protections have prevented communities from advancing nearly any solutions to the affordability crisis they face — locking a growing number of Tennesseans out of housing in their own state while luring higher income residents and out of town visitors.

WHAT ARE STATE BANS?

State laws — often pushed by corporations, their industry groups, and lobbyists — that prevent local communities from passing policies that create essential protections for working people in one or more issue area. Referred to as “preemption” in some spaces, state bans have become a tried and true strategy of the corporate deregulation agenda by dismantling existing local policies that check their power and profit — like local minimum wage ordinances — and blocking future ones from taking effect. Bans may 1) block communities from setting local standards that go beyond state law on a specific issue; 2) put strict limitations on how communities can set standards on a specific issue, or which aspects of the issue they can regulate at the local level; or 3) block communities from setting local standards on a specific issue, even when no state standard exists — thus shutting communities out of protections entirely (beyond the bare minimum of what is required by federal law).

State bans now exist in all 50 states, including some form of affordable housing or workers’ rights related ban.¹⁸ We define these bans as:

- ⚡ Affordable housing bans: any state bans that constrain communities’ ability to pass local policies that support access to affordable housing — like rent stabilization, just cause eviction protections, and incentives for affordable housing.
- ⚡ Workers’ rights bans: any state bans that constrain local communities’ ability to pass policies that set baseline standards for working people — like minimum wage ordinances, paid leave requirements, and fair scheduling policies, requirements, and fair scheduling policies.

TENNESSEE'S LEGACY OF CORPORATE POWER

Over the past 25 years, corporations have amassed tremendous power over Tennessee communities and the Tennessee state legislature. Lured by false promises of trickle-down prosperity, politicians have worked closely with business interests to bring corporations like Dell,¹⁹ Amazon,²⁰ and Oracle²¹ to Nashville and other cities.²² Meanwhile, the state's economic development agency sells Tennessee as a “proud” right-to-work²³ state.²⁴ And since 2013, Tennessee lawmakers have banned local governments from raising the minimum wage²⁵ or creating other labor protections for working people like ensuring fair scheduling and paid leave.²⁶

When community activists and progressive local officials have sought to put checks on tax giveaways and create safeguards for working people, tenants, and the environment, corporate players and their allies in the statehouse have batted down those efforts time and again via bans and other tactics. Wage suppression combined with state bans and development policies that favor new, higher income residents over existing working and middle-class residents have created a corporate-driven housing emergency.

TENNESSEE'S HOUSING BANS

Corporate-driven state bans in Tennessee have severely limited the ways that local communities can address the housing crisis. Some of the major state bans related to housing in Tennessee include:

- ⚡ **Rent stabilization and tenant rights.** Tennessee has no statewide rent stabilization law, and since 1996 has barred local governments from limiting the amount of rent landlords can charge, or how frequently they can raise the rent.²⁷ (The Affordable Housing and Tenant Protection Act, which would reverse the state's ban on local rent stabilization ordinances, has been stalled since February 2025.²⁸) Corporate-backed bans also prohibit Tennessee cities from enforcing tenant protections that are more stringent than state law.²⁹
- ⚡ **Inclusionary zoning.** Corporate-backed bans have constrained municipal efforts to spur even modest amounts of affordable housing in new development. In April 2016, the legislature passed HB1632/SB1636, a bill sponsored by Representative Glen Casada and Senator Ferrell Haile that prohibits municipalities from requiring developers to include affordable housing in new residential projects.³⁰ In September 2016, despite pressure from a coalition of corporate real estate groups, the Nashville Metro Council approved two ordinances aimed at creating affordable housing.³¹ One of these included a voluntary inclusionary zoning policy, under which developers seeking zoning variances or greater development rights (such as increasing density or height on a project) would have to include affordable or workforce units in their projects.³² Crafted in the face of state restrictions and industry opposition, the bills were each expected to generate only about 100 new housing units per year.³³ In March 2018, the state legislature passed HB1143/SB0363, nullifying Nashville's voluntary inclusionary zoning ordinance, despite the modest goals of the policy.³⁴ Senate sponsor Ferrell Haile openly admitted that legislators had developed the new bill in partnership with major industry associations.³⁵ In 2024, at the urging of local community leaders in response to the escalating housing crisis, the state legislature finally passed SB 2496 reversing the ban on voluntary inclusionary zoning, authorizing cities to create incentive-based affordable housing programs that property owners can apply to participate in, with numerous requirements for how such programs would be set up.³⁶ Corporate housing interests have thus blocked everything but the most timid attempts to incentivize affordable housing, while creating numerous hurdles for even the most willing property owners to participate in incentive programs.³⁷
- ⚡ **Short term rentals.** In February 2015, Nashville passed an ordinance capping the number of short-term rental permits per neighborhood in response to community concerns about the impacts of Airbnbs on housing availability.³⁸ In January 2018, the council voted to phase out short-term rentals that weren't occupied by their owners from residential-zoned neighborhoods.³⁹ In May 2018, the legislature passed the “Short Term Rental Unit Act,” sponsored by Senator John Stevens and Representative Cameron Sexton,⁴⁰ which effectively quashed the Nashville ordinances by allowing existing non-owner-occupied short-term rentals to continue to operate.⁴¹

The Airbnb Effect

A key factor driving Tennessee's affordability crisis has been the conversion of homes into short-term rentals (STRs) by corporations like Airbnb. As Nashville's tourism boom led to a proliferation of Airbnbs in the city's neighborhoods over the past decade,⁴² residents became concerned about the impacts of STRs on housing affordability. In 2018, Metro Nashville responded to community concerns by passing an ordinance to phase out STRs that were not occupied by their owners.⁴³ After aggressive lobbying by Airbnb, however, the state legislature grandfathered in existing non-owner-occupied rentals, allowing investors with large numbers of properties to hold on to their STR permits.⁴⁴ There are now 9,443 Airbnb listings in Nashville⁴⁵ — a city that needs more than 90,000 new housing units by 2035.⁴⁶ Over 90% of the listings consist of entire apartments or homes (as opposed to a space in an owner-occupied house), and close to 70% are held by owners with multiple rentals. In fact, almost 4,000 of Nashville's Airbnb listings are held by hosts who own ten or more properties.⁴⁷ Some investors like Host Extraordinaires and AvantStay Nashville own hundreds of Airbnbs in the city.⁴⁸

The legislature's corporate-driven ban on regulating STRs has impacts beyond Nashville, with investors controlling the STR market in many Tennessee cities. According to the Alliance for Stronger Communities, thousands of homes in the state's most popular tourist destinations have been turned into Airbnbs, with a high proportion operated by investors and their commercial property managers.⁴⁹

Tennessee Airbnbs by City⁶⁰

	Number of Airbnbs	Percent of Airbnbs Operated Commercially
Knoxville	986	62%
Chattanooga	1,119	73%
Memphis	1,648	62%
Pigeon	2,925	83%
Sevierville	7,960	79%
Gatlinburg	4,622	81%

UNDERSTANDING AIRBNB

Airbnb has become a way for wealthy investors to run commercial businesses akin to hotels without the zoning laws, regulations, or taxes that would apply to traditional companies in the sector.⁵⁰ Its business model — generating over \$11 billion dollars for shareholders per year⁵¹ — has drifted far from the original concept of connecting visitors to an extra bedroom in someone's home.⁵² Yet when community advocates attempt to put reasonable limits on STRs, the corporation collaborates with organizations that bamboozle the public with arguments about individual property rights and the freedom for homeowners to use their personal space as they wish.⁵³

Airbnb is one of the largest US companies.⁵⁴ It built a reputation for exploiting the courts and aggressive lobbying tactics to ban cities' regulation of short-term rentals.⁵⁵ The company has played a key role in the housing crisis nationwide, driving up housing costs for local residents by converting otherwise available housing into short-term rentals.⁵⁶ In addition to working through lobbyists and PACs, the company has organized hosts into a lobbying force to push back on regulations of the short-term rental industry at both the local and state levels.⁵⁷ Nationally, more than 30% of active listings are managed by commercial mega-hosts who own more than 21 properties,⁵⁸ contributing to lack of housing options for local residents to rent or purchase. Combined with soaring rents, many would-be homeowners are thus faced with the impossible situation of paying more on rent while trying to save for one of their area's highly contested homes. Cities have responded by attempting to regulate short-term rentals as well as creating incentives for the development of affordable housing.⁵⁹ These laws are then often overturned by corporations using buy, bully, and bamboozle tactics.

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WORKING POOR AND LONGTIME RESIDENTS BEAR THE BRUNT

Tennessee's affordability crisis is significant across the state, but its effects have been especially acute in Nashville, where over 90% of the housing built in the last decade is luxury class,⁶¹ including thousands of units built since 2020.⁶² Meanwhile, Nashville's planning department has determined that residents in all income brackets have experienced growing housing cost burden in recent years and that 90,000 units — including 20,000 affordable homes — will be needed to adequately house local residents over the next 10 years.⁶³ There are also nearly 10,000 Airbnb listings in Nashville alone⁶⁴ — or more than 10% of the number of units needed to house the city's expected population by 2035.⁶⁵ The vast majority of these are entire homes and apartments that have been snatched out of reach for local renters and would-be homeowners.⁶⁶ Because of Tennessee's various bans on local measures that would support affordable housing, recent housing development has been out of sync with local need and landlords have raised rents enormously, particularly in the years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic — increasing 14.6% in 2022 and 20.8% in 2023.⁶⁷ After a brief pandemic-era moratorium was lifted in 2020, evictions have also steadily increased.⁶⁸

As a result, a growing number of Tennesseans struggle to find, obtain, and keep affordable housing. Over 400,000 children statewide live in cost-burdened households.⁶⁹ In Nashville's Davidson County, nearly half (or 49%) of renters are cost-burdened, meaning landlords and utility corporations take more than 30% of their income for housing costs. And 23% are severely cost

burdened — with more than half of their income being taken by landlords and utility corporations.⁷⁰ Income inequality and structural racism within the housing and lending systems have created disproportionate impacts on communities of color. Black and Latine median income households can only afford the typical for-sale home in fewer than 1% of Nashville neighborhoods.⁷¹ And in Davidson County, Black mortgage applicants are rejected at twice the rate of white applicants.⁷² Among Tennessee renters, Black and Latine households are more likely than white households to be extremely low-income renters — with incomes at or below the federal poverty line.⁷³ And only 42 rental homes are available and within financial reach for every 100 extremely low-income households.⁷⁴

Tennessee's lack of wage standards has also exacerbated the crisis. The state's minimum wage has not been raised beyond the federal minimum wage of \$7.25/hour since 2009.⁷⁵ According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a person paid minimum wage in Tennessee would need to work 19 hours per day, seven days per week — or 3.4 full-time jobs — to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the average fair market rent (FMR).⁷⁶ And it is not only people without means to steady income who are unable to find housing. The "housing wage" — or hourly full time wage required to afford an average two-bedroom home⁷⁷ — greatly exceeds the median wage of common occupations.⁷⁸ In this landscape, people working stable middle class jobs — like police officers, fire fighters, educators, childcare workers, and nurses - are increasingly unable to find decent, well-located housing that they can afford.⁷⁹ And for residents seeking to buy, the Nashville Planning Department found that the median income family in Nashville — earning about \$100,000 in 2023 — can only afford to buy the typical for-sale home in 9% of the city's neighborhoods.⁸⁰

The health impacts of unaffordable housing costs, rising evictions, and homelessness are immense. Housing cost burden forces residents into impossible trade-offs, as they struggle to afford food, transportation, childcare, and doctor's visits while keeping a roof overhead. A large body of research links housing cost burden to overcrowding; lower housing and neighborhood quality; exposure to harmful pollutants, toxins, and allergens; increased

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anxiety, financial stress and emotional strain; and lower educational attainment for children.⁸¹ When rising rents displace residents out of their longtime neighborhoods, they may face worsening health due to loss of critical support networks and places of care, increased commutes, and stress.⁸²

And when landlords turn to eviction if tenants struggle to pay rent, a cascade of health consequences follows for entire families.⁸³ The associations between eviction and poor health outcomes have been well documented;⁸⁴ even the threat of eviction results in worsening physical health and increased rates of depression and suicide.⁸⁵ A recent study found that rising rents and evictions are linked to increased risk of mortality and premature death.⁸⁶

And if evicted residents have nowhere to go — as a growing number of Tennesseans are experiencing⁸⁷ — homelessness is devastating for both physical and mental health. Without the most basic of human needs, new health problems emerge and existing ones worsen.⁸⁸

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THE TENNESSEE VILLAINS

The national industry groups behind state bans in Tennessee:

NATIONAL APARTMENT ASSOCIATION

The National Apartment Association (NAA, parent organization to the Tennessee Apartment Association) is the primary voice of the corporate landlord lobby, with some of the country's largest multifamily corporate owners driving the agenda of the national association and its state affiliates. Representatives from Greystar, for example, hold three seats on the national association's board⁸⁹ and sit on multiple other state Apartment Association boards.⁹⁰ Major corporate landlords like Blackstone and its subsidiaries,⁹¹ Essex Property Trust, and Avalon Bay Communities have collectively sent millions to power the association's affiliate campaigns to defeat stronger rent stabilization and tenant protection policies in California.⁹² And the Apartment Association's state chapters have proudly touted their role in preserving corporate-driven bans and beating back local tenant protections.⁹³ Through its buy, bully, bamboozle tactics, the National Apartment Association and its state affiliates have ensured corporate members can continue cashing in on the escalating housing crises they contribute to in states like California,⁹⁴ Colorado,⁹⁵ and Tennessee — as discussed in this memo.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS

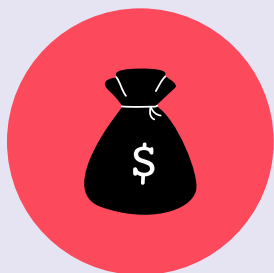
The National Association of Realtors (NAR, parent organization to the Tennessee Realtors Association) has combatted rent stabilization on residential and commercial properties in states across the country, while rallying its state and local affiliates to do the same.⁹⁶ Its leadership team includes representatives from major real estate brokerage firms like Century 21 and Realty ONE Group.⁹⁷ The National Association of Realtors lobbies against tenant protections,⁹⁸ opposes the regulation of short-term rentals,⁹⁹ and rails against the “expan[sion] of the authority of local governments” to provide oversight on property owners.¹⁰⁰ Its state chapters run well-funded political action committees that have used buy tactics to influence elections and lawmakers in states like California,¹⁰¹ Colorado,¹⁰² and Tennessee — as discussed in this memo.

STATE POLICY NETWORK

A right-wing, corporate-aligned network of think tanks and non-profits with members and affiliates in all 50 states,¹⁰³ the State Policy Network (SPN, affiliated with the Beacon Center of Tennessee¹⁰⁴) and its members serve as the policy, research, and legal complement to ALEC's policy agenda.¹⁰⁵ SPN describes itself as "dedicated to state-based, free-market policy" and has been an advocate of weakening unions (through so-called "right to work" laws), privatizing education, and rolling back labor and environmental regulations. And SPN's affiliates and partners often directly author or influence ALEC's model bills that get pushed by industry groups in states across the country.¹⁰⁶ The State Policy Network was founded in the 1980s by a Reagan administration advisor and Trustee of The Heritage Foundation.¹⁰⁷ Its current board of directors includes Project 2025 authors, including representatives from The Heritage Foundation and corporate affiliated groups like the Adolph Coors Foundation,¹⁰⁸ which funds projects in alignment with "traditional Judeo-Christian values."¹⁰⁹ Despite its affiliated Center for Practical Federalism proclaiming that "when policy is local, it takes into account unique community conditions...and thereby leads to better outcomes for more of the people it governs,"¹¹⁰ SPN's affiliates have been key drivers of state bans eroding the local governing power of communities, harming working people across the country.

THE CORPORATE PLAYBOOK: BUY, BULLY, BAMBOOZLE

THE TACTICS CORPORATIONS USE TO PUSH STATE BANS FALL INTO THREE PRIMARY BUCKETS. OFTEN, CORPORATIONS USE A COMBINATION OF ALL THREE:



BUY:

Corporations pour funds into amassing political power over lawmakers and voters — like writing campaign checks and hiring pricey lobbyists — and leverage this influence to ban policies that protect community wellbeing.



BULLY:

Corporations use legal, economic, and other threats — like lawsuits, raising prices, or leaving town — to pressure elected officials and community members into banning policies that hold them accountable.



BAMBOOZLE:

Corporations push misleading information — like political ads and talking points about how tenant protections hurt working people — to sway lawmakers and community members against policies that check corporate power.

The Buy, Bully, Bamboozle Tactics Behind Tennessee's Housing Bans

As community leaders and local officials have sought solutions to the state's growing housing crisis, they have been met with the full suite of buy, bully, bamboozle tactics from corporate lobbyists and their allies.



BUY: TENNESSEE'S CORPORATE FRONT GROUPS

Tennessee lawmakers acknowledge that state bans are written by and put forth in cooperation with the very business groups that have a vested profit interest in squashing community-led initiatives.¹¹¹ Senator Ferrell Haile, who introduced the 2018 bill that banned Nashville's ordinance creating incentives for development of affordable housing, said that he did so in "collaboration" with five industry and corporate lobbying groups: the Tennessee Apartment Association, the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), the Beacon Center, the Tennessee Chamber of Commerce and the Associated Builders and Contractors (representing non-union contractors¹¹²).¹¹³ Together, these groups and their local chapters spent up to \$720,000 on lobbying in the 2017-2018 election cycle,¹¹⁴ and each of the above industry groups or their PACs have also donated directly to Haile.¹¹⁵ NFIB gave Haile its "Guardian of Small Business" award for sponsoring the bill banning local governments from requiring affordable housing in new developments, among other votes that aligned perfectly with NFIB's agenda of anti-government regulation.¹¹⁶

Trade associations provide a shield for the corporations that comprise their membership and whose agenda they advance at the state level. The use of these front groups allows Fortune 500 companies — like Tennessee Chamber board members Amazon, Caterpillar Inc., Coca-Cola, FedEx, and John Deere¹¹⁷ — to appear neutral, while creating the illusion of a local community voice in favor of state bans. Together with the groups above and their local chapters, the following associations spent up to \$7.5 million on lobbying in Tennessee from 2015 to mid-year 2024:¹¹⁸

- ⚡ **Home Builders Association of Tennessee**, with donations from executives at Amazon, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Cigna and Volkswagen.¹¹⁹
- ⚡ **Nashville Business Coalition**, with donations from Amazon and Comcast.¹²⁰
- ⚡ **NAIOP**, representing commercial real estate developers, including donors like executives at CRBE, Highwoods Realty LTD Partnership and the national real estate investment firm Somera Road.¹²¹
- ⚡ **Tennessee Association of Realtors** supported by individuals at Compass, EXP Realty, Coldwell Banker, ReMax and Weichert.¹²²

AIRBNB'S TENNESSEE BUYS

Not all corporations hide their spending behind industry groups: Airbnb gave its Tennessee state PAC, "Committee to Expand the Middle Class," \$304,568 in direct corporate contributions between 2018-2024. The PAC in turn spent \$125,000 on funding candidates and associations, including \$40,000 to the PAC run by its lobbyists, Bivens & Associates. That PAC then gave \$420,000 to Tennessee candidates and groups from 2018-2024, the same years Airbnb has been politically active in the state.¹²³ Airbnb spent up to \$500,000 on lobbying in Tennessee from 2015 to midyear 2024.¹²⁴



BULLY: BEACON CENTER, CORPORATE CUDGEL

The Beacon Center, a Nashville-based non-profit, uses the court system to entrench corporate power, repeatedly suing to block policy aimed at increasing affordable housing. In 2016, the Nashville City Council carefully tailored its inclusionary zoning ordinance to not run afoul of the state's corporate-driven ban on affordable housing mandates.¹²⁵ Yet even this modest law was met with a lawsuit by the far-right Beacon Center¹²⁶ and another round of state bans under a bill that lawmakers crafted in partnership with corporate landlords and other business interests. The same pattern emerged when the city tried to regulate short-term rentals: a lawsuit by the Beacon Center,¹²⁷ followed by a state ban driven by Airbnb.

Though it calls itself an independent think tank committed to limited government, the group is actually a right-wing activist group in lock step with the corporate agenda. It has continually used legislation and the courts to restrict communities from freely exercising their authority to govern in the best interest of their residents. While pushing for tort reform and caps on damages for corporations,¹²⁸ Beacon itself is an aggressive litigator. Beacon has repeatedly sued the city of Nashville: in 2024 to prevent the city from charging stormwater capacity fees to developers;¹²⁹ in 2023 to prevent the city's sidewalk construction requirements for new development;¹³⁰ in 2017 over development incentives for affordable housing;¹³¹ and in 2015 to prevent the city from putting limits on Airbnb's STRs.¹³² Beacon has also sued the federal government in the state of Tennessee to prevent expanded overtime rules.¹³³ It is currently sponsoring "a constitutional amendment to ban a statewide property tax."¹³⁴

Beacon is a member organization of the State Policy Network (SPN),¹³⁵ a network of conservative and libertarian think tanks.¹³⁶ SPN's national board of directors includes Project 2025 authors, such as representatives from The Heritage Foundation, and corporate affiliated groups, such as the Adolph Coors Foundation,¹³⁷ which funds projects in alignment with "traditional Judeo-Christian values."¹³⁸ The board of Beacon Center's advocacy partner, Beacon Impact, includes the top lobbyist for K12, Inc.¹³⁹ K12 is the largest provider of online curriculum in the country, especially for "Christian worldview" educational proponents.¹⁴⁰

While pushing for tort reform and caps on damages for corporations, Beacon is itself an aggressive litigator.



BAMBOOZLE: AIRBNB AND THE "RIGHTS OF HOMEOWNERS"

Airbnb's campaign spending and lobbying has paid off in the Tennessee legislature, with lawmakers carrying bills that directly benefit the company. In 2022, CBS affiliate NewsChannel 5 in Nashville ran an investigative report on Airbnb's influence over lawmaking in the state. The reporters asked Representative Michael Curcio, sponsor of short-term rental legislation HB 2782, which would have expanded the powers of Airbnb owners and curtailed the rights of communities to regulate them,¹⁴¹ "Who brought you this bill?" Eventually Curcio responded, "I'm working with the Bivens Group" (the lobbying firm representing Airbnb). During hearings, when asked by a congressional subcommittee to interpret an aspect of the bill, Curcio looked to the Airbnb lobbyists for an answer.¹⁴²

Despite the overwhelming evidence that Airbnb is working to enrich its shareholders by providing a platform for large investment vehicles to snatch up single family homes, the company and its surrogates like Beacon Center claim they are acting on behalf of homeowners' property rights. The party at the center of Beacon's lawsuit, P.J. and Rachel Anderson, were white residents described by the plaintiff as "exactly the kind of people you want to move to Nashville...a married couple with two children" who moved from Chicago for P.J.'s career as a "professional Christian singer-songwriter."¹⁴³ The Andersons are held up as an example of residents whose rights would be unfairly trampled if no longer able to "supplement their income"¹⁴⁴ by renting out their home via Airbnb during travel.¹⁴⁵ This bamboozle conveniently pivots attention away from the people most struggling to afford life in Nashville — including nearly 50% of the city's population who are renters,¹⁴⁶ and long-time Black residents who are being pushed out of many Nashville neighborhoods in record numbers.¹⁴⁷

When asked by a congressional subcommittee to interpret an aspect of the bill that would limit regulations on STRs, Representative Curcio looked to the Airbnb lobbyists for an answer.

CONCLUSION

Tennesseans are not alone in the struggle for an affordable and sustainable place to live amidst a tightening grip of corporate control over our housing options, the way our cities develop, and the income we have to afford a home. Across the country, people's basic needs are being pushed out of reach while our avenues for protecting ourselves and improving the conditions of our daily lives are increasingly restricted by corporate interference. And no matter where we live, the same set of corporations are very often working through state industry groups to buy, bully, and bamboozle our lawmakers into governing in ways that favor corporate profit over public good.¹⁴⁸

As our communities grapple with the transformative changes needed to truly push back on the corporate-authoritarian stranglehold on American life, exposing and disrupting the corporate playbook that got us here will be paramount. Indeed, state government has been — and continues to be — a pivotal testing ground for the current federal regime. After working for decades to push state bans on local policymaking and proclaiming the superiority of state government, corporations are now recycling the same buy, bully, and bamboozle tactics they've honed at the state level to push for federal bans on state regulations. Major tech corporations have spent at least \$100 million to influence lawmakers and argued against a "patchwork of regulation" to block state governments from creating regulations to protect people from the myriad potential harms of AI,¹⁴⁹ for example. And many of the same corporations and billionaire CEOs in industry groups behind state bans across the country have unapologetically aligned with Trump's authoritarian agenda through contracts enabling mass surveillance, kidnappings and detentions by ICE,¹⁵⁰ unquestioned rollbacks of DEI policies,¹⁵¹ and directly funding Trump's personal projects.¹⁵²

Collectively, we must expose the corporations that have plundered our lives and banned our freedom for too long. Familiarizing ourselves with their false claims, tired talking points, egregious buys, and dirty threats can equip us to better fight back. Corporations developed these tactics to curtail the power of everyday people. Yet we have seen that when communities organize across race, class, gender, and geography to defy corporate greed and authoritarian power grabs, we can push corporations to end their complicity in attacks on our communities and reverse the march towards autocracy. Together, we can make their playbook a losing game and build an economy and democracy that truly serves the people and our needs, not corporations and their greed.

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