



# PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Thursday, February 8, 2024 | 9:15am – 10:15am  
Bluebonnet Room

Board of Directors Meeting  
El Paso, Texas | Winter 2024

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The Liberty Group  
MRI Software/MRI Apartment Data

**TAA Public Affairs Committee  
February 8, 2024**

# Agenda

- 01 Welcome & The Committee's Focus
- 02 GR PR Firm Introduction
- 03 TAA Media Strategy Presentation
- 04 Adjourn





**PLUS**

**STRATEGIC MEDIA ENGAGEMENT**



*"Three things can happen  
when you throw the ball,  
and two of them are bad."*

-Darrell Royal



# Media Focus On Rent Prices



## DALLAS BUSINESS JOURNAL

**Dallas-area apartment rents up 21% since start of the pandemic in March 2020**

*"...In Dallas-Fort Worth, apartment-market fundamentals are strong, said Tim Harris, vice president of Multifamily Development for Rosewood Property Co., based in Dallas. **Corporate relocations, job growth and population growth continue to drive the rental market, he said.** Rosewood develops apartment communities throughout DFW..."*

*April 3, 2023*



## HOUSTON CHRONICLE

**Houston monthly rent prices are down year-over-year for the first time since the pandemic**

*"Broad trends across the rental industry, including new inventory and demand below seasonal norms, **have driven price slowdowns in recent months and could continue to temper growth going forward,**" according to the rent.com report. "But monthly decreases have been shrinking since October 2022. May's trends suggest a potential bottom to recent rent price declines."*

*July 9, 2023*



## THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

**Texans face a bigger burden than ever to pay rent, study finds**

*Rents in Texas skyrocketed as the state's population boomed during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Rent growth has since cooled as housing construction surged and higher mortgage rates tamped down demand for homes. But rents are still considerably higher than they were before the pandemic struck.***

*January 5, 2024*

# Categories of Inquiries



- **Rent Prices/Property Taxes**
- **Eviction Process/Courts**
- **Housing Affordability**
- **Emergencies/Disasters**





# Strategic Media Engagement

## Key questions to ask:

- Who is your audience?
- What are your goals?
- What is the benefit of engaging?
- What are the drawbacks of engaging?
- What story is the reporter trying to tell?
- When should I proactively engage media?





# Who is your audience?

- Lawmakers
- Public officials
- Renters



## Reporters Are Conduits, Not The Audience

- Convincing readers/viewers, not reporters, is the goal
- Interviews are not debates; stay on message
- Be reasonable in arguments and demeanor
- Don't take questions personally or let them get in the way of your story
- Getting your message out doesn't always have to be through media

# What are your goals?

## What does 'success' look like?

- Correct misinformation/misperception
- Establish credibility
- Tell your side of the story
- Mitigate negative public perceptions
- Prevent adverse legislative/regulatory actions
- Success from a communications perspective is measurable: Did we kill bad bills and pass good ones?





# Example: Texas Tribune Inquiry on Evictions



## INQUIRY:

“I’m writing a story about **the level of eviction filings in Texas** and the state of the safety net for tenants. **Filings in Houston, Fort Worth and Austin are all above where they stood the year before the pandemic**, according to Eviction Lab.”

Could you speak to these levels as well as **the portion of HB 2127 that aims to bar cities from setting their own right-to-cure requirements when it comes to eviction cases.**”

## SECONDARY INQUIRY:

Per our conversation, here are the figures from Eviction Lab for [Austin](#), [Dallas](#), [Fort Worth](#) and [Houston](#). What I did was just total the number of eviction cases filed each year to get the following:

### 2022

- Houston: 82,100
- Dallas: 42,924
- Austin: 9,199
- Fort Worth: 92,425
- Total: 176,648**

### 2023

- Houston: 83,939
- Dallas: 37,941
- Austin: 9,394
- Fort Worth: 45,957
- Total: 177,231**

# Example: Texas Tribune Inquiry on Evictions



## RESPONSE:

*"Equating filings with evictions is not an accurate representation of the data, as filings alone do not always result in evictions. Additionally, there are several factors that contribute to evictions that should be considered in any analysis."*

*"HB 2127 was desperately needed to provide uniformity across the rental industry, and many other industries, as companies operating in multiple cities dealt with a patchwork of regulations across jurisdictions, resulting in increased costs of operations that impact property owners, and this bill is helping to address that issue."*



# What are the benefits/drawbacks of engaging?

## Pros

- Shift the narrative
- Introduce facts/information that would otherwise be absent
- Avoid lopsided media coverage
- Establish relationships with reporters\*

## Cons

- Giving credibility to biased/negative coverage
- Becoming the 'face' of a bad story
- Inviting further scrutiny
- Statements/pushback not included
- \*Reporters are not your friends



# What story is the reporter trying to tell?

- Consider what the headline and lede of the story will be
- The reporter has most likely already written story.
- Is the story about you, another entity/individual, or a larger trend?
- Is the reporter just looking for another source to fill space?
- Opposing entity/group pushing narrative to reporter/editors
- Reporter using your statement/information on background



# Proactively engaging media

- Local TV still most trusted outlets for actual news
- Securing positive coverage of your work in local communities must be pursued strategically and carefully, with the goal of 'moving the needle' forward
- Reporters/producers get hundreds of pitches each day – why should they care about yours?
  - Relevance to community
  - Timeliness
  - Space in broadcast package



# Example: Responding to negative coverage and narratives



## Rental 'Inflation Pandemic' Prompts Overhaul of Dallas Eviction Ordinance

### LEDE:

***"The rent is too damn high. And renters who can't make their monthly payments are likely to be evicted, which causes a whole new set of problems contributing to Dallas's homeless rate."***

### RESPONSE:

***"Dallas is the only city that still has a COVID ordinance. The majority of our owners are mom-and-pop owners, and they've been significantly impacted by the loss of rental income. That goes directly to their ability to pay their mortgage, to pay their insurance, to pay their property taxes, to keep up the maintenance on their property. **It hurts their ability to provide housing, and it hurts folks who need rental housing to get those units, because they're occupied by people who are not able to pay rent.**"***





# Example: How *not* to respond to negative narrative

## The Mercury News

**Alameda County renter advocates warn of landlord lobby's  
"fake tenant's rights website"**

### LEDE:

*"The problem, say local tenant advocates, is that the website is run by the California Apartment Association, a landlord lobby group, and is spreading misinformation, as well as diverting renters searching for help online away from valuable resources. In a statement, the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), a local grassroots organization working on racial and economic justice issues, likened the website to fake abortion clinics set up by anti-choice groups."*

### RESPONSE:

According to the California Apartment Association, the website is simply providing publicly available information about state renter protections. The group **accuses tenants rights groups in Alameda County of "fear-mongering"** and spreading **"fake news."**

**"There's nothing sneaky about telling people what laws are on the books,"** said Joshua Howard, CAA's executive vice president of local government affairs.

*(repeating the negative)*

# Questions for Discussion

- What are other categories of media inquiries that are becoming more frequent post-pandemic?
- How have you responded to media on stories about rent prices?
- How have you responded to media on stories about evictions?





 **PLUS**

**THANK YOU**