I had been living in East Boston with the same neighbors for many years. Then City Realty bought the house. City Realty is a big corporate landlord. They were buying properties all over the neighborhood. They sent us an eviction notice. They sent eviction notices to other families, too. They wanted to fix up the properties and rent them at much higher rents.

My husband and I joined with five other families living in properties owned by City Realty. We were all getting large rent increases. We formed a Tenants Association, and we stayed together and fought. An organization called City Life/Vida Urbana helped us. We went to meetings every Wednesday night in East Boston. We learned that many people were facing eviction.

I became a leader. I helped facilitate meetings, and I helped people learn their rights. I knocked on people’s doors to find out what conditions they had in their apartments and to find out if they were getting rent increases and eviction notices. I invited them to come to our Wednesday night meeting where they could meet other people facing the same problems.

We were in this struggle for 15 months. We went to court many times. It wasn’t easy. We had to struggle hard. Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) helped us in court, and explained what rights we had. For example, we learned:

- to call inspectional services and ask them to visit our home
- to take photos of the damage and the bad conditions
- not to pay rent in cash and not to let the owner enter whenever he wants

And we helped others learn too. We lost our fear and gained confidence.

WHAT IS DISPLACEMENT?

East Boston used to be home to immigrants and working-class people. But then developers started buying buildings, evicting tenants, and renting out apartments to people who could afford to pay a lot more. From 2014 to 2015, the median sales price of homes in East Boston increased 120%. Rents also increased dramatically — sometimes 50%, sometimes 100%, sometimes even 200%. Many tenants moved out rather than pay these rent increases. Developers and corporate landlords saw that they could make a lot of money by “flipping” buildings. They displaced one community so that another could move in.

SOURCE: http://www.wbur.org/radioboston/2015/12/14/just-cause-ordinance
Finally, we won our first victory. We forced City Realty to sign a 4-year contract with us. The contract said they could raise our rent, but only 3% each year.

We are low-wage employees. In East Boston, developers are trying to take all the apartments and turn them into condominiums. The investors are displacing us and replacing us with rich people. When we won this contract with City Realty, it was a huge victory. But we won even more than just a contract. When you meet other people who have been through the same things, you feel more comfortable. You feel not alone.

From the moment that you start to resist, you are already winning. At our meetings, we ask each new person: “Are you ready to fight for your home?” If the person says, “Yes,” then we all answer, “Then we’ll fight with you.” Now, this person is winning even more. Now they have a whole community fighting with them. In Spanish, we say, “Cuando luchamos, ganamos.” And it is true: “When we fight, we win.”

Lucia Guardado, originally from Honduras, is a housing justice activist. She lives in East Boston and she has worked with the Chelsea Collaborative and City Life/Vida Urbana. Currently, landlords in Boston can evict tenants even if they have done nothing wrong. This means that developers can easily buy a property, evict everyone in it, and turn it into condominiums or high-priced rental units. A proposed new law called “Just Cause Eviction” would make it harder for developers and corporate landlords to clear out large apartment buildings. (It would not affect landlords of small apartment buildings.)

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**FIND OUT MORE AT** <www.justcauseboston.org>.

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**TAKE IT FURTHER:**

- **THINK** more about Lucia Guardado’s story. Identify several different ways she fought, as well as some of the things she won. How would Just Cause Eviction affect corporate landlords like City Realty? How would it help tenants?

- **FIND OUT** what tenant protections exist in your state, city, or town. Collect them and present them on a poster or in a powerpoint to other students in your program or people in your community. Make sure people know how to connect with tenant rights organizations in your area.