



HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE NEWSLETTER

April 2024

HB 404 AS LAW IS RESULT OF WORK

by Alison

After years of dedicated advocacy, working in collaboration with other organizations, there is now a little light at the end of the tunnel in regards to increasing tenant protections in the state of Georgia. House Bill 404 – also known as the “Safe at Home Act” – was introduced by Republican representatives in response to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution’s* “Dangerous Dwellings” investigation from last summer, which was spearheaded from the tenant organizing and will power of tenants to speak out which showed how Georgia’s complete lack of tenant protections were allowing landlords to run roughshod over those who rent from them.

House Bill 404 requires rental properties to be “fit for human habitation” when the lease is signed, and landlords must maintain the property throughout the lease. Landlords are now prohibited from turning off the air conditioning of a rental property before eviction proceedings to force tenants to move out.

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“We are hopeful that this is just the first step in continuing to codify protections for Georgia’s tenants”



HJL joins Georgia ACT's Housing Day the Capitol (source: SaportaReport)

The bill also limits landlords from demanding a security deposit that exceeds two months' rent.

HB404 included some positive codification of tenant protections common in other states, but also problematic provisions that would have made some evictions even quicker than they already are. After outcry from HJL and other housing advocates, we were successful in getting the bill's co-sponsors to heed (some, though not all) of our warnings and remove the provisions about expedited evictions.

We maintain some skepticism that HB404 is fully up to the task of protecting Georgia's most vulnerable renters. Nonetheless, we are hopeful that this is just the first step in continuing to codify protections for Georgia's tenants. Next on the docket is rent control and stabilization. The passage of HB404 allows us to shift our focus to more tangible gains for the renters and tenants across the peach state.

INTRODUCING THE GEORGIA FOR ALL COALITION - A RENT STABILIZATION CAMPAIGN

by GFA Coalition

Georgia For All is a community-built movement fighting to transform the way rapidly increasing rents destabilize and inflict harm on our communities. Adequate housing is denied to many people in our economic system; it treats housing as a means to profit rather than as a basic human need.





Organizers with HJL supporting rent control (source: HJL)

We believe that everyone should have access to adequate, safe housing regardless of their ability to pay. We believe the people who are most impacted by housing insecurity and rent burden must lead the struggle against extraction by landowners and speculators.

What is our goal?

Georgia law currently prohibits local governments from protecting tenants from increasing rents. The current GA code reads, “No county or municipal corporation may enact, maintain, or enforce any ordinance or resolution which would regulate in any way the amount of rent to be charged for privately owned, single-family or multiple-unit residential rental property.”

Landlords in Georgia are free to terminate a tenancy at the end of a lease and increase the rent as much as they like between leases. Most tenants rent on the private market so this means that most tenants have no security year to year.

Rent stabilization and just cause eviction laws give tenants long-term security by requiring lease renewals and limiting rent increases to an amount that tenants can afford.

Our goal is to lift the statewide ban so that local governments can stabilize rent and protect people from displacement and housing insecurity.

Landlords, real estate speculators, and politicians work hard to keep the laws that keep us housing insecure. We must create a movement!

Member Organizations:
Georgia Community Coalition,
Housing Justice League, SPLC
Action Fund, S.A.F.E Place,
Senior Citizen Council of Cobb
County, Cobb County SCLC,
National Faith Homebuyers
(Atlanta Branch), We Thrive
Riverside Renters Association,
Cobb County NAACP

“We believe that everyone should have access to adequate, safe housing regardless of their ability to pay. We believe the people who are most impacted by housing insecurity and rent burden must lead the struggle against extraction by landowners and speculators.”



“Tenants have been displaced, seriously injured, and killed as a result of Millennia’s refusal to correct critical issues”



Organizers outside of the Georgia State Capitol Building during a rally for Palestine (source: ATL DSA)

THE STRUGGLE FOR HOUSING AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A FREE PALESTINE: DEMANDING THE RIGHT TO RETURN

by PSL Atlanta

For more than 6 months, the Palestinian people have been under a genocidal onslaught by the state of Israel.

The corporate media seeks to mystify the issue, but the people of Palestine have been slaughtered and displaced in service of one thing: theft of land.

In 1948, Palestinians suffered the Nakba, where over 750 thousand people were displaced from their land, with many more massacred or maimed. The 1917 Balfour Declaration put into writing the UK’s support for a “Jewish state” in Mandatory Palestine. But why was Britain in control of Palestine anyway?

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire as a result of WWI, the League of Nations mandated control of Palestine to the UK. We see similar machinations as what led to the colonization of the indigenous land we now live. Powerful European men thousands of miles away drew borders without a thought to the residents’ sovereignty. The tenants of Forest Cove are currently fighting for their right to return.

The site-based Section 8 regulations forced them to live in wretched conditions or lose their status, not unlike Gaza, where Israeli officials have limited the caloric intake to the baseline needed for survival for years.

At Forest Cove, residents lived in environs riddled with rats and other vermin, huge holes in the floors and walls, rampant mold and more.



Once the process of relocation was finally settled on in 2021, Millennia and HUD promised funds for apartment hunting, storage and more. Residents have received some of this but at this very moment are dealing with notices of utility shutoffs, non-renewals or just the inability to find housing that will actually take vouchers.

Andre Dickens is touting the ongoing demolition of Forest Cove as a victory, painting the idea that the new Thomasville Heights developments are something to be excited about. It hearkens to Jared Kushner discussing the “very valuable” nature of Gaza’s land for development. Neither Dickens nor Kushner are focused on the countless lives that have been destroyed by these processes of displacement, only on the construction of a gleaming city that’s attractive to investors.

Our world today has normalized Black and Brown people constantly dealing with evictions, even up to evictions from the streets they’re forced onto!

The US Supreme Court is currently hearing arguments on the legality of clearing homeless encampments, as rent has increased 30% across the nation since the pandemic began. The grotesque situation in Gaza, where thousands of people who have had their homes bombed and destroyed are being chased out of the streets where they have had to take refuge, is not out of the realm of possibility in this country. Working people are being systematically locked out of a real chance at homeownership as we speak, and as evidenced by new data, new homes are being bought up by fewer and fewer corporations that have no accountability to the people of Atlanta.

The cleanup of Gaza and the cleanup of Forest Cove must be a process that is led by the displaced. The big developers and capitalist-imperialist interests seek to continuously expand, building their profits and stock portfolio on the corpses of the oppressed and downtrodden, and our movement must fight to take power and create a world where all have the right to live in their communities in safe, secure housing.

“Our world today has normalized Black and Brown people constantly dealing with evictions, even up to evictions from the streets they’re forced onto!”



ATLANTA'S WORKING CLASS FIGHTS AGAINST COP CITY

by Atlanta DSA

Since 2021, working people in Atlanta have been fighting against the mayor's plans to build Cop City, a \$90 million militarized police training center. Atlanta city government aims to demolish large parts of the South River Forest, land from which the Muscogee Creek people were forcibly displaced, and build the new cop fortress on the ruins of the Old Atlanta Prison Farm, a former forced-labor camp and slave plantation home to countless atrocities. Last year, the movement to "Stop Cop City" grew exponentially through a novel referendum strategy rooted in nonviolent, mass working-class politics.

Over 1,000 Atlanta residents gave 17 hours of public comment opposing the plans when the project was first voted on at a September 2021 City Council meeting. The corporate-sponsored council members approved them anyway. For the next year and a half, environmental activists occupied the forest and held sporadic protests. In January 2023, Georgia State Patrol officers murdered one of these Forest Defenders, Tortuguita, leading to an explosion of public outrage against the project.

Then, on June 5, 2023, thousands of protestors again convened at Atlanta City Hall to testify against allocating \$67 million for Cop City's construction. After 15 hours of public comment urging the City Council to vote "no", the council again chose to advance the project.

That City Council meeting was not an end for the movement, but rather a crucial turning point. A few months earlier, socialist organizers had begun drafting plans for a referendum campaign against Cop City and reaching out to allied organizations and City Council members about the idea. A formal referendum coalition came together during the spring campaign against Cop City funding, so once the funding was approved, the "Vote to Stop Cop City" campaign was ready to spring into action with a petition drive. Forming a coalition with local, statewide, and regional organizations — including Atlanta DSA, PSL, Community Movement Builders, Working Families Party, Southerners for New Ground, New Disabled South Rising, Black Male Initiative, Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights, and American Friends Service Committee — strengthened the impact of the campaign through increased capacity, reach, and resources.

Atlanta's City Charter requires the collection of about 60,000 signatures within a 60-day period to put an issue on the ballot.

“The fight over this public forest land is just one part of the larger class struggle over control of wealth and political power”



“In all kinds of weather and during one of the hottest summers on record, people from all over Atlanta came together against the odds to obtain even more signatures than required”

In all kinds of weather and during one of the hottest summers on record, people from all over Atlanta came together against the odds to obtain even more signatures than required, ensuring some room for error (we knew the mayor would be ready to toss some out via dirty tricks). On September 11, 2023, the coalition submitted over 110,000 petition signatures from Atlanta residents.

Atlanta residents have never before exercised this element of their charter. As of this writing, the Atlanta City Council is continuing to work to delay or disqualify the referendum. In January, councilmember Liliana Bakhtiari put forth a coalition-endorsed bill that would formalize a clear, transparent, and fair referendum process in Atlanta, but on February 5, the City Council sided with voter suppression by passing a stripped-down version of the bill that includes signature matching — a controversial process of discarding signatures that a reviewer decides do not match the signature on the signer’s voter registration. So, once again, the movement has adapted.

The Stop Cop City movement has never been just about one training center: it’s about creating an Atlanta for working-class people instead of corporate elites. This campaign has been pushed forward by a mass movement of ordinary working people fighting to radically democratize our city’s society and economy. Throughout the campaign, our main messaging has focused on how we could collectively use that \$67 million in public funds for Cop City to instead fund housing, healthcare, education, and public transit for all.



“ The referendum drive is a real class-struggle campaign that has drawn in tens of thousands of working people to identify with an independent political project aimed at challenging the corporate city establishment”

The people of Atlanta want a real voice in how our tax money is spent and a city government that puts our communities first before the interests of corporations, politicians, and the police. The fight over this public forest land is just one part of the larger class struggle over control of wealth and political power. The Stop Cop City referendum drive is a real class-struggle campaign that has drawn in tens of thousands of working people to identify with an independent political project aimed at challenging the corporate city establishment, spreading class consciousness, and uniting a new Left in Atlanta.

Those involved in the Stop Cop City movement since its start in 2021 have been propelled by the knowledge that the militarized police training facility, funded by corporate donations and the City of Atlanta, and constructed on a site of both extreme environmental and historical significance is a reactionary attempt to repress dissent following the 2020 uprisings against police violence ignited by the murders of George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, and countless others. The RICO charges brought against Forest Defenders, community organizers, and innocent bystanders reaffirm as much by citing the day of George Floyd's murder as the beginning of the so-called conspiracy. The referendum campaign has equipped the movement with an accessible central structure and a unifying political goal, transforming the disparate Atlanta Left into a credible threat to city elites.

Organizers from a broad coalition created the Peoples Campaign to Stop Cop City (source: Atlanta Journal-Constitution)



GET INVOLVED!

Support our Peoples Community Land Trust!

- **Pancake Fundraiser Brunch: 12PM May 5th**

Come learn about and support the Peoples Community Land Trust from the beginning, foundational ground level. We will be holding a brunch fundraiser Sunday May 5th from Noon-2PM at 684 John Wesley Dobbs Ave Unit F, Atlanta, GA near Ladybird. Pancakes, mimosas, bacon, and vegetarian options provided!

- **Block Party: 3PM May 11th**

It's a block party going down on Saturday May 11th from 3PM-6PM on our PCLT located at 379 Elm St NW, Atlanta, GA, where we will have music, food, and fun!

- There are so many more opportunities to come involving our PCLT as well! Keep tuned into the HJL, along with The Guild on social media to stay plugged in on all the great events coming up! You can RSVP to the above PCLT events on our HJL website or social media pages.

Thursdays (Bi-weekly) at 12 PM: Corporate Landlord

Campaign Zoom Meetings

The CLLC meets virtually every other Thursday at Noon to discuss tactics in fighting against the corporate takeover of Atlanta and how we can educate the public about it. Please email matthew@housingjusticeleague.org to be added to the Google calendar group and receive the Zoom Link.

Saturday June 8 at 10 AM: Georgia For All

Rent Stabilization Community Forum

The GFA Coalition is holding a workshop forum on the fight for rent control and tenants rights. The forum will take place at In His Image Church 630 Kurt Dr SW, Marietta, GA from 10AM-2PM and will include lunch. You can RSVP via our linktree on Instagram or email matthew@housingjusticeleague.org

Every 3rd Tuesday of the month: Mass Membership Meeting

Join us every third Tuesday of the month for our Monthly Mass Membership Meetings held in the Rick McDevitt youth Center at 1040 Crew St SW, Atlanta, GA located in Peoplestown. We discuss our organizing campaigns and get to know each other in the movement. New member orientation begins at 6PM, with the meeting kicking off at 6:30PM. Food and childcare are provided! RSVP forms are posted on our website & linktree.

