



# Housing Justice League Newsletter

April 2018

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Check [www.housingjusticeleague.org/events/](http://www.housingjusticeleague.org/events/) to confirm time and location of events!

Tuesday May 1 Rally: Tenants Say No to Trump's HUD Cuts 11:00 am 3280 Peachtree Rd NE #2640, Atlanta, GA 30303.

Join us outside US Senator David Perdue's office calling on him to reject Trump's HUD cuts as they would have horrible consequences for working class people across the state of Georgia.

Tuesday May 1 HUD Tenant Association Training 6:30 pm. Build a Tenant Association, Stop Displacement! Focusing on how to start a tenant association in HUD-subsidized housing. Please email [housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com](mailto:housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com) if you plan to attend!



Housing Justice League (HJL) is a community-led organization. Our mission is:

*"to empower renters and homeowners to self-organize and defend their right to remain. We fight to preserve affordable housing, prevent gentrification, and build neighborhood power for an Atlanta-wide housing justice movement."*

We are always looking for ways to work with and support community members dealing with housing issues. We are excited to hear your ideas and for new leadership. Come to our monthly meetings to join or start your own tenant association, volunteer for a campaign, or help with community outreach.

Go to [www.housingjusticeleague.org](http://www.housingjusticeleague.org) to sign up to volunteer, make a donation, learn about membership, or check out our upcoming events!

Follow us at [facebook.com/housingjusticeleague](https://facebook.com/housingjusticeleague) to keep up to date with what's going on in the organization and housing-related politics.

# TENANT ORGANIZING

## FOREST COVE TENANTS DELIVER PETITION TO HUD

On Thursday April 12 tenants from Forest Cove Apartments delivered a petition and a photo documentation of their living conditions to Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Representative John Lewis' office. The petition was to make clear the inhumane conditions in which Forest Cove residents are living and the effects this has on students attending the neighboring Thomasville Heights Elementary School who live with asthma and other health issues. "Why do people have to live like this?" asked Ms. Morris, one of the tenants who has been leading the organizing at her apartment. "I pay rent every month and I have to live in a moldy apartment. It's a very sad thing that a person has to live like that." The petition also demanded a full rehabilitation and renovation of the complex, with a guaranteed right-to-return at full affordability under project-based section 8 for all current residents.

Tenants at Forest Cove started working with Housing Justice League last month to organize a tenant association that will allow them to take back control over their housing by uniting for their collective needs as a community. They are holding weekly meetings and have collected over 100 signatures and photos that they included in the petition delivery on Thursday. Residents plan to continue to meet to build their tenant association so they are better able to protect each other from abusive practices that focus solely on extracting rents from tenants and collecting a government paycheck, while making negligible attempts to do anything about the very serious state of the apartments including infestations, high levels of mold, gas leaks, and plumbing issues, among many other life-threatening hazards.

At the petition delivery to HUD, residents met with their local HUD representative, Jeremy Hudgeons, and explained many of the problems they have been experiencing with bad conditions and retaliatory actions they have faced, such as receiving 10-day eviction notices in response to filing maintenance requests. Mr. Hudgeons also explained that their owner, Global Ministries Partners, is under fire

from HUD in multiple states where its other properties are in similarly abhorrent conditions.



We know from our experience organizing with other tenant associations in similar situations that residents will have to stay organized to clearly put forth their demands and hold owners accountable. Especially of concern is the 100 percent right to return at full affordability, as well as the maintenance of the specific HUD subsidy types that give tenants better legal protections. Forest Cove is currently a 100 percent site-based section 8 HUD property, which gives residents important protections to organize collectively and independently without facing retaliation. While the living conditions at Forest Cove are abhorrent, strong HUD regulations and collective class interests put Forest Cove residents in a unique position to build an association that will act as an "unstoppable force," as one tenant leader put it.



## TENANTS SAY NO TO TRUMP'S HUD CUTS

On May 1st HUD tenant leaders and HJL will hold a rally outside US Senator David Perdue's office calling on him to reject Trump's HUD cuts as they would have horrible consequences for working class people across the state of Georgia. Trump's proposed cuts to HUD would effect 58,400 working class households in Georgia and bring a 38% rent increase to affected households.



The proposal from President Trump would raise rents by more than \$2 billion per year on nearly 1.8 million low-income families and nearly 3 million children receiving rental assistance. The proposal would reduce federal costs by squeezing more rent from low-income people, forcing families to divert money from other basic needs and put some at risk of losing their homes. The cuts would devastate poor families, while benefiting the wealthy and corporations and adding approximately \$1.5 trillion to federal budget deficits over ten years. Rather than “trickling” wealth down, these cuts would trickle wealth up to put even more money in the hands of the wealthiest Americans.

The President's 2019 budget request for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) largely confirmed the plan detailed in draft legislation that was leaked February 1. It would raise rents on people with rental assistance — other than households headed by a person who's 62 or older or disabled — in three main ways. (Our estimates exclude another \$1 billion in rent increases that the plan, as described in the leaked

draft, would have imposed on the elderly and people with disabilities, but which the budget request said HUD would avoid.)

The plan would:

- \*Raise from 30 to 35 percent the share of income that households must pay in rent. The bulk of such rent increases would fall on low-wage workers, whose rent payments would rise by close to \$120 a month, on average. Such families typically have little or no room in their budgets to cover added costs after paying for other basic needs and work expenses like child care and transportation.

- \*Eliminate income deductions that reduce rents for certain households that likely have high out-of-pocket expenses. For example, the plan would end a deduction for child care costs that helps many working parents with rental assistance make ends meet.

- \*Raise the “minimum rents” charged to households with little or no income by as much as \$150 a month. Virtually all of the affected families have incomes below half of the poverty line, so they would have little ability to cope with higher rents. This proposal would be especially harmful for children in these families, who are already among the nation's most vulnerable. (The affected families could be eligible for hardship exemptions, but experience has shown that those exemptions protect few families, and HUD has not complied with a 2016 congressional directive to certify that existing protections are being enforced.)

In addition, the plan would give HUD unlimited power to impose additional rent increases, letting it drastically cut rent subsidies for low-income Americans without seeking Congress' approval. It would also sweep aside most of the careful rent reforms that Congress enacted unanimously and President Obama signed into law in 2016 but that HUD has not yet implemented. And it would put the cart before the horse by making fundamental rent changes just as HUD is overseeing a rigorous evaluation of alternative rent policies, with findings due in 2020.

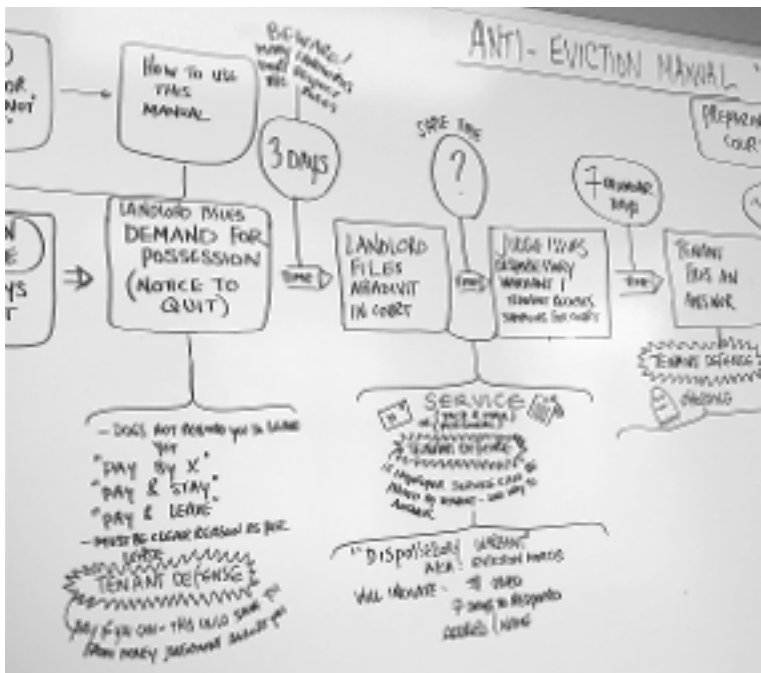
The President's plan contradicts itself and is completely illogical. For example, HUD claims that the plan intends to increase local control and choice, but the minimum rent proposal would eliminate local agencies' flexibility to determine rents for the poorest families. And HUD says it aims to encourage work among rental assistance recipients, but key aspects of the plan would, if anything, discourage work, by raising households' rent to 35 percent of their income — which would increase rents more drastically as earnings rise — and by eliminating the child care deduction which would make employment even more difficult. The plan also includes a proposal to let agencies and

certain subsidized housing owners condition rental assistance on work requirements. As we've explained, that would hurt families — including working families — while doing nothing to support work through good job training and living wage employment opportunities.

HUD's proposals offer a deeply problematic approach that would undercut rental assistance programs and hurt the low-income families they assist. Policymakers must adequately fund rental assistance and avoid rent increases that would make it harder for the nation's poorest families to keep a roof over their heads.

A WORK IN PROGRESS: HJL MANUALS FOR EVICTION DEFENSE

Housing Justice League is in the midst of an exciting project and we wanted to loop you in on



what it's all about! We are working to develop a 3-part manual for defending against evictions, understanding your rights as a tenant, and starting a tenant association to work collectively to enforce your rights and win safer, healthier, and more affordable housing! The part that is furthest along is the eviction defense manual. The manual walks tenants through the complex legal process of eviction, different opportunities for defense, and best practices for preventing an eviction. Fulton County has one of the highest eviction rates in the country with approximately 500 evictions occurring every week. Understanding our legal rights as tenants and why the system is stacked against us is a first step in changing the catastrophic cycle of displacement that leaves many people sick, unemployed, disconnected from friends and family, and often homeless. We are looking forward to having the manuals as a tool to assist vulnerable families to build neighborhood networks to distribute this knowledge and gain power.

## HJL HOLDS SECOND TENANT ASSOCIATION TRAINING

On Tuesday April 3 Housing Justice League held its second tenant association training of the year. We are holding these trainings on the first Tuesday of every month as a way to extend our reach and grow our knowledge. For the time being, these trainings are focused on HUD-subsidized multifamily buildings, but we plan to extend them to tenants in private buildings in the near future. If you know residents in HUD multifamily buildings, please help us spread the word! As the movement

builds and we win better apartment conditions and preserve affordability, we stabilize our living situations and make ourselves a more powerful force to win real protections and community control over land and housing. This work is now more important than ever as we watch the rapid gentrification of Atlanta unfold, and turning affordable housing over to private developers to transition it to market rate housing becomes more and more profitable.

Residents who attended the workshop raised concerns about their right to organize free of retaliation from their management. Some residents' management said they are not allowed to distribute flyers in their building or start a tenants' rights organization. Not all publicly subsidized buildings have the same regulations under HUD protecting the right to organize independently free of retaliation. Many tenants' rights have been stripped away through the process of privatization and the widespread turn to tenant-based vouchers in mixed

income developments. Our current work with residents facing the consequences of this stripping of rights highlights the need to understand the rights that do exist so we can enforce them in our favor and work strategically where they do not exist. We are building partnerships with Atlanta Legal Aid Society and Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation to better understand the technicalities of tenant law so we can better navigate legal systems and inform our neighbors of our rights.

## BELTLINE FOR ALL

### FIRST SERIES OF WORKSHOPS END AND THE CAMPAIGN LOOKS FORWARD

The BeltLine For All campaign's scheduled series of popular education workshops about the BeltLine's development concluded in late March with a workshop in the NPU-V neighborhood of Adair Park. Adair Park lies along the last stretch of the Westside portion of the BeltLine trail, and despite the trail's official opening being as recent as last summer, the neighborhood is already experiencing wildly rising housing costs. The price hike is no doubt due to the desirability for newer residents to live next to the promising BeltLine development, and the overall housing conditions in Adair Park stand in stark contrast to conditions in neighborhoods like Pittsburgh, just across Metropolitan Avenue from Adair Park. The economic disparities that exist within Adair Park itself can be seen in a matter of one or two blocks, or just by turning a corner. The rapid outgrowth of wealth radiating outwards from the BeltLine is a common sight in every area where it has been constructed, and visible evidence of the haphazard manner in which the city of Atlanta manages its corporate and investor-oriented growth.

The workshop, held at Genesis Early Learning & Child Development Center just north of the BeltLine on Allene Avenue, was well attended and proved to be an exceptionally engaged meeting for those in attendance. Housing code enforcement, was among one of the most heavily discussed topics, with workshop attendees affirming how it is used as an agent of gentrification by enabling the displacement of lower-income, senior homeowners. The discussion around this policing of code

compliance tied together the ways in which residents who are unable to maintain housing codes due to their economic status, often resort to low and exploitative offers to buy their homes. These offers are apparent in many neighborhoods that are feeling the squeeze from new development in the form of hastily written signs, promising fast cash for homes in any condition, that are part of an entire industry of house-flipping that benefits from the fear of foreclosures and evictions among residents on low or fixed incomes.

Residents that attended this workshop made the connection between these economic issues of housing instability among working-class black communities to federal policy initiatives such as redlining, which for decades prevented the granting of loans to non-white people in the US. These policies prevented people of color in America from accruing generational wealth through homeownership, and thereby laid the groundwork for future financial instability and lack of economic mobility. These opportunities for critical discourse about the immediate causes of displacement, the connections they have to the past, and the shared drive to shape our future collectively by understanding and organizing for community control are deeply important for the BeltLine For All campaign.

The discussions that resulted from this and all other past workshops spurred an initiative in the campaign to expand its scope to directly tackle what issues were most discussed by residents. The





Housing Justice League reached out to its membership and past participants in the BeltLining report's research to structure the next course of action that we are to take through this campaign. Our last meeting saw a strong commitment to take advantage of the momentum and growing visibility of the campaign, no doubt influenced by the pressure applied by the recent acquisition of land by the Atlanta BeltLine Inc. necessary to complete the Southside portion of the trail. With more residents arriving to take the reigns of the campaign, we discussed many ideas for new directions. Among

these are plans to create channels by which HJL can connect those facing displacement to existing programs and resources that can be of immediate use to them, engaging local media about resident organizing efforts, and increasing our outreach efforts throughout affected areas. There is still much work to be done and many ways that we can work to stop displacement, gentrification and our inhumane culture of exploitative development, so if you want to be involved and join the campaign contact us at [housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com](mailto:housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com) and come to our next meeting!

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## HJL-SPONSORED EVENTS

### Thursday April 26 3:00 pm Online Tenant Union Training with Homes for All:

Are you and your neighbors facing rising rents? Is your landlord threatening you with eviction, deportation or retaliation? Are you and your family forced to live in bad conditions? Now is the time to organize a tenants union to fight back! Join Homes For All's Monthly Tenant Union trainings. Each month we'll dive into the basics and next steps of organizing tenants unions in your building, your neighborhood and across your city!

Each training will have space to take your questions about how to organize with other tenants, and have other renters and organizers on to provide peer feedback and advice!

These trainings are ideal for tenants and/or local organizers who are either just starting to organize or who have been organizing tenants unions and want to get support and training.

go to <https://homesforall.org/tenantuniontrainings/> to register!

### April 28 5:00 pm Social with Rosa with Rosa Burney Tenant Association

Come out and meet other tenant leaders in the City of Atlanta! Covenant Christian Fellowship International will perform spoken word poetry.

259 Richardson St SW, Atlanta, GA 30312 at the Gazebo