

Housing Justice League Newsletter March 2019

Updates from the HJL Board Retreat

by Richard Hunsinger

This past weekend of March 1st through March 3rd, the Housing Justice League Board met for their annual retreat to discuss important and necessary developments in the structuring of the organization. Of the utmost importance to those involved in HJL is that this be an organization that deeply respects and embodies the ideals of democracy and autonomy that we are founded upon. To then address this point, the focus of this year's board retreat was the democratization of Housing Justice League and the ways in which we can codify and then implement these processes that make the organization, and the work of housing justice itself, more open and accessible to membership and the ways in which our members want to and/or can be involved.

Following this are some important announcements for how we will need your help to move forward and make these ideals real! This year, HJL aims to add 2 more members to the board. This will be a good opportunity for some of our members to participate in the process of nominating and electing some newer leadership to help strengthen the organization. This will be done through an open and democratic process in which we aim to have our membership's full participation and engagement!

That being said, we are also working on better identifying our membership base and finalizing our system for the payment of dues. This is going to be important if you want to be able to vote in the upcoming board elections and also for the long-term

sustainability of HJL. We are nothing without our membership! If you are not sure if you are a dues-paying member, or would like to know more about why you should become one, just ask us at a meeting or email us at

housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.org!

We are also working on the creation of a new set of bylaws for the organization that better reflect the kind of work we are doing now and the ideals and goals of the organization. This process will also be open and transparent, and membership will have to vote on these bylaws in order for them to be ratified, so again, it's important to find out the status of your membership, or to become one.

We are very much looking forward to the advances in our work and the broader movement for housing justice that these changes to Housing Justice League's organizational structure will make possible!





Housing Justice League
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Congratulations to Alison Johnson, Our New Executive Director!

All of us at Housing Justice League want to congratulate Alison Johnson (pictured on the previous page) for her new position as the organization's first Executive Director. This is a substantial step forward for the organization, and an exciting moment for its future as we embrace Ms. Johnson's leadership in this new role.

Alison Johnson is a long-time resident and community leader in Peoplestown, the neighborhood she still calls home. Her work in community organizing and housing justice comes from her deep family and social roots in Atlanta, and the legacy of displacement that her own family has struggled with on the Southside for generations. This lived experience and family history has inspired her life-long commitment to these issues, and her work through Housing Justice League and many other important local initiatives, make this an exciting development in the organization, of which we could not be more proud.

Contribute to HJL's newsletter!

We are looking for volunteer editors/writers to work with impacted individuals to tell their stories, individuals who are directly impacted by housing injustice to write their story or work with a volunteer to do so, and photos/drawings/comics/etc.

Go to housingjusticeleague.com >> "News" >> "Contribute to the Newsletter" and fill out the short form.

SEEKING VENUE LOCATIONS!

We are seeking new spaces throughout Atlanta to hold mass meetings, tenant trainings, and other events. Spaces would preferably be wheelchair accessible, fit 30 people, have wall space to project, have free parking, be owned/managed by groups who support HJL's mission, and be free for our organization to use. Have any leads?

Email us at housingjusticeleague@gmail.com



CALL TO ACTION!

HB 346 for Healthy Housing & Tenants' Rights in Georgia Senate!

A big step forward for tenants' rights in Georgia has passed the House this legislative session in the form of HB 346, a bill that would make retaliatory action by landlords illegal for tenants that seek to report unsafe housing conditions that threaten their health and safety. Coming soon, the bill may make it to the Senate for a vote, so it is important for everyone to call their State Senators and ask that they support and vote to pass this bill! For more information, here is a message from the Georgia Healthy Housing Coalition:

This bill seeks to protect families living in rental units facing mold, leaking roofs, rats, insect infestations, lead, radon, and unsafe electrical and other conditions when they exercise their right to seek repairs and complain to code enforcement. These conditions are forcing children and vulnerable adults into the emergency rooms and hospitals across the state in high numbers. Georgia is the only state in the country that does not protect tenants against unsafe and uninhabitable housing conditions with a "warranty of habitability."

HB 346 would allow Georgia to join 41 other states (including FL, TN, TX, AL, NC, SC, MS VA, etc.) that prohibit landlords from retaliating against tenants with evictions merely for seeking repairs for unhealthy and unsafe housing.

Georgia has some of the highest eviction rates in the country. After eviction families have an even harder time finding a place to live, children are forced to change schools, and families are forced into less stable and less desirable housing.

ACTIONS NEEDED TODAY:

- **Contact your Senator Today and urge them to vote YES on HB 346.**
 - To find out who your Senator is (the upper chamber) go to https://openstates.org/find_your_legislator/ and enter your home address. When you click on their name it will provide you with their phone and email address at the capitol. **Please call or email today! Tell them you are a constituent.**
- **Contact these members of the Senate Judiciary Committee and urge them to vote YES on HB 346.**
 - **Bill Cowsert (Athens)**
bill.cowsert@senate.ga.gov or (404) 463-1366
 - **Blake Tillery (Vidalia)**
blake.tillery@senate.ga.gov or (404) 656-0089
 - **John F. Kennedy (Macon)**
john.kennedy@senate.ga.gov or (404) 656-0045
 - **William T. Ligon, Jr. (Brunswick)**
william.ligon@senate.ga.gov or (404) 463-1383
 - **Brian Strickland (McDonough)**
brian.strickland@senate.ga.gov or (404) 656-7454

The Committee Substitute that passed the House was carefully negotiated with the Georgia Apartment Association and Georgia Realtors Association to address their objections, while retaining the purposes of the Bill. Their objections have been addressed and they have withdrawn their opposition to the Bill.



Successful Beltline for All Canvassing Day

by Livvy Feeney

Last Saturday, March 9th a group of volunteers knocked on doors in Ormewood and Grant Park to have conversations with residents about how the BeltLine will impact their neighborhood and how we can fight back! We had a great volunteer turnout and five teams of two people took on different streets for door knocking - thank you to all who were able to attend! We were especially successful in connecting to residents of Tressle Tree Apartments, which is one of complexes with a tenant association connected with HJL. One volunteer who canvassed with us reflected on the experience saying, "Canvassing was wonderful, I am SO glad we went to Trestle Tree to talk to residents about the BeltLine path that is quite literally in their backyard. They have just started the more conspicuous part of construction of the Southeast stretch of the BeltLine around Boulevard and many of these residents didn't know about the BeltLine or the foreboding consequences either; however, many residents were vocal about complaints they had in their complex due to mis-management and the installation of surveillance cameras on every corner in their community. I reckon quite a few residents and their roommates will be coming out to the mass membership meeting next week!"

Canvassing in neighborhoods that will soon feel the impact of the BeltLine development is a key strategy for this phase of the BeltLine for All campaign. With this tactic, we hope to connect with directly impacted residents before they get pushed out and these neighborhoods are totally gentrified, like what happened with the Old Fourth Ward. Now is our time to prevent this pattern from continuing. Canvassing is a crucial way to build our base for the BeltLine for All



campaign, to increase consciousness about the effects of the development, and collect more signatures on our Beltline for All petition. It's also a chance to offer "House NOT For Sale" signs to residents in homes that developers will target to flip as the neighborhood becomes more desirable to wealthy newcomers. Similarly, we will do a sweep of each neighborhood we canvass to collect predatory "We Buy Houses" signs.

Lookout for more canvassing days coming up soon! We have two canvassing days planned per month for the next four months and will be focusing on different key neighborhoods each month. Join us Saturday March 23rd for another canvassing day in the Ormewood/Grant Park neighborhoods. We need volunteer power to make these crucial connections with community members, so we hope you can join us!

If you have not yet signed the BeltLine for All petition, you can find it online at: housingjusticeleague.org/sign-the-petition

Have house flippers been calling or knocking on your door to try and buy your home? Send us an email and we can get you a "House NOT For Sale" sign for your yard! This is a sign to let developers know that their predatory home buying practices are not welcome in your neighborhood and you will not be moved!



Film Screening

By Sanae Alaoui

Wednesday night was packed in Mother's Bar's upstairs loft for the Beltline For All Campaign's first film screening. The film screened, *City Rising*, is based on the effects of rising housing cost and consequent displacement of California's inner-city communities. The film presented a trajectory of disinvestment from traditionally POC communities for the past two decades to the current rapid influx of investment money used to "revitalize" some of these neighborhoods, consequently pushing out the people who have traditionally lived there. *City Rising* illuminates the journey of California's neighborhoods advocating for responsible development. The documentary examines gentrification in the state — its historical roots, economic role and social consequences.

The similarity between Atlanta's housing crisis and California cities' housing crisis is striking. From the testimonies of long-time residents of inner-city communities who are being forced out of their homes to the narrative surrounding "revitalization" of a community at the cost of pushing out people who are already living there, the stories are very similar. Understanding these similarities are important. Most inspiring, however, was the work being done by community organizers in some of California's biggest city neighborhoods such as Oakland. People standing up for housing rights, disrupting the city's local government proceedings, and drawing attention to

the problem gave them time to organize a legal attack against an imminent corrupt housing project in Oakland.

The film screening ended with a Q&A that featured some valuable questions and input from audience members, as well as discussion led by B4All Campaign members. The lasting message of this film was how many parallels can be drawn between the housing crisis in Atlanta and California's city neighborhoods and how important it is to have an organized housing movement.





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METRO ATLANTA DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA

New Housing Justice Working Group in MADSA

In January, the Metro Atlanta Democratic Socialists of America (MADSA) passed a resolution making housing justice a priority of its work in 2019. The resolution acknowledged the work of the Housing Justice League, which has fought the forces of gentrification while empowering and promoting the struggle of low-income and Black families in Atlanta since 2011. Supporting and engaging with HJL is also the central focus of MADSA's newly formed housing justice working group.

The working group, with HJL's approval and input, will provide support in a variety of ways, including by promoting HJL events to MADSA members and the public and by providing resources, such as transportation, for HJL actions and events. The working group will recruit MADSA members to join in the work of HJL, attend HJL education events and become official members of HJL.

MADSA is excited about this important work. We recognize that we have a lot to learn from HJL and its members. We are committed to being an active part of a mass movement in our city to end the displacement caused by gentrification and other racist policies and to support low-income and Black communities in achieving community control and self-determination.



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March 2019



Housing Justice League
presents the

Housing Justice Film Series

Join us to learn how gentrification has transformed cities and hear stories of communities fighting for housing as a human right!

March 13 at 7pm



City Rising

City Rising illuminates the journey of California's neighborhoods advocating for responsible development. The documentary examines gentrification in the state — its historical roots, economic role and social consequences.

April 17 at 7pm



Priced Out

Priced Out is an investigative and personal look at housing discrimination and the pain of losing a community to gentrification in Portland, Oregon. The film explores the complexities and contradictions of gentrification and life after the era of "the ghetto."

May 15 at 7pm



The Home Team

The construction of the Mercedes-Benz Stadium has brought a lot of hype and money to the Atlanta, but what about the neighbors next door? The new documentary, **The Home Team**, explores how Atlanta's Westside communities have been overshadowed due to the stadium development.

MOTHER Bar + Kitchen
447 Edgewood Ave SE,
Atlanta

Donations accepted and no one will be turned away for lack of funds. Yummy drinks and food available for order at MOTHER. Stick around after each film for a discussion!



UPCOMING EVENTS

Check www.housingjusticeleague.org/events to confirm time, location, and event details!

Saturday, March 23rd, 12-2pm - BeltLine for All:

Canvassing Day - Hodgepodge Coffee Shop 720 Moreland Ave SE. Come knock on doors with us in the Ormewood/Grant Park neighborhoods and have conversations about the BeltLine for All campaign! We will be collecting signatures for our BeltLine for All petition and offering folks "House NOT For Sale" signs to let developers know that they will not be moved out of their community.

Saturday, April 13th, 12-2pm - BeltLine for All:

Canvassing Day - Location to be determined. Come knock on doors with us in South Atlanta neighborhoods and have conversations about the BeltLine for All campaign! We will be collecting signatures for our BeltLine for All petition and offering folks "House NOT For Sale" signs to let developers know that they will not be moved out of their community.

Tuesday, April 16th, 6:30pm - Mass Meeting - 1040

Crew St SW 30315. We will discuss the current status of all campaigns, the organization, and have breakouts for tenant associations, BeltLine for All, and more! It will be a potluck, so please bring a dish if you are able.

** For all events, please email us at housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com if you need childcare.*



Housing Justice League (HJL) is a community-led organization in Atlanta, GA. 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 to sign up to volunteer, make a donation, learn about membership, or check out our upcoming events!

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