



HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE NEWSLETTER

November 2021

FACES OF FOREST COVE

by Monica

Of course, we have written about Forest Cove in the newsletter before. Unfortunately, national slumlord Millennia has yet to relocate any of the tenants that have been suffering mold, rodent, and other health and safety problems for years. To keep record of the human cost of Millennia, HUD and other governmental agencies' inaction, we are embarking on a new project called Faces of Forest Cove. This project will include interviews from tenants describing their experiences in their own words. Follow @forestcovenants on Instagram to view photos of the tenants and the conditions in their units that will be up soon. Our first interviews cover Tyeshia and Philippa, ages 23 and 55 respectively.

TYESHIA

Q: How long have you lived in Forest Cove?

A: 4-5 years

Q: What conditions are you dealing with in your unit?

A: Mold, rats, holes in the floors and the walls, the heat doesn't work. The ceiling is leaking from the shower and baths upstairs.

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*Housing Justice
League Mission:*

*We work with
renters and
homeowners to self-
organize and
defend their right
to remain. We fight
to preserve
affordable housing,
for just living
conditions, to
prevent
gentrification, and
to build community
power for an
Atlanta-wide
housing justice
movement.*

The living room closet is very moldy, kitchen as well. They (maintenance) cut the closet open, there's just a hole. There's a large hole by the kitchen sink that she has covered herself with a piece of wood.

Heat doesn't work.

Five children living with her, a new baby born on the 8th (of October).

Q: What would a brand new renovated unit mean for you and your life?

A: "Everything. My kids are going through a lot, just staying in these units. It's ridiculous. My babies get sick from the mold. It would mean everything."

Q: If you could say one thing to the people of Atlanta who don't live in Forest Cove, what would it be?

A: Don't move out here! It's not good, it's ridiculous. It looks like they don't help with anything. They try to make it seem like it's all peaches and cream, it's all good, but they don't do anything out here. It's ridiculous.

Q: What is your biggest hope for Forest Cove and your fellow residents?

A: "That they move us and close this down. If they close it down, it will be 1000x better when they redo it. It's really ridiculous. I was early in my

pregnancy when they was first saying they would move us out. They said they were supposed to contact us about apartments today, I haven't heard anything and neither have my neighbors. It's just ridiculous."

PHILIPPA

Q: How long have you lived in Forest Cove?

A: Over 20 years. "Moved out here in '94."

Q: What conditions are you dealing with in your unit?

A: "I have a hole in my floor right by my living room door, cabinets about to fall in the kitchen. In my bottom and top cabinets, there was a water leak, so now there's mold. A lot of soft spots on my floor, when I step on it I worry if I'll go through it. I had to get me a rug to throw over my tiles because I kept tripping on the cracks. And then, I got problems with rodents. I got holes i fill with aluminum foil... these rats are about to eat through the bottom of these apartments. Had to tape my own hole closed so the rats wouldnt come through."

Q: What would a brand new renovated unit mean for you and your life?

A: "I mean, right about now it'd mean everything. I'm going through a lot. I have a blood clot in my leg, arthritis





"This fight is really a testament to the value of Black life to people in power in Atlanta and the state of Georgia."

real bad in my knees and my hip. I have neuropathy from the chemotherapy when I had cancer. Nerve damage. It's hard to climb those steps on a daily basis to get to the shower. I mostly have to take wash-ups."

Q: If you could say one thing to the people of Atlanta who don't live in Forest Cove, what would it be?

A: "I would want them to know we are over here living in deplorable conditions, it's real bad. These apartments are no longer livable, and we need to be from over here. They really getting to be a health hazard."

Q: What is your biggest hope for Forest Cove and your fellow residents?

A: "I guess for them to do better for us. I really don't know, I just hope they get us out of here, fix 'em up and put us back in our apartments quickly. And a little more security around here."

Q: Since you've been here for 20 years, you remember when Global Ministries owned Forest Cove. What would you say about the transition between owners?

A: "I wanna say the maintenance was better, when Global had them. Since Milennia done had 'em, they been more focused on the transition, so they not taking

care of our needs like they should. But they not moving us out fast enough...The maintenance issues, it's like they just letting them go."

From my perspective, doing these interviews is painful. I feel bad for asking the tenants to recount the details of their pain, humiliation and despair when all I have to offer them is organizing support. This fight is really a testament to the value of Black life to people in power in Atlanta and the state of Georgia. In our supposed Black Mecca, the government allows a private corporation to keep low-income workers in immiseration, and when we bring it up, we are told to wait. It's evil and depraved to continue to leave people in this hell. At Housing Justice League, we are strategizing on how to press Millennia, HUD, anyone to do what they say they'll do, to put these tenants in safe housing. Make sure to follow @housingjusticeleague and @forestcovenants for updates.

EVICTON DEFENSE WORKING GROUP MEETING TIMES:

- Tuesdays at 5:00 PM
- Thursdays at 2:00 PM

ON ZOOM

All are welcome

Email:
[evictiondefense@
housingjusticeleague.
org](mailto:evictiondefense@housingjusticeleague.org)



EVICTON DEFENSE WORKING GROUP UPDATE

by Foluke and Natalie

The Eviction Defense Working Group has been continuing to manage the Tenant Power Hotline, coordinating and training volunteers and talking with tenants about their rights and how organizing can make a difference where the law often can't. One of our key resources in supporting tenants who call our hotline is our Eviction Defense Manuals which we just printed 10,000 of! 5,000 in English for Fulton County and 5,000 in Spanish for DeKalb County. We are starting to distribute them out into the community but we can't do it alone! Please email evictiondefense@housingjusticeleague.org if you have any ideas for organizations or locations that could benefit from our manuals! We currently meet on Tuesdays at 5:00 and Thursdays at 2:00.

In October, much of our attention turned toward the campaign of Ms. Juliet Brown. Ms. Juliet has lived in the same house in Decatur for 27 years. She called the hotline in February 2021 because her landlord, Dustin Maxwell, was trying to evict her so that he could sell the house for a profit. Mrs. Brown worked closely with Johnna Gadomski, a hotline volunteer, to negotiate with Dustin and try to purchase the house, however they ran out of time and Ms. Juliet's eviction hearing was scheduled for October 18th. As the hearing date approached, the HJL Eviction Defense Team did what we could to rally community support and put pressure on Dustin to cancel the eviction and sell the house to someone who was committed to letting Mrs. Juliet stay. The week before the eviction hearing, we launched a petition that collected over



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3,000 signatures in just a few days. On Saturday, October 16, we organized a protest outside of Cultivate Food & Coffee, a restaurant owned by Ryan Bowersox, one of Dustin Maxwell's business partners. The protest was successful in capturing Ryan's attention, and he offered to contribute financially to the campaign. The day of Ms. Juliet's eviction hearing, we held a press conference that was attended by WABE and CNN. Ms. Juliet and Dustin took a lot of time in mediation, and her case needed to be rescheduled. The court said that the new hearing would likely occur during the third week in November, however on Thursday, November 4, Ms. Juliet was contacted by the court and told that her new hearing would take place the following Monday-- just four days later. After hours of negotiating during her new hearing, Dustin was willing to settle the case, on the condition that Ms. Juliet pay all back rent and purchase the house by January 31, 2022.

Ms. Juliet's neighborhood in southeast Decatur is in the early stages of gentrification, and she is not the only resident who is currently at risk of displacement. Ms. Juliet's fight is just one piece of a larger struggle against dispossession in predominantly Black Atlanta-area neighborhoods.

The Eviction Defense Team plans to continue working with tenants in Ms. Juliet's neighborhood to ensure that all who wish to remain are able to do so.

ASSIST AND RESIST PROGRAM CALLS OUT GEORGIA'S DEFICIENT RENTAL ASSISTANCE

by Natalie Villasana

At the beginning of September, the Party for Socialism and Liberation Atlanta launched the Assist and Resist Survival Program. The program exists to help more tenants apply for rental assistance, and to call attention to the unjust and bureaucratic process that Georgians must go through to receive the rental assistance that they are owed. At the end of August, the state had distributed only 7% of the almost \$1 billion in funds that were allocated by the federal government over six months ago.

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**TEXT
"VOLUNTEER" TO
(470) 563-7230 IF
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WITH ASSIST AND
RESIST!**



process that Georgians must go through to receive the rental assistance that they are owed. At the end of August, the state had distributed only 7% of the almost \$1 billion in funds that were allocated by the federal government over six months ago.

Volunteers first spread the word about the program by flyering and canvassing to distribute the Assist and Resist phone number, letting people know that they can call to set up an appointment to apply for rental assistance with the help of volunteers. The volunteers go over basic eligibility questions with the caller, then schedule a time to meet in person, often at the caller's home, where they fill out either the Fulton County or state of Georgia's rental assistance applications together.

Over the last few months, Assist and Resist has helped dozens of tenants around the Atlanta Metro Area apply for

rental assistance, but to date, only one tenant is in the final stages of receiving assistance from Fulton County. The process for his application has taken almost three months.

The City of Atlanta's rental assistance program was closed due to high volume of applications when the Assist and Resist program began in September. Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms announced a new round of \$12 million in funding to be distributed through a program called "Atlanta Covid-19 Emergency Housing Assistance," but to date, that program is also no longer accepting applications due to volume. Due to eligibility restrictions, residents of Atlanta can't apply to the Fulton County assistance program that has a higher disbursement rate, they can only apply to the state of Georgia's assistance program. The Treasury Department is also threatening to take back hundreds of millions in funds



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unless the State of Georgia submits a disbursement plan by November 17.

As part of the Assist and Resist program, on October 1, volunteers also organized a protest outside of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the department responsible for management of the state's rental assistance application. Protesters demanded the immediate distribution of funds, faster processing of all new applications, the removal of restrictive application requirements including landlord participation, and to fix the broken online application that prevented people from submitting applications for weeks. Just one day after the protest, the online application form was fixed—a small win for the struggle.

Millions of people are facing eviction in the coming months, while local governments sit on

hundreds of millions in undistributed funds that belong in the hands of working class people. This negligence is an outrage! Together we must continue to build a working class movement to fight for the people's right to housing. Text "volunteer" to (470) 563-7230 if you are interested in volunteering with Assist and Resist!

PEOPLESTOWN UPDATE

by Tanya Washington

In an effort to address flooding caused by overdevelopment and neglect in the area surrounding Turner Field, the City of Atlanta moved forward with a plan that displaced 20+ families from the historical Black neighborhood of Peoplestown in Atlanta, GA. The families that refused to move, Robert and Bertha Darden, Tanya Washington Hicks, Dwayne Adgar and the

SUPPORT PEOPLESTOWN!

Sign the petition asking Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms to suspend efforts to evict us from our homes and to allow the next Mayor to address the situation.
<https://tinyurl.com/2vr7rj6t>

Sign and share the Go Fund Me to help cover hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal costs
<https://www.gofundme.com/f/peoplestownfight>



McCords were sued on October 31, 2016. The City removed their names from their deeds and took legal title to their homes by eminent domain. Ms. Mattie Jackson was allowed to stay in her home until August 2020, where she took her last breath at 98 years old. But her last years were spent fighting with her neighbors to prevent the City's predatory taking of houses on her block, and the fight took a toll on her mental and physical health. Eight years after this battle began, the remaining residents are facing evictions but, with the support of the Housing Justice League who have stood with them for 6 years, they held a rally and press conference on their block to make clear they have no intentions of leaving their homes or their beloved community.

Former City of Atlanta Mayor, Kasim Reed, initiated the taking of homes and the displacement of families in Peoplestown. During the 5

years of litigation evidence surfaced that the City only needed 2-4 houses to stop the flooding not an entire block of 27 homes. Former City engineer, Kimberly Scott (formerly Palmer) testified in court that she informed the City about the lack of engineering data in September 2013, before the first house was demolished, and she was fired by the City for telling the truth. Eight years later, Mrs. Bertha Darden confronted Kasim Reed at a mayoral forum on Friday Oct. 24 about the City's unlawful actions at his direction and under his leadership. In response to her accusations of the predatory use of eminent domain, Kasim said he made the best decision based on the information he had at the time and that he was concerned about flooding "killing people." If flooding on the block had been life threatening Kasim would not have allowed Ms. Mattie Jackson to stay in the middle



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of the block. Kasim Reed's response to Mrs. Darden highlights the same untruthfulness and fraud that undergirds the City's efforts to use eminent domain to displace the Peopletown residents.

On the eve of the election, former mayoral candidate Kasim Reed attempted a Hail Mary to make it into the runoff by urging Councilmembers Smith and Bond to create a hastily contrived settlement offer that fails to acknowledge the City never had the data to support the taking of the residents' homes in the first place. The proposed offer of \$1.5m for 3 of the 4 affected families to divide, was a political stunt created without input from the families that ignores that the residents are entitled to remain in their homes.

Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms has the authority to rescind the evictions that are advancing at her direction. In her last days in office, the Housing Mayor has an opportunity to resolve an issue she inherited from her predecessor. The City has NOT, contrary to Mayor Bottoms' assertions, engaged in good-faith negotiations with the families, who have endured 5 years of litigation that has resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal and engineering fees.

We appreciate that both candidates in the runoff, Council President Felicia Moore and Councilmember Andre Dickens, stood with us at the People's Rally on November 1 on the steps of City Hall and at our press conference on November 10 on our block (the scene of the unlawful takings). We are hopeful that each of them is prepared to take action (individually and collectively) to bring our suffering to an end and to allow us to stay in the homes and community we love.

On November 2, ATLANTA PROVED IT'S A PEOPLESTOWN. We hope Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms will stop the evictions and allow the next Mayor of Atlanta to bring this painful and shameful chapter in Atlanta City government to an end. We have created a GoFundMe page to help us pay the hundreds of thousands of dollars we owe to our lawyers and to our engineering experts. Please share our link and consider making a donation. We are grateful for any and all contributions!

We have also created an on-line petition asking Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms to suspend efforts to evict us from our homes and to allow the next Mayor to address the situation.



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