



HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE NEWSLETTER

September 2023

HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE SAYS GOODBYE TO A WARRIOR OF THE HOUSING MOVEMENT

by Alison

At Housing Justice League, we will continue to celebrate the life of Mrs. Bertha Darden . Inspired by her commitment to defend her home and protect her community, we will honor her with an award in her name to someone who exemplifies strength, tenacity and courage. Mrs. Darden didn't stop at fighting for her own home, she fought for others, and she held elected officials accountable in a way that shaped policy and impacted city elections. Her presence, her voice, and her kindness moved everyone she encountered. Our thoughts are with Bertha's family, especially her husband Robert Darden.

Mrs. Darden was a true warrior, full of spirit and grounded in her faith. Her fearless spirit will burn in our souls . She was a true leader. The ripple effects of her infectious laugh and calming spirit will be felt throughout this city and world for many generations. She was relentless in her fight for her community and we are forever grateful and indebted for her service. Her ability to bring people together through her music will always be a comfort for us to have. She was an amazing

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Mrs. Darden (left) sits beside Mrs. Mattie Jackson during her birthday celebration. Activists and community members stand behind them.

human being who gave so much of her life to make this world a better place, and she did it with grace and class. Her legacy will live on forever. We will miss her dearly but we'll never forget.

HJL TENANTS JOIN PROGRESSIVE ORGANIZATIONS FROM ALL OVER THE SOUTH FOR THE KENTUCKY MOVEMENT ASSEMBLY

by Rhonda, Latresa, and Graham

On September 17th, progressive organizations from across the South came together to engage in workshops, learn from one another, and think about how to build our movement stronger. Organizations represented included student groups, labor unions, tenant unions, voting rights groups, anti-carceral organizations, and more. Housing Justice League was very proud to send four of our tenants to this amazing gathering, and we

had a chance to speak with two of them, Latresa and Rhonda, about their experiences.

The weekend was packed with workshops and activities; Rhonda remarked that “almost as soon as we stepped off the plane, we were in workshops.” These workshops were hosted both by organizations from Kentucky and by others from across the south. Everyone chose three different workshops to attend over the course of the weekend. Latresa’s first workshop was *The Fight for the Right to Vote*, which she said was “centered around getting voting rights for incarcerated people” and that it wasn’t just about getting voting rights for *formerly* incarcerated people, but also for those who are presently incarcerated. The presenters also talked about the need to change the language we use, and to stop referring to incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people as “felons” or “prisoners.”



HJL tenant leaders after arriving in Kentucky for the assembly. From left to right: Rhonda, Latresa, Yasin, and Theresa

For her second workshop, Latresa attended Building Tenant Power in Texas, hosted by BASTA, a tenant organization from Austin Texas. They spoke candidly about what worked for their organization and what did not, what their victories were and what their setbacks were, and their advice for tenant organizers.

The final workshop that Latresa attended was *Passing Public Policy*, which was hosted by a group of Kentucky women who organize court watching. The principal thing they talked about was their fight to end cash bail and to allow lower income people who are arrested to stay out of jail while awaiting their court date.

Rhonda attended an entirely different set of workshops. The first that she attended was called *Black Girl Magic, Fat Girl Liberation*. She said, “that [workshop] talked about the

stereotypes of the black body and that fat body... that felt very liberating to me.” The second workshop she attended was called “Supremacy Keeps Killing Education.” The subject of the workshop was the continued attacks on education, and how those that oppress us try to keep knowledge away from us, whether that’s knowledge of our rights, our history, or anything else. Rhonda remarked, “It was interesting to see the bills they are fighting in Kentucky that ban trans education, and know that we are fighting the same thing here.” Her final workshop was Engage, Educate, Empower: How to Ignite the Masses. This workshop broke down how to bring new people into the movement and how to approach people who are not yet politically engaged. They practiced meeting people where they are and relating to them on a more personal level rather than inundating them with a

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Yasin participates in a workshop in the Kentucky Movement Assembly

political spiel. Rhonda says that she is excited to apply what she learned in her workshops, especially this final one.

Both Rhonda and Latresa said that it was very difficult to find time to talk to others outside of their workshops because their schedules were so packed. However, they still managed to make some new friends, including Trynice, a tenant organizer from Miami. Overall, this conference was a great way for progressives from across the south to learn from each other and to gain valuable knowledge on how best to organize our movements. HJL is extremely proud to have sent four amazing tenant leaders to such an important event!

AN UPDATE ON COP CITY

by Emma

Recent events, including flooding in southwest Atlanta and record-breaking heat, have highlighted the growing impact of deforestation in the years to come. 11 Alive published an article in July about a study commissioned by the Atlanta City Council that found that areas with minimal tree cover can increase temperatures by up to 22 degrees. Most concerning is that the neighborhoods most at risk for higher temperatures and flooding are predominantly low-income Black communities in southwest Atlanta. Another 11 Alive article published in June outlined research that revealed a correlation between the "Heat Island Effect" and historically red-lined communities of color in Atlanta.

The study's findings have prompted calls for action from council members. Councilpersons Bakhtiari and Westmoreland proposed a solution to plant 350,000 trees citywide, with an annual maintenance cost of \$35 million. They also urged the city to take other preventative measures.

It raises a valid question: should we clear 85+ acres and allocate nearly \$70 million to build a police training facility, while it costs \$35 million annually to combat the effects of deforestation? This decision warrants serious consideration, especially when residents have long been advocating for affordable housing and sustainable solutions to homelessness. When Atlanta residents request these services, officials often claim budget constraints. However, when the Atlanta Police Foundation asks for the better part of 1 billion dollars, resources suddenly become available without taxpayers' consent.

In a city where the majority of residents are renters, stronger tenant protections are essential to a healthy society. When tenants are facing dangerous, slumlord conditions in their homes, they can't call the police on the landlord committing these crime, even though many

tenants have been put in life-threatening situations at the hands of their landlords and management companies. But as soon as a tenant falls behind on their rent, the police are the ones that show up to evict them. The police do not serve the interests of the people. The police eat up 1/3 of the city budget, not including these extra projects like Cop City or subsidized housing for officers. And police pose no real, material solutions to working class people. It's clear that simply pouring resources into policing does not create safer communities. Evidence has shown that police only solve about 2% of crimes and that investing in housing, street lighting, public green spaces, youth programs, and similar initiatives is more effective at reducing crime, debunking the suggestion from city officials that we need the training center to address Atlanta's "crime wave".

The debate over the proposed "Cop City" is fundamentally about democracy. Prominent figures, such as Dr. Bernice King, Senator Raphael Warnock, and Stacy Abrams, have endorsed the referendum to allow citizens to vote on the matter. However, Mayor Andre Dickens and other city officials are attempting to hinder the referendum despite activists' non-violent, direct action

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We are witnessing a recurring pattern in how the city responds to activists, using violence and unjust incarceration. But just like history has gone to show, the people will succeed through persistent organizing and solidarity with one another.

efforts. All while continuing to cite civil rights figures like Dr. King and John Lewis any chance they possibly can. As of September 11th, 116,000 signatures have been submitted to city hall, and residents must now pressure city officials to verify the signatures fairly and promptly.

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HJL, THE GUILD, AND AFSC HOST HOUSEWARMING COOKOUT FOR MS. JULIET, THE FIRST RESIDENT OF THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNITY LAND TRUST!

by Graham

In 2021, Housing Justice League received a call on our hotline from Ms. Juliet Brown. Ms. Juliet was a widow, a senior, and had been paying rent to stay in her home for 27 years. However, a new landlord had recently purchased her home, and he wanted her out so that he could sell to make a quick profit. Ms. Juliet had nowhere to go, so she decided to fight back. At HJL, we organized a massive public

pressure campaign against her landlord, as well as a very successful fundraising campaign for Ms. Juliet. The campaign to keep her in the home was nearly successful; however, just when it looked like he was ready to sell her the home, her landlord backed out of his end of the deal.

But that wasn't the end of the campaign. With Ms. Juliet, we decided to start a land trust, and have her as its first resident! This way, she would have a home to live in, and the property would be permanently taken off the speculation market to become permanent affordable housing. In order to finance the purchase of this first property, we partnered with The Guild and the American Friends Service Committee. After purchasing a wonderful home in Peoplestown, volunteers from HJL helped to make the final repairs and maintenance to get it ready, and just this past month, Ms. Juliet has officially moved in!

To celebrate our first resident in what will hopefully become a much larger land trust, HJL, The Guild, AFSC, and Ms. Juliet hosted a cookout on the property. Attendees included members of the media, residents of Peoplestown, and progressives from across the city. Leaders from all three organizations and Ms. Juliet





Ms. Juliet stands with members of HJL, the Guild, and AFSC on the front porch of her new home

herself addressed the crowd to speak about the story of the land trust and what a journey it has been to achieve. Ms. Juliet said, “when I see everyone here, who is standing with me... words cannot express how grateful I am.” HJL, The Guild, and AFSC all hope to continue to add more properties into this land trust to create a democratic, affordable alternative to living in commodified housing. We are also so amazed and proud of all the work that our members have put in, and also at the tenacity of Ms. Juliet to not give up her fight!

SOUTH FULTON RESIDENT FIGHTS TO STOP HER HOME FROM BEING STOLEN BY CORPORATE LANDLORD

by Graham

In 2008, Ciara, a young black woman, purchased a home in the Pitman Park neighborhood of South Fulton.

She said that she wanted to purchase a home so that she could create a stable environment for herself and her sisters because they had been evicted frequently while growing up. However, after missing a single mortgage payment, she was forced to sell the home and enter into a lease-purchase agreement with Invitation Homes, a large, corporate, private-equity landlord.

After paying rent for several years, Ciara was ready to purchase her home back. But Invitation Homes backed out of their end of the deal and has refused to sell back to her. During her time as a tenant, she paid for maintenance to the home herself, including repairing bad flooding damage. When she challenged Invitation Homes and tried to stand up for herself, she was retaliated against. The landlords attempted self-help evictions against her multiple times. Eventually, when she

“when I see everyone here, who is standing with me... words cannot express how grateful I am.”

-Ms. Juliet

To help
Ciara fight
back against
this
corporate
landlord
that is
stealing her
home, call
Invitation
Homes and
demand
they halt
this
eviction!



Ciara's friend speaks at a press conference. Ciara stands behind her, along with other activists and community members

was not able to keep up with rent due to the pandemic, IH filed for a formal eviction in court, despite receiving rental assistance that covered her rent.

Two weeks ago was Ciara's court date. While in court, she was belittled by the judge and made to feel less than human. The court did not hear many of her arguments, and the judge gave her seven days to vacate the property.

At HJL, we have organized a phone zap to put pressure on Invitation Homes to do the right thing and return Ciara's home to her. Ciara is already developing a large network of support, including that of South Fulton mayor Khalid Kamau. We ask that all of HJL's members and supporters call IH and demand that this injustice be rectified! Here is the contact information for you to use:

Invitation Homes CEO home phone:

480-664-3059

Office/investor line:

844-456-4684

Atlanta office:

770-442-3372

HJL WORKS TO BRING BACK TENANT ORGANIZING TRAININGS

by Emma

Housing Justice League is excited to announce the return of our Tenant Organizer Trainings. These sessions are designed to strengthen our community base and establish new tenant associations throughout the city. Our primary goal is to equip tenant leaders with the knowledge and tools needed to form and sustain these associations successfully.



SEPTEMBER 2023

We will cover a range of essential topics, including a Know Your Rights training. Participants will gain insights into lease literacy and learn how to navigate common rental scenarios within the state of Georgia. Based on previous trainings, we expect each training will consist of two sessions, each lasting approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours. During these sessions, those facilitating the training will deliver informative presentations and be available to answer any questions tenants may have. To further support tenants, we are in the process of creating a comprehensive master document. This document will serve as a valuable resource, providing tenants with essential information and tools to empower them in their individual housing situations and within their associations.

We plan to start off this project by collaborating with communities and leaders with whom Housing Justice League has established relationships. From there we will engage in outreach efforts to identify and work with additional communities. Our aim is to refine the Tenant Organizer Trainings through practice and involvement, attracting more members to join our work.

We are aiming to host our first training mid-October. More details will come via email and HJL's social media!



HJL's tenant organizer trainings will hopefully return in mid-October. Watch your email and our social media for updates!