



Housing Justice League Newsletter

May 2018

UPCOMING EVENTS

Check www.housingjusticeleague.org/events/ to confirm time and location of events!

Tuesday June 5 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 for location if you plan to attend!

Tuesday June 19 HJL Mass Meeting: 7:00 pm, 6:30 orientation for newcomers 1040 Crew St SW 30315. We will discuss the current status of all campaigns, the organization, and will be having breakouts of interest for tenant associations, the BeltLine for All campaign, and outreach!



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 to sign up to volunteer, make a donation, learn about membership, or check out our upcoming events!

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

TENANT ORGANIZING

ATL TENANTS FIGHT BACK AGAINST TRUMP'S PROPOSED HUD CUTS



You can support our cause by tweeting at Senator Perdue (or your own state representatives) with the hashtag #NoHudCuts.

On International Worker's Day (Tuesday May 1) Housing Justice League members and supporters rallied outside Senator David Perdue's office at a main intersection in Buckhead to protest Donald Trump's proposed cuts to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and demand the senator vote against Trump's 2019 budget proposal that includes the slashing of HUD programs across the board. The rally was part of a National Day of Action organized by the National Alliance of HUD Tenants (NAHT), of which HJL is a member. The full budget proposal represents a brutal attack on the poor that will only contribute to inequality, racism, and the war economy. According to NAHT, the \$6.8 billion in proposed cuts would be the deepest cuts in HUD's history. Deborah Arnold, a community activist with Housing Justice League and NAHT Vice President commented, "Trump wants to cut taxes for the richest of the rich, paid for by raising rents on the poorest of the poor. 80% of HUD tenant households are led by women. We, too, demand that Congress reject Trump's vicious assault on the women, children, elderly and disabled people who live in HUD housing."

If approved, program cuts would leave even more

people in Georgia and across the US at high risk of death, without basic necessities such as housing, food, and health care in order to give tax cuts to corporations and the extremely wealthy. Trump's cuts would pay for a \$1.5 trillion tax cut for the 1% and corporations, huge hikes in the Pentagon budget, including first strike nuclear weapons, and the border Wall. Nationally, the cuts would raise rents on nearly 1.8 million families and 3 million children receiving rental assistance, squeezing even more rent from poor communities caught in discriminatory and exploitative systems including the housing market, education, and criminal justice system. In Georgia, the cuts would affect nearly 60,000 households. Rents would be raised by increasing the share of income that households must pay in rent from 30 to 35 percent, eliminating income deductions for households that have high out-of-pocket expenses (such as childcare), and raising minimum rents for households with little or no income, most with incomes below half of the poverty line.

Trump's budget proposes to cut 200,000 people from Section 8 Vouchers next year – 10% of the total – and an astounding 37% from Public Housing operating budgets, which are already severely underfunded. The budget also repeals Section 8 Enhanced Vouchers, which would immediately displace more than 30,000 families and seniors across the nation.

Additionally 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. 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. The plan includes a proposal to let agencies and certain subsidized housing owners



condition rental assistance on work requirements, while the budget proposal simultaneously includes deep cuts to job training programs.

Throughout the rally, residents of HUD-subsidized housing, as well as a few community supporters, explained to the crowd why they oppose any cuts to HUD, their voices amplified by the "People's PA." Mary Porter, an activist and resident at Veranda at Auburn Point, a senior HUD-insured public housing complex in Sweet Auburn commented, "We live on fixed incomes. We cannot afford for our rents to be raised. We cannot continue to be mistreated by the government of the United States of America. We deserve affordable housing. This is not just about people who live in affordable housing. Those of you who don't live in affordable housing, and who don't have to live in affordable housing should care about those of us who do."

Protesters emphasized that the budget changes will not only affect the most vulnerable people in Georgia, but their entire communities as well. "You can't address poverty if you don't address affordable housing. We are in a housing crisis in

Atlanta. All we're doing is increasing homelessness," commented Karimah Dillard, a student of social work and community advocate. "When I think about the social cost of raising rent, it goes so far beyond whether or not I'm able to make my rent payment. We're talking about can I eat? Can I afford my medicine? Transportation? If I can't drive to work, I will lose my job."

Following the rally, protesters entered the Terminus 100 Building to request a meeting with Senator Perdue. Due to Perdue's office being located 26 stories up on a "closed floor," only a small group managed to get into the elevator leading to the correct floor. They were able to hold a brief meeting with Perdue's State Director, Ben Fry, to explain their concerns and request a meeting at a later date with the Senator. "The government will subsidize corporate America, but it won't subsidize poor people, or low-income people, or the working class community. Everything that's being proposed seems to be going against the working lower-class people," explained Columbus Ward, long-term Peoplestown resident and HJL member. "We want our representatives to understand the negative impact these cuts will have on the people who elected them." Alison Johnson, another



Peopletstown resident and member of HJL added, “all of our public housing has been taken away. Not only are we asking for no HUD cuts, we’re asking for money to be put back into the HUD budget. We can’t afford to live the way we are living today. There is nowhere for us to go. We are here today to ask respectfully that David Perdue listen to the constituents that put him in office. We cannot tolerate or take another HUD cut.”

An attack like this, added to an already severe housing crisis in which over half of renters are paying more than 30% of their income in rent (the definition of affordability), and people of color are

being hit the hardest, makes an urgent situation even more dire. Housing Justice League is supporting tenant organizing through regular monthly tenant trainings and ongoing support, in working to build political force among a large renter class that is already shifting political consciousness and power across the United States and internationally. Hul’yah Yasah, a tenant organizer at the HUD-subsidized Briarcliff Apartments commented, “we rise that we may be a voice for the voiceless. We no longer have to look to you to make it right. Our presence is what makes it right.”

HOUSING JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS GATHER IN NASHVILLE, TN



On May 4 through May 7 housing and land justice organizers from 18 organizations and 8 southern states gathered in Nashville, Tennessee for a weekend of training, strategizing, and making connections. This gathering was organized by a new regional organizing network called Homes for All South which is part of the national Homes for All coalition. As the housing crisis becomes even more destructive to our communities and lives, with half of renters in the US paying unaffordable rent and people of color being hit the hardest, it is more important than ever that we come together to learn from each other's work, support one another, and build unity and power in the landscape of the south.

Nashville, much like Atlanta, is experiencing an intense period of growth. Estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau show that from 2016–2017 the city’s population grew by more than 36,000 residents, an average of 100 people moving there every day. If these numbers sound unbelievable, a cursory look around Nashville itself supports them. All throughout the city’s downtown one can see cranes on top of each other, hovering over dense clusters of ongoing apartment and condominium construction. Heading further out from the city center, areas like the historically Black working-class neighborhood of Edgehill are undergoing massive construction with tall, skinny, uniform duplexes towering over subsidized

housing complexes and smaller, older, ranch-style homes.

At the gathering Housing Justice League was represented by a delegation of eight, including both new and experienced organizers, and four tenant leaders representing their buildings. We were also joined by a neighbor organization, Los Vecinos de Buford Highway, working with immigrant tenant populations just north of Atlanta.

Training “tracks” during the conference were divided into three topics called “Community Control of Land and Housing,” “Development without Displacement,” and “Tenant Unions 101.”

Particularly informative was the tenant union training track which was co-led by Homes for All Nashville, the City-wide Tenants Union of Rochester, and the Housing Justice League. Focus topics included step-by-step process to building a tenant union, conflict resolution, addressing harassment from management, and scaling up to a city-wide tenant union.



The Rochester Tenants Union also shared their approach to broader organizing structures which includes a definition of “tenant” as someone who lacks control over their housing and encompasses bank tenants, homeless people, public housing tenants, and market-rate private housing tenants. With representation and leadership from these different groups, they have been able to identify key issues that spread across all three groups and try to build goals and strategies to dismantle the underlying systems causing the shared issues of

dignified conditions, security, and affordability.

Franklin Mack, a tenant leader at Capitol Towers Avenue School Apartments reflected, “I really benefited from the training that we receive at the HFA conference in Nashville. It’s mind-boggling to know that other tenants’ associations across the country are experiencing the same negative effect of not having a enough affordable housing in their communities and quality-of-life issues similar to those that we are experiencing here in Atlanta. After hearing testimonies from other associations that attended the conference, and the role-playing we did in some of those workshops, I am equipped to use what I have learned so that I may be able to speak for those who are not able to speak for themselves and for those who do not know their rights as tenants in HUD subsidized housing.”

This broader perspective on the struggle is crucial to our own understanding at home. Too often those of us that are involved in efforts to challenge this history of systemic, deliberate oppression find ourselves mired in the confusion that these systems set out to produce in the first place. Taking our eyes off of simply our own city, our own homes, if even for a few days, can reinvigorate our sense of purpose. It can take us out of our own alienating condition, and by bringing us closer to others fighting far from us, bring us closer to our own understanding of this movement.

INTERVIEW WITH FRANKLIN MACK, TENANT LEADER AT CAPITOL TOWERS

Franklin Mack is a member of the newly formed tenant association at Capital Towers/Capital Ave Schools and shared some of his story with us this month for the newsletter. The Capital Towers/Capital Ave Schools Association became an official member of Housing Justice League last month.

How did you get involved with your tenant association?

I was a new resident at Capitol Towers last year in August. The management of our building posted a notice suggesting we start an association for tenants rights. A lot of tenants in our building were not associating with each other. We needed an organization through which the senior tenants





could channel their concerns such as loneliness. A lot of us have things to do on the weekends, but the other five or six days a week we are stuck by ourselves. But we are still a very viable asset to our community, we have a lot of wisdom we can pass on to our fellow residents. We needed a way to be more involved with the community.

What is the work you do for your tenant association?

I am the Sergeant at Arms for my tenant association and my responsibilities are posting notifications for meetings and setting up the meeting location. I also attend Housing Justice League meetings and events to bring back information to my tenant association and help build a stronger tenant association. Housing Justice League is very concerned with communities having tenant associations and even though we are not where we want to be yet, we can help other associations with starting up.

How did your association hear about Housing Justice League? What do you see as the role of

Housing Justice League?

When our management posted the notices about starting a tenant association, a longtime resident of Capitol Tower suggested reaching out to Housing Justice League on how to build a legal and sound association. Housing Justice League helps us to understand tenant rights because many residents are not familiar with laws and the meaning of our lease. I see HJL as an outlet for advice on how to build an association that will benefit tenants, address quality of life concerns, and create good communication between management and tenants.

What are your hopes for your tenant association?

Tenants in our building are interested in having off-site activities which is a big financial burden on one tenant association but if we were able to join with other tenant associations it could be more financially feasible, as well as a good opportunity to connect with members of tenant associations in different buildings.

HJL-SPONSORED EVENTS

Wednesday March 23 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!