

STATE OF D.C. HOUSING

The rising cost of housing in D.C. is turning historically working-class and low-income neighborhoods into playgrounds for the rich. The tide of gentrification across the District now means the median rent is more than \$1,400. A family needs to earn \$27 per hour to afford a two-bedroom market-rate apartment. The current minimum wage (\$8.25) is only 30 percent of the needed wage, and even the minimum wage increase coming in 2016 (\$11.50) is only 42 percent of the housing wage.

Most people think rent control policies are a way to counter the effects of gentrification, but thousands of residents are being pushed out of the District every year. Currently, rent control is limited to buildings built before 1976 – a rapidly shrinking set of units. This lack of real rent control has had serious consequences. Between 2000 and 2010, median rents increased by 50 percent. In the same period, half of all low-cost rental units were lost, while the number of high-cost units tripled. To put this even further in context, the lowest-income 40 percent of D.C. households have seen essentially no change in income. Specifically for renters, the average income has also remained virtually unchanged.

The true meaning of “affordable” housing is very muddled. Affordable housing is determined via relationship to area median income (AMI), which measures not just the District, but many of the wealthy surrounding coun-

ties, distorting measures of affordability. The current AMI in the District is \$107,500. Practically, this means even a lot of “affordable” units remain out of reach for those with the greatest need and the most significant burden in housing costs.

The truth about District policy on affordable housing

With tens of thousands on waiting lists for affordable housing, even those with decent work are being squeezed by the thirst for profits among developers and rental companies. The District government claims the problem is beyond any budgetary solution.

As advocacy group ONE DC points out, however, in the past 10 years, the District gave \$1.7 billion to developers, and this amount could have housed every family making less than \$32,250 (30 percent of area median income) – 60,000 families – for more than two years.

The District has a Housing Production Trust Fund, which has received roughly \$100 million per year (the baseline for appropriate funding according to many housing activists) over the last three years. But historically, this Trust has produced fewer than 1,000 units for families earning under \$32,250 per year, meeting less than 2 percent of the need. That’s fewer than 1,000 units for 60,000 families!

Limited Equity Housing Cooperatives (LEHCs) present one of the most powerful tools

The bottom line is that current policies are not working for the poor and working people in the District.

for countering displacement in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods. At an average development cost of under \$165,000 per unit, they are one of the most cost effective ways to preserve affordable housing. With 45 tenant associations filing for assistance in Fiscal Year 2012 alone – representing over 1000 units – program goals and funding must be significantly increased to adequately respond to the pressing need for affordable housing in D.C. Yet despite the benefits, funding for the program has fallen sharply in recent years, to under \$2 million in Fiscal Year 2013.

There are currently 71,000 people on the public housing waiting list. To house them would cost an estimated \$2.3 billion. \$1.3 billion of that would upgrade our existing public housing stock and ensure our residents in public housing have safe, livable and comfortable accommodations. Currently, however, no substantial sum is being appropriated to upgrade or build public housing units. Instead, the District is continuing efforts to reduce the number of public housing units, and in fact allows hundreds to sit vacant.

The bottom line is that current policies are not working for the poor and working people in the District. We need a grassroots movement to fight back. We have the tools – it is time to use them.

We can have a big impact:

Fighting Displacement

Tenants facing displacement can lean on Justice First as a resource in the fight to protect their rights. Whether it is preparation to deal with District boards and agencies, building support amongst neighbors and D.C. residents, or holding rallies and press conferences, we are here to help. Our organizers work directly with tenants to empower and support the struggle.

Fighting for Rent Control

Rent control is critical and more advocacy is needed to change decades-old policies. Justice First is engaged in a district-wide campaign to demand that rent control be determined not by a set multi-year formula but instead be based on real annual increases in the cost-of-living and wage realities.

Promoting Alternatives

As we fight gentrification and displacement, we also promote and produce materials on alternatives, like Limited Equity Housing Cooperatives to create affordability and ownership, a D.C. Public Bank to leverage District dollars, and District investment in priorities for residents – like housing – as opposed to contributing to the dividend payments of Wall Street banks.

Building empowerment

We recognize that the issues are ongoing and ever-changing. As such we are a membership organization that brings together people who believe that housing is one of the basic rights people should have. We are building an infrastructure, and a culture of organizing to confront the many challenges in housing and other areas of the lives of working-class and low-income District residents.

WHERE DO WE FIT IN?

Justice First recognizes that this is a fight that will take a lot to win. The statistics show that District policies are totally backward. We believe housing is a right; no one should be denied access to shelter, certainly not in one of the richest cities in the richest country on earth.

Get involved!



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Housing is a RIGHT!

- ◆ Fighting Displacement
- ◆ Fighting for Rent Control
- ◆ Promoting Alternatives
- ◆ Building Long-term Empowerment