

Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law

Hearing on Human Rights of HUD Tenants

March 04, 2024

Written Testimony of Miracle Fletcher

Chairman Ossoff, and members of the Subcommittee on Human Rights.

My name is Miracle Fletcher. I am a 40-year-old mother, a rare cancer survivor, and a housing advocate. I am here today to share my experiences as a former Tenant living in Trestletree Villages Apartments.

In late 2018 I moved into Trestletree Villages to ensure I was able to afford to pay my monthly bills without assistance from family members due to complications from my previous cancer diagnosis. I moved into unit 777A with a feeling of security and ease, thinking this was a safe, secure environment for myself and my children. Shortly after moving into my unit, I started to hear loud bubbling noises erupting from my pipes centering from my bathtub drain. The sounds mimic the sound your stomach makes if the room is silent, and a person has not eaten for a while. Little did I know the rumbles would grow into a massive plumbing issue. My unit at 777A constantly flooded with an up-flow of raw sewage consistent with my neighbors flushing their toilets and heavy rainfalls. Floating pieces of fecal matter, eaten food, toilet paper, and derbies filled my bathtub overflowing onto my floors throughout my apartment. The everyday smell of a foul odor of feces that would normally cause someone to cringe upon smelling it became the dreadful smell we endured daily. Our reality was not a Folgers cup wake up. Instead, our mornings consisted of walking through contaminated sewer water to reach the restroom to brush our teeth and wash our faces while inhaling the vile-smelling odor fumes of bowel movements-drifting-in bathtub. Thoughts about the quality and sanitation of our water remained a consistent thought in our minds. Four months of daily exposure to raw sewage floating discarded food

particles, fecal matter, and blood was extremely hurtful and inhumane. Despite reports to management, my daughter was taking a shower while my upstairs neighbor flushed her toilet. The content of her bowel movement covered my daughter's feet. While she attempted to take a shower to clean her body instead found her feet covered in feces. This was a horrifying experience for my daughter and myself as a mother. At that moment I felt the pain of being unheard all over my body leaving me empty without recourse or support.

My children and I lived in uninhabitable conditions after consistent attempts to get management to address the severe plumbing issues resulted in a merry-go-round of emails to management and phone calls to the National Housing Compliance leading to a dead end of hopelessness. After repeated attempts to seek assistance, my unit 777A erupted with a nonstop flow of raw sewage that flowed over into my neighbor's unit underneath the floor and baseboards. As my neighbors assisted in attempting to salvage our things, the things in my unit discarded during previous months of exposure to sewage. Due to the consistency of water in my unit daily I utilized all the towels, covers, and any other materials we could use to stop the water flow. Constant exposure to fecal matter and raw sewage contributed to exposure to my exposure to bacteria and stomach infection.

Finally intense flooding led to our relocation from the downstairs unit 777A into the upstairs unit 777D. After moving into unit D I, along with other tenants came together to address concerns that were mutually shared. After partnering with other organizations to assist us in organizing the pathway for us to get assistance for our concerns was not clear.

I started to research our HUD tenant's rights uncovering HUD CFR part 245 - the right for tenants to organize without interference from management. The tenants' association canvassed passing out flyers for meetings, rallies, and community resources. Due to our organizing during the COVID-19 pandemic, we experienced fines, retaliation, lease violations, threats of eviction, and the placement of any suspected community organizer, churches, or organization suspected of offering support to the tenants' association, placed on a criminal trespassing list.

Throughout all our efforts we still feel like we felt unheard. Our rights are violated daily yet, the constant threats of losing our homes weighed heavier than the support we received from HUD.

Our posted meeting signs removed, and oppressive treatment received for our unwavering commitment to upholding our HUD rights to organize. Living in one of the nicest neighborhoods in Atlanta surrounded by \$250,000 homes yet isolated from exposure to the nature preserve right next door to us. Our children were climbing kudzu to reach the Beltline or the blatant disregard for electrical issues, plumbing concerns, or a massive water flood steaming from a utility hole sewer cover in our parking lot causing massive flooding. A shared feeling of insignificance resonated amongst all of us. My question as well as all the tenants at that time and still is today. Where is HUD? How are they allowing us to live like this?

Continually organizing and educating ourselves prompted the tenant's association to send more invites for meetings between management and HUD. This led to missed scheduled meetings from management and police enforcement officials requesting tenants and organizers to leave the property. The constant fight for our association's acknowledgement overshadowed our main concern, the habitability of our living conditions. In late October 2021, I experienced issues concerning my water heater, previously reported the water heater left unfixed or replaced and declared unsafe by the gas company. From October until January 31, 2022, when I moved out of unit 777D my children and I lived without access to hot water.

Today I leave challenging HUD to implement a task force created of tenants with lived experiences of housing insecurities in partnership with HUD and The National Housing Compliance. The HUD Tenants Task Force will serve to ensure tenants concerns for the habitability of their living will be efficiently and urgently addressed by HUD placing the accountability on land lords and property owners to provide safe and healthy housing for us all. Thank you.