

A Statement from the Richmond Democratic Socialists of America, Regarding the Housing Crisis at RRHA
Delivered to City Council during session Open Comments, November 12, 2019

Charles Peters, Chair, Communications Committee

We are outraged.

On the Agenda is a Proclamation, that the week before Thanksgiving be Richmond Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. We can't ignore that irony, but we'll honor the meaning of that week by asserting that housing is a human right.

These problems are not new. For decades, RRHA residents have been trapped in a grinding cycle, not receiving the housing necessary for life, health, and dignity, that is theirs by right. Since the first highways crashed into Richmond's black neighborhoods, and the Courts built to rehouse some of the victims, this cycle repeated: scandal, hand-wringing over costs, and relieved abandonment at the first opportunity. This time, though, the cycle may break, because the government has grown callous enough.

Since the release of the 2020 RRHA Plan described the demolition of the Courts, RRHA's betrayal of its residents has been a matter of public record. Empty units go unrented, comments restricted in advance of functionally unannounced Board votes, shocking residents. When challenged, the reply from RRHA was not concern for the distress inflicted, only statements that the letter of the law had been followed. This is among the lies RRHA offered to the public. Multiple violations of federal housing law have occurred.

We understand, as developers swarm the East End and occupy public meetings; as new rules, never before mentioned nor enforced, hid the Board reading new resolution language into the minutes, or as Board members declared in shock that RRHA's Counsel was advocating for developers and not them. Board meeting minutes have not been posted since July.

This is the old violence of Richmond. This is the propertied class, devouring the common wealth, spooned by public officials. This is the sexist violence of men taking whatever they want from women, for any reason whatsoever. This is the white supremacist violence, the monetization of black suffering, the demonstration that no matter how cruel, the whims of white wealth must be satisfied. This is the old class warfare of Richmond, waged by the rich on the poor since the colonial invasion of Powhatan lands.

This Council doesn't have to watch it happen. You have authority over RRHA. Nothing is stopping you from asserting control. Until you do, you're complicit in this violence. Homelessness dramatically shortens lives. People will die if you don't do your jobs, and help them.

Thank you.