Preventing Displacement and Maintaining Diversity in Philadelphia

Philadelphia is changing rapidly, and with it, property values and rents are rising. Philadelphia has typically lagged behind its peers in New York, Chicago, D.C., and Los Angeles in development. However, the past few years have seen a ramping up of speculative land purchase by developers, the increased presence of out of town investors, demographic changes in every major region of the city, and an increased level of construction activity. With Philadelphia on the cusp of rapid gentrification, property owners and landlords are increasingly making decisions that detrimentally impact the ability of tenants to remain in their longtime homes in areas of opportunity – close to schools, jobs, transportation, grocery stores and mixed income neighborhoods.

Mass evictions of low-income residents is a particularly pernicious form of eviction that has major health and economic implications for families, and which destroys economic, cultural, and racial diversity in communities where it occurs. The forced displacement of tenants from their homes and neighborhoods has a direct impact on the health of families, who must then find housing in cheaper, more impoverished neighborhoods, often having to travel farther and spend more to maintain their employment, health, and schooling for their children. The shortage of affordable housing available in Philadelphia becomes only aggravated by this crisis – existing affordable housing units are lost forever when mass displacements happen. This in turn puts pressures on resources and housing stock elsewhere in the city, and works to concentrate poverty and increase segregation in particular neighborhoods.

By the time a mass eviction is underway, it is often too late to employ available legal strategies, even if there are violations of civil and human rights. The more time that passes, the more limited the options for tenants facing these circumstances become. It is vital to identify vulnerable buildings and intervene prior to mass eviction, in order to prevent the displacement that creates health-harming homelessness or housing instability for lower-income families, or pushes entire communities out of neighborhoods.

Mass evictions and displacements from multifamily buildings take several different forms and are a result of specific public policies that enable them to take place. There has been a robust response from the City in addressing issues of eviction prevention for individual households and access to affordable housing, including the creation of the Mayor’s Task Force on Eviction Prevention, the forthcoming Housing Action Plan, and the Construction Impact Tax. However, mass evictions of entire buildings and affordable apartment complexes have become dangerously commonplace in Philadelphia, requiring tailored strategies and interventions.

CLS and TURN have serious concerns about the impact of mass displacements on the future of communities and low-income residents and are working toward developing solutions. There must be policy changes and legal supports that will prevent, or at least ameliorate, the human suffering and the disparate racial and economic impact caused by the mass displacement of

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Preventing Displacement and Maintaining Diversity in Philadelphia communities. There is an opportunity to work with property owners and tenants to prevent mass evictions and displacement before they happen, while advocating for policies that protect tenants from becoming trapped in these situations, and that preserve affordable housing in the communities that need it most. With the right tools, strategies, and resources, we can work to preserve safe, affordable housing in Philadelphia, preventing the health-harming effects of housing instability, substandard housing, displacement, and homelessness that threaten thousands of Philadelphians every day.

**TURN and CLS invite our colleagues in the eviction prevention, affordable housing, and government communities to join with us and community leaders from throughout Philadelphia in fighting displacement by:**

1. Creating a public dialogue on the increasing threat of mass evictions and tenant displacement in Philadelphia, centering the voice of tenants and tenant advocates;
2. Participating in a community forum which will be held on October 9, 2018 as part of the Philadelphia Reinvestment Summit at the Wyndham Hotel and;
3. Supporting the formation of a tenant anti-displacement working group focused specifically on creating additional legal resources, tools, and strategies to prevent displacement and maintain racial and economic diversity in Philadelphia.

**For more information, please contact:**

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