



October 19, 2015

Tia Ingram, Executive Director
Berkeley Housing Authority
1936 University Avenue, Suite 150
Berkeley, CA 94704

Dear Ms. Ingram:

The Berkeley NAACP has observed a very disturbing trend in the housing of low-income African Americans tenants. To that end we are asking to be included in the process of hiring the next Berkeley Housing Authority Executive Director. As a vanguard organization it is our solemn and sacred responsibility to look out for our downtrodden and often voiceless community members. Indeed just last year (2014) we witnessed over 600 low income housing residents be displaced from their low income public housing which was sold to a private developer.

That's 75 units of three and four bedroom housing privatized with the promise that 13 families would be allowed to return to the renovated apartments. That's only 17% of the total households that were displaced. That means 83% of the families were forced to find somewhere else to live. The net effect of this upheaval was the permanent removal of hundreds of African Americans from the Berkeley citizenry. Gentrification has devastated Berkeley's African-American population and it appears that BHA is contributing to this immoral situation. This is unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue unchecked. To end this disturbing trend we are asking for transparency in the hiring process and would like to have a Q and A with the candidates in order to ascertain how they intend to maintain diversity in reference to retaining African Americans as residents in Berkeley given the present socioeconomic conditions.

We realize that housing is a game changer. It is the first stage in establishing stability for many individuals and families. Our research reveals that in 1975 Berkeley was 29% black. Fast forward to 2015 and the black population numbers less than 8%. Our recent Mason Tillman report reminds us that the community must be ever vigilant, less the old ways of doing business such as cronyism, nepotism, favoritism and overt discrimination will return with a vengeance.

Moreover, we feel that BHA's staff is not being proactive enough to successfully replenish the housing stock available to low income African Americans and other low-income Berkeley residents. The current trend of the staff is to process the perspective African American tenant for "Porting Out" of Berkeley to other communities for section 8 housing. Adding insult to injury the few fortunate African Americans who have been able to secure housing in Berkeley are under constant assault and scrutiny from BHA and landlords.

Several BHA low income residents continuously complain to us about all types of unprofessional and unethical encounters with city officials, their landlords and BHA employees. According to many of the resident's health and safety code violations are rarely enforced against the offending landlords although there may be several code violations. In the final analysis we feel that the BHA staff is not ensuring that their Section 8 voucher holders are being respected and protected.

A new round of danger is on the horizon for many of the African Americans who reside in the old public housing units. The one year anniversary of those current tenants lease agreements will culminate with the loss of their ability to move with a "housing choice" voucher. Essentially this means the voucher stays attached to the unit and the tenant must leave and face market rate rents when they decide to or are forced to move out of their current rental unit. Curiously, section 8 voucher holders are not protected by Berkeley rent control regulations and policies.

As previously stated the African American presence in Berkeley is under severe socioeconomic stress. It is our organizations responsibility to investigate, expose and suggest remedies to alleviate disparities. Several African American female Section 8 head of household tenants have stated that they feel disrespected by their landlords. Oftentimes maintenance issues are not reported or repaired because these women don't want to be subjected to verbal indignities and the invasion of their privacy by unscheduled visits from surly maintenance personnel.

Since landlords have stopped renting to African Americans in pursuit of the upwardly mobile population, we have noticed an increase in the reporting of unethical tactics and practices by landlords and their employees. Once again our research reveals that there is a huge disparity in income between Blacks and Whites in our state and within our county. According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey, In 2014 Household median income (estimates)

California			
Black	\$42,509.00		
Black	\$41,911.00		

Well educated, financially secure, gainfully employed and upwardly mobile Whites, Asians and others are moving into historically African American and low-income communities. Racial income disparity puts premium housing out of reach for low-income African Americans. Thus the escalating cost of goods and services are informed by these dynamics and reduced to one all inclusive codification popularly known as gentrification. This often means smothering the locals who don't have the economic resources to stay in their historical neighborhoods and communities. The way forward suggest that city planners, policy makers and other stakeholders must intervene in order to preserve the place of space that African Americans of lower economic means deserve. To that end we endeavor.

Yours in Service,

Mansour Id-Deen,
President, Berkeley NAACP

cc: Berkeley City Council Members