

Racial Equity Progress & Accountability Report

July 2023 – December 2023

Regional Housing
Legal Services &
The Pennsylvania
Utility Law Project

Transparency & Accountability in Housing and Utility Policy

- RHLS attorneys worked with the Philadelphia Community Land Trust on the acquisition of six homes for rental to low-income families in Strawberry Mansion, a historically disinvested neighborhood in Philadelphia.
- PULP led efforts to co-draft comments on the PA Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Interim Final Environmental Justice Policy. A total of 29 environmental, faith-based, health advocacy, housing, and energy agencies and organizations signed the comments, which emphasized support for engaging impacted communities before the submission of a permit application, recommended DEP use EJ mapping tools to inform all agency work, and asked that DEP promulgate formal EJ regulations.
- PULP submitted comments/reply comments in the Low-Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP) rulemaking on behalf of CAUSE-PA, advocating for improved coordination, health/safety measures, fuel switching, and other reforms to help address disparities in housing efficiency for historically disinvested communities. PULP also drafted a sign-on letter, joined by 36 organizations.
- RHLS attorneys completed the legal work with Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia on the construction and sale of six single-family homes to low-income families in North Philadelphia, a majority-minority section of the city.
- PULP led efforts to co-draft comments with frontline groups, provided verbal testimony, and coordinated advocacy with NE Climate Justice Alliance members to improve investment in and engagement with impacted communities through the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).
- PULP built a relationship with and were invited to join meetings of the Pennsylvania Climate Equity Table, and asked to serve as a technical consultant for their Whole-Home Repairs advocacy.
- RHLS Attorneys helped a client secure a Community Benefits Agreement to ensure that the legislative remapping of a prominent West Philadelphia site is developed as 100% affordable housing.
- PULP participated in utility Universal Service advisory committees to push for better language access and to ensure program notices and outreach materials are provided in English and Spanish, as well as other commonly spoken languages.
- Erie adopted a Rental Housing Ordinance that contained many tenant protections that were researched and drafted by RHLS, including protections for survivors of gender-based violence and protections against retaliation for filing code complaints.

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Outreach, Engagement, Listening, and Learning

- The staff-led DEI Education Subcommittee:
 - Developed and distributed monthly emails containing DEI resources to RHLS and PULP staff.
 - Hosted a screening of Encanto in September for National Hispanic Heritage month, followed by the distribution of resources and recipes.
 - Began the process of planning and preparing for a series of in-person and virtual educational initiatives centered on “Immigration and Citizenship,” 2024’s staff-selected DEI learning theme.
- The DEI External Work Subcommittee continues its work of expanding outreach opportunities and is in the process of doing an evaluation of current work.
- RHLS gave a presentation on Community Benefits Agreements to Equitable and Just Greater Pittsburgh, a regional network for people and groups committed to advancing equity and justice to achieve people-centered change in Greater Pittsburgh.
- RHLS and PULP staff co-facilitated a workshop at the Housing Alliance of PA’s Homes Within Reach Conference with Sylvia Deaderick, founder of PA Home Matters. The session shed light on the disproportionate percentage of low-income Pennsylvania tenants facing a shortage of quality and affordable rental options, with over half of Black households falling into this category. Topics included utility and state-funded weatherization and energy efficiency initiatives, municipal authority in upholding rental health and safety regulations, and strategies to encourage heirs to rent out inherited properties to preserve generational wealth in Black communities.
- As a direct result of the advocacy of RHLS with Pittsburgh United, Mayor Gainey proposed, and the Pittsburgh City Council approved annual funding to support a \$25-\$40 million bond issuance for affordable housing. This will provide affordable housing, rental assistance and home repairs for thousands of low-income households. In addition to securing the funding allocation, RHLS will be working with Pittsburgh United to advocate for program guidelines and project selection criteria that are transparent and equitable.
- PULP organized an Environmental Justice Lunch and Learn session for the Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA) Utility Law Section, bringing in experts from the Department of Environmental Protection’s Office of Environmental Justice.
- PULP provided training to multiple frontline organizations and agencies regarding race and economic based disparities in access to energy and water, reaching over 4,000 advocates and community members.

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- RHLS submitted comments to the Federal Housing Finance Agency (which oversees Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and Federal Home Loan Bank) on tenant protections.
- PULP began its community engagement project to get better community turnout at public input hearings for utility rate cases.
- RHLS researched best practices for data collection through rental licensing programs and developed, with others, proposed data for Pittsburgh to collect in order to understand the extent and impact of investor ownership of the city's rental housing.

Resources & Internal Programs

- The staff-led DEI Internal Policy Subcommittee:
 - Reviewed and revised the Employee Self-Evaluation and Performance Appraisal form.
 - Created a DEI statement to be added to all staff job descriptions, and the revised descriptions were signed by staff.
 - Made recommendations on staff using pronouns in their email signatures.
 - Began developing hiring guidelines.
- PULP staff took on leadership roles in the PLAN Ally and Latinx Affinity Groups.
- RHLS and PULP completed a training led by Disability Rights PA in October.