

# Racial Equity Progress & Accountability Report

January 2024 – June 2024

Regional Housing  
Legal Services &  
The Pennsylvania  
Utility Law Project

## Transparency & Accountability in Housing and Utility Policy

- RHLS acted as local counsel to City of Bridges Community Land Trust (CBCLT) to close Pittsburgh’s first fully affordable New Markets Tax Credit homeownership project, bringing \$8 million to develop at least 22 permanently affordable homes throughout Pittsburgh. While the homeowner secures stability and builds equity, the community oversees long-term stewardship of the land to keep it permanently affordable through the community land trust model. All the homes will be sold to homeowners below 80% AMI. Two of the homes will be fully ADA compliant and accessible to individuals with disabilities. Additionally, CBCLT has secured over 30% MWBE (Minority- or Woman-owned Business Enterprise) participation across the project.
- PULP now serves as a Technical Consultant for the Pennsylvania Climate Equity Table for their Whole-Home Repairs and Inflation Reduction Act advocacy.
- RHLS provided technical assistance to Allegheny County in connection with their ‘500 in 500 Initiative’, an effort to create 500 new housing units in 500 days for people transitioning out of shelters.
- RHLS successfully advocated for more resources for the PA Housing Affordability Fund (PHARE). The amount of money PHARE receives from the Realty Transfer Tax will increase from \$60M to \$100M over four years. The Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) tax credit saw its allocation double from \$36M to \$72M in the new budget along with increases in the value of the tax credits.
- RHLS co-authored “Battling Blight in Pennsylvania: The Abandoned and Blighted Property Conservatorship Act,” which analyzes Act 135 cases

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filed in Philadelphia. The article details that “Act 135 petitions are disproportionately filed in communities vulnerable to, or actively experiencing, gentrification,” and that data shows that Act 135 petitions are disproportionately filed against Asian American property owners and, to a lesser degree, Black property owners. The article concludes with a call towards further investigation into the impact on low- income property owners.

- PULP submitted comments to the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority (PBDA) on its Digital Equity Plan, advocating for specific focus on economic development for low income families, increased enrollment of eligible families in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), inclusion of community organizations in the Plan’s Asset Inventory, streamlined enrollment processes, equitable and inclusive enrollment of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals, and a call for creation of a “blueprint” and standards for digital affordability through a collaborative process.
- RHLS drafted a Philadelphia Bar Association resolution to support PA HB 657, which would prohibit unfair real estate service agreements, such as those used by MV Realty that were secured by mortgages on the homeowners’ properties. According to an analysis by Reinvestment Fund, an estimated 69% of MV Realty’s mortgages recorded in Philadelphia were on Black-owned homes despite Black Philadelphians making up only 37% of all homeowners in Philadelphia.

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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.
  - Continues to plan and prepare for a series of in-person and virtual educational initiatives centered on “Immigration and Citizenship,” 2024’s staff-selected DEI learning theme.
- RHLS published “Rebuilding Lives on the Foundation of a Stable Home: Best Practices for Expanding Housing Options for People with Criminal Records,” a report about the importance of affordable housing and supportive services for returning citizens.
- PULP received a grant from the National Telephone Abuse Prevention Project (NTAPP) to support its work protecting low-income consumers from scams, abusive debt collection and telemarketing practices, and to address the causes and consequences of these practices.
- RHLS published “Pennsylvania’s Affordable Housing Crisis: An Explainer of State and Federal Investments,” a report comparing the distribution of housing and community development funds with demographic data across the Commonwealth.
- As part of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission Annual Fair Housing Equality Summit, PULP joined a panel of presenters to highlight various aspects of tenant protections, including protections against racial discrimination and protections for tenants with disabilities, including mental health struggles.

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- PULP assisted with planning and moderating the PLAN Latinx Affinity Group’s training “Cultivating Cultural Humility and the Duty of Competency for Legal Service Providers.”
- PULP assisted with planning and moderating the PLAN Asian Pacific American Affinity Group’s training “Asian Americans and the Law: A Conversation with Civil Rights Advocate Tsiwen Law.”
- RHLS has been participating on the Steering Committee of the Philadelphia Bar Foundation’s Steering Committee for its Equal Justice Center HUB, which will serve as a web-based resource for information and referrals for Philadelphians seeking civil legal help. They will be holding focus groups and conducting surveys in low-income communities in Philadelphia to determine the nature of the residents’ civil legal needs.
- RHLS was asked to comment in the Philadelphia Inquirer on an ongoing crisis of a predatory company preying on affordable housing complexes for seniors.

## Resources & Internal Programs

- The staff-led DEI Internal Policy Subcommittee finished drafting hiring guidelines. The guidelines are awaiting final approval from the overall DEI Committee and Leadership Team. The Procurement Standards have been finalized and sent to Leadership Team for approval.