

Racial Equity Progress & Accountability Report

July 2024 – December 2024

Regional Housing
Legal Services &
The Pennsylvania
Utility Law Project

Transparency & Accountability in Housing and Utility Policy

- RHLS and PULP urge for more supportive housing, advancing racial equity, and environmental justice in PHFA’s Qualified Allocation Plan. RHLS submitted comments to PHFA during the open QAP comment period. The letter made many suggestions to improve the state of affordable housing in Pennsylvania, including calling for more supportive housing allocation.
- RHLS submitted comments as part of a group on investor ownership of affordable housing in PA. RHLS worked with the Allegheny County Financialization of Housing Incubator to research best practices and draft public comments to the Pittsburgh Department of Permits, Licenses and Inspections (PLI) regarding investor ownership of rental housing. Since the 2008 financial crisis, investment corporations and private equity firms have become increasingly active in America’s rental housing market. Institutional investors tend to operate under a business model that maximizes short-term returns by increasing rents and keeping repairs to a minimum. This business model harms tenants and can leave communities with a deteriorating housing stock.
- RHLS issued an organizational statement and follow up assessment on the Johnson v. Grants Pass U.S. Supreme Court case that had serious implications for the criminalization of homelessness. The Court’s decision in Grants Pass risks empowering jurisdictions to enact punitive policies that will further the crisis of homelessness, exacerbate existing racial disparities in housing instability through criminal collateral consequences, and harming our neighbors when they are struggling most. At RHLS, we and our partners know the answer to the question “How do we end homelessness in America?” is “With homes!”
- PULP advocated with an electric company to improve its language access policies at the time of termination to ensure that Spanish-speaking households are properly informed of emergency protections, as well as improvement of tracking of its outreach efforts to ensure the company is properly targeting underserved communities.

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- PULP won an increase in investment of electric fleet vehicles in environmental justice communities served by a gas company in Western PA. The company will also consult with stakeholders to develop a plan to report on the progress of the fleet electrification process.

Outreach, Engagement, Listening, and Learning

- RHLS's Outreach Specialist continues to update and expand housing resource sheets for counties in Western Pennsylvania, including Spanish-language versions of the fliers. We have also created a short version of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Tenant's Guide and produced a Spanish-language version of the condensed document. The LIHTC Tenant's Guide continues to get significant usage from other legal services providers in their tenant education programs. These are available on the housing resource page of our website.
- The RHLS Policy Team recorded a video series that explains the various ways in which affordable housing construction is funded. These videos are part of an educational series that the Policy Team is working on to help professional capacitation of smaller and less experienced affordable housing developers.
- The RHLS Policy Team wrote a report on rent stabilization measures that protect manufactured home communities, historically very vulnerable because they do not own the land that their homes sit on. In recent years, manufactured home communities (MHCs, sometimes called mobile home parks) have faced growing issues as private equity firms have increasingly bought them up. The idea is not to prevent property owners from benefiting from their investments, but rather to control how and when rent increases happen so they are gradual and manageable for residents. The state-by-state review conducted by RHLS staff includes twelve states.

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- RHLS Development Services attorneys worked with the Women’s Community Revitalization Project on the Abigail Pankey Apartments, a newly constructed building with 32 apartments. Eight of the apartments will be fully accessible, and two will be sensory units, accessible to those with hearing and visual differences. The apartments are reserved for low-income families, and there will be a supportive services office on-site to work with them.
- RHLS Development Services attorneys have been working in the Uptown Flats Development. Phase One included the renovation of Bethlehem Haven, a 26 Single Room Occupancy (SRO) facility on Fifth Avenue, where Bethlehem Haven has operated a year-round supportive shelter for women. Phase Two included the new construction of 34 apartments in a new mixed-use building with 34 LIHTC apartments and supportive services for low-income residents in Pittsburgh’s Uptown neighborhood.
- RHLS worked with the Senior Law Center and the Public Interest Law Center (PILC) to provide expertise on the case of the Brith Sholom house, a 360-unit multifamily complex operated by a developer that had let the property fall into untenable conditions, causing harm to remaining residents. RHLS attorneys were quoted in an exposé conducted by the Philadelphia Inquirer that spotlighted the issues at the property.
- RHLS Development Services attorneys worked on the Mosaic Apartments in the Oakland neighborhood of Pittsburgh. The forty-eight new apartments will offer affordable housing specifically marketed toward the needs of the older LGBTQ+ community. Originally called Oakland Pride, the forty-eight apartments will also house formerly homeless, elderly individuals in select units within a welcoming and community-oriented space.

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- RHLS Development Services attorneys worked with the TLC Work-Based Training Program, Inc., a nonprofit housing developer that is headed by a returning citizen, to build affordable housing in Harrisburg’s Allison Hill neighborhood. Several of the units are fully ADA-accessible and eight of the fifty apartments in the development will be offered to returning citizens in need of permanent housing.
- PULP launched the Utility Accessibility Project (UAP) to address the unique needs of individuals with disabilities, seniors, and veterans in targeted zones within Pennsylvania.
- In partnership with The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV), PULP hosted a virtual Utility Protections Roundtable for Domestic Violence Advocates, bringing together advocates from across the state to discuss key utility protections for survivors. The session also covered updates on the 2024-2025 LIHEAP season and strategies to prevent utility shut-offs during the winter.
- PULP and RHLS, alongside other housing partners, hosted a multi-week virtual Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Bootcamp for multifamily affordable housing providers to learn about how to make affordable housing more energy efficient and prepare their portfolios to apply for funding. The series culminated in an in-person convening in Harrisburg, where the participants of the Bootcamp were able to meet with state government representatives to learn about their programs and how funding can support their housing preservation and sustainability needs.
- PULP is working with a Pittsburgh-area decarbonization coalition to support the weatherization and home health and safety repair process of a multifamily affordable housing complex housing seniors.
- PULP led an in-person DEI training for the Pennsylvania Clean Power Coalition’s Winter Convening.
- PULP gave multiple presentations on energy justice and equitable decarbonization at the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania’s annual Homes Within Reach conference and the Keystone Energy Efficiency Alliance’s annual policy conference.

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Resources & Internal Programs

- RHLS and PULP released a statement reaffirming our commitment to our community in the face of coming political uncertainty and possible upheaval. We promised that we will do all we can to be an advocate and resource for our clients and for those with low incomes, women, immigrants, Black and Brown individuals and communities, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, those with disabilities, and those who are marginalized in a myriad of other ways.
- The DEI Education Subcommittee hosted a virtual talk with Cathy Miller-Wilson, Executive Director of HIAS-PA, to learn and ask questions about immigrant and refugee policy in the U.S.
- The DEI Education Subcommittee hosted a staff-led podcast discussion about “To Be a Citizen? The History of Becoming American.”
- The DEI Internal Policy Subcommittee finalized its hiring guidelines and began its work to create additional hiring guidelines for fellows, interns, and volunteers. The Subcommittee also reviewed the “Update Nonprofit Profile” guide for GuideStar and made recommendations on which checkboxes ought to be marked and counted towards our organizational equity score. Discussions and conclusions were made toward professional development funding best practices and employee retention strategies as well.