

Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants

Save Our Homes Newsletter Winter 2011



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MAHT Fights Threats of Disastrous Cuts to HUD Programs

In Massachusetts 25,000 low income tenants could lose their Section 8 vouchers while 20,000 project-based tenants could be cut off; Public Housing could face \$52 million in cuts; and Block Grants to Massachusetts cities could face \$30 million in cuts. Because Congress has not passed a 2011 budget but only passed a temporary extension through March 4, 2011, this gives the Republican majority House the opportunity to slash \$100 billion—fully 20% of all domestic, non-military programs.

Nationally, this would mean 500,000 Section 8 Voucher tenants would be cut from the Housing Choice Voucher Program, and another 250,000 families in Project Based Section 8 would face termination as well.

“The cuts proposed by Boehner will make the Bush budget cuts look like a ‘tea party,’” comments Michael Kane, MAHT’s Executive Director. “It’s urgent for tenants and their allies to mobilize now to save their homes. Otherwise, we’re talking mass displacement starting as soon as this spring.”

The newly formed Save Our Homes Coalition is seeking a meeting with Senator Brown to see whether he will support adequate funds for HUD, while working for legislation to provide enhanced vouchers for Georgetowne tenants and others across the country at risk of displacement.

MAHT to Seek New State Legislation to Save Our Homes

The failure of Congress to protect expiring mortgage tenants adds urgency to MAHT’s efforts to win state legislation to save affordable housing. The new “expiring use” housing law signed by Governor Patrick in November 2009 unfortunately has not stopped the loss of housing.

Of the first 52 Notices filed by owners under the new law, *not one* has triggered the Right of First Refusal, which gives the state the option to buy at risk properties where owners are planning to sell in a manner which ends subsidy contracts. Instead, many owners are filing “Notices of Intent to Complete Termination” of subsidy contracts when they run out. While some may change their minds and eventually renew, there is nothing in the new law to stop the conversion of these apartments to market rents.

(Continued on page 4)

Tenant Coalition Rally at City Council Chambers & JFK Building February 14, 2011

MAHT is spearheading the Save Our Homes Coalition’s efforts to counter threatened budget cuts, starting with a major Rally at City Council Chambers at Boston City Hall on Monday, February 14, 2011 at 11 AM followed by a march to the JFK Building at 12 Noon. The action is part of a national day of actions in cities across the country, coordinated by National Alliance of HUD Tenants.



Multifamily, public housing and voucher tenants and their supporters will deliver a Valentine’s Day message to our federal elected officials demanding that they protect low income tenants from calamitous spending cuts. We demand that Congress and HUD: **Fully fund and do not cut Section 8, Public Housing, and other HUD Programs! Protect tenants in buildings with expiring HUD mortgages!**

In the News

- **The Bay State Banner** featured a long article on the Georgetowne Tenants Rally in Cleary Square, Hyde Park October 2010. See Thursday, November 11, 2010 www.baystatebanner.com.
- Also in the **Banner** an article about MAHT’s Holiday Party where Congressman Barney Frank was honored. See Thursday December 23, 2010 baystatebanner.com

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MAHT Tenants Attend One Nation Rally in D.C.

MAHT tenants were a part of history when they attended the One Nation Rally in Washington, D.C. on October 2nd. The rally, organized by the One Nation Working Together Coalition, focused on messages of job creation, access to education, immigrant reform, and access to affordable housing. Tenants from High Point Village, Marcus Garvey Apartments, Loring Towers, Beverly Fairweather, and the Boston Resident Advisory Board traveled by bus to D.C. in order to march in a rally of thousands and listen to progressive speakers such as Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, and the presidents of the SEIU and the NAACP. Not only were tenants able to witness this impressive rally, but they were active participants as well.

At a pre-rally for affordable housing, MAHT tenants passed out a petition asking Congress not to pass the current form of the PETRA bill, which attempts to streamline all of HUD's Section 8 programs and introduces loans and private funding into the public housing stock for the first time in history. The tenants were able to connect with union workers, peace protestors, other affordable housing tenants and many more by attending the One Nation Rally; and MAHT was able to show our strength on a national stage by parading our "Save Our Homes" banner through the Washington Mall.

Welcome New Staff to MAHT

Hannah Weinstein has joined the MAHT team as tenant organizer. Up from New York City and the Tenants and Neighbors organization, Hannah has come home to Jamaica Plain, where she grew up. She is learning the ropes quickly, helped to get out the vote and working with several tenant groups in SW Boston and the North Shore.

Stephanie Soto is MAHT's new administrative assistant, having joined the staff last summer. Stephanie is also a Jamaica Plain native and a HUD tenant at Forestvale Apartments. We welcome her and thank her for her contributions to Save Our Homes.

MAHT Board Member Leads Fight Against Bedbugs

MAHT Board Member Kathleen Burke knew that there had been a bedbug problem in some Salem public housing buildings in the past, but she began taking the problem much more seriously when she learned of an infestation on the first floor of her building. "When I heard about it in my building, I started educating myself," Ms. Burke says.

She learned that not only were some tenants not reporting their bedbug problems to the Salem Housing Authority, but also that when the Housing Authority found out about an infestation they did not automatically bring in exterminators for all other apartments in the complex.

To try to change this inadequate policy, Ms. Burke called the Health Department and mayor in Salem. However, the Salem Housing Authority still refused to bring in exterminators for all of the apartments in the two buildings with infestations. Ms. Burke then convinced The Salem News to write a story on the tenants' saga, and says, "As soon as it came out in the paper, it was a whole different story." The Salem Housing Authority immediately agreed to exterminate all apartments in the building, and currently has completely eradicated one building of bedbugs and is working on the second.

Unfortunately, protecting tenants has not been a priority of the Housing Authority during the extermination process. The Authority has not done much to provide help or alternatives for tenants who are unable to move their furniture and do not have relatives to stay with during the exterminations. Kathleen Burke continues to provide support and information to tenants, and truly has been an outstanding tenant leader throughout the bedbug infestation in Salem.



Save the Date!

**National Alliance of HUD Tenants
2011 Save Our Homes Conference
Washington DC**

June 19—June 21, 2011

Board Members

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Stephanie Soto
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Volunteer

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Volunteer

MAHT Tenants Get Out The Vote Help Defeat Questions 2 and 3



MAHT's Hyde Park Election Day Volunteers Celebrate at Victory Brunch

On Election Day, November 2, Zereel Posey and her posse of volunteers from Blake Estates elderly housing braved the cold all day to hand out literature, urging voters in Hyde Park to vote "No, No, No" on Questions 1, 2 and 3. "We're so happy we did as well as we did," commented Posey, a retired bank and hospital worker and Boston School lunch monitor. "We all pulled together and did something to help the community."

She was not alone. MAHT mobilized a small army of HUD tenants to hand out more than 10,000 leaflets and cover polls opposing the three ballot questions in Boston, New Bedford, Lawrence, Worcester, and Salem. Question 1 was an attempt to repeal the state tax on alco-

hol consumption. Question 2 was an attempt to weaken the state's primary affordable housing law, and Question 3 was an attempt to reduce the sales tax from 6.25% to 3% which would in turn slash services throughout the state. While Question 1 ultimately passed, MAHT was victorious in protecting our housing and our communities by defeating Questions 2 and 3.

In Boston, MAHT worked through the Mass VOTE coalition to coordinate the "Vote No, No, No, on 1, 2, and 3" campaign. Tenants and other MAHT volunteers went door to door at Georgetowne, High Point Village/Stonybrook Commons, and Blake Estates about why voters should vote No, No, No. On Election Day, Zereel Posey and other volunteers stood outside the polls all day in most of Hyde Park, the South End, Lower Roxbury and the North End, talking to voters as they came to vote. MAHT volunteers reached more than 80% of the voters in Hyde Park, the South End/Lower Roxbury and North End target areas.

MAHT volunteers provided all day or peak time poll coverage in 11 out of Boston's 22 Wards, including Charlestown, Mission Hill, the Fenway and Dorchester. In addition, the MAHT office in Jamaica Plain served as the "war room" for all volunteers in JP, Roslindale, Hyde Park and West Roxbury working to defeat the three ballot questions.

All this hard work heir work paid off. While voters statewide did not defeat Question 1, Boston voters overall voted "No, No, No" on all three questions, by wide margins. In Hyde Park, the highest percent of "No" votes were cast in the Georgetowne and High Point Village/Stonybrook priority precincts targeted by MAHT volunteers. The second highest "No" vote tallies were in the Hyde Park precincts covered by Posey and other MAHT volunteers on Election Day.

Following the Election, MAHT organized a Victory Brunch for Election Day volunteers in Hyde Park. Adds Zereel Posey: "We really enjoyed working with MAHT. It's a great bunch!"



Congressman Barney Frank

**honored by MAHT for his stalwart support of HUD Tenants
on December 16, 2010**

At its Annual Holiday Party, MAHT honored Congressman Barney Frank for his lifelong commitment to helping tenants save their homes. This year, Frank led the fight on Capitol Hill to win Enhanced Vouchers for Georgetowne and other at-risk families.

Continued from Page One "MAHT to Seek New Legislation"

As a result, several hundred apartments in Boston, Worcester, Stoughton, Taunton, Brockton, Lawrence, Malden and Plymouth have already been lost as affordable housing since the passage of the new state law. Another 176 at Burbank Apartments in Boston will be lost in March. At Georgetowne in Hyde Park and another 1,300 apartments statewide, moderate income tenants not currently eligible for federal rent vouchers will face \$400 to \$1,000 per month rent increases as soon as 2013, when the rent "phase in" protection of the new state law runs its course.

CEDAC recently documented the loss of 2,105 units in the first 19 "expiring 40 year mortgage" properties in the state. Projecting current trends through 2019, CEDAC estimates the state could lose 9,500 affordable units, particularly units that do not receive Section 8, when current subsidized mortgages expire.

"The new state law has not stopped the steady erosion of affordable housing, nor will it save tenants from mass displacement. Cities need supplemental state legislation to give them the tools to save our homes," comments Elaine Marin of High Point Families United. "We'll be back at the Statehouse in January to re-file Home Rule Petitions and other no-cost legislation to preserve at-risk housing." **Contact MAHT at 617.267.2949 to join MAHT's Lobby Leadership Team or the Coalition to Save Affordable Housing.**



Lorraine Fairfield of Georgetowne Tenants United at GTU/MAHT October 31, 2010 solidarity rally in Cleary Square, Hyde Park. 50 Tenants and their allies came together to underscore the loss of affordable housing and demand legislation to protect low income tenants' homes.

What's New at Georgetowne?

A lot has happened at Georgetowne Homes since our last newsletter. Since then, Georgetowne Tenants United and Beacon Properties finalized a "repairs needs survey" for tenants, with tenant volunteers and MAHT staff going door-to-door conducting the survey, completing 172 surveys. MAHT staff analyzed the surveys and forwarded the results for the management team to use to inform the development-wide renovation that will begin in the winter.

Additionally, in late September CEDAC (the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation) trained Georgetowne tenants in how to understand an owner's development budget, since the owner of Georgetowne Homes told the tenants that he would only release his development budget to them if CEDAC trained the tenants how to read it. However, when Georgetowne Tenants United met with the owner in early October, he continued to refuse to hand over the development budget.

More positive news from the owner, though, was that the rent freeze for the moderate income tenants has been extended until April 2011. Beacon also promised that if federal legislation passes allowing moderate income tenants at Georgetowne to be eligible for enhanced vouchers and enhanced vouchers to be turned into project-based Section 8, it will ensure that all of these tenants receive enhanced vouchers and then will convert these vouchers into project-based Section 8 vouchers (see "MAHT Seeks Amendment in DC but Senator Brown Blocks Appropriations Bill").

Congress Fails to Pass Enhanced Voucher Amendment

Congress adjourned in December without taking action on legislation that would have secured Enhanced Section 8 Vouchers for 286 Georgetowne families who will otherwise be displaced by \$400 to \$1000 per month rent hikes. Although MAHT won support from the outgoing Democratic House and from the Senate Appropriations Committee for an amendment to protect tenants at Georgetowne and other "expiring mortgage" buildings, Senate Republicans blocked action on the overall appropriations bill, killing the amendment for now.

It remains to be seen whether Massachusetts Senator Scott Brown will oppose budget cuts to HUD and support passage of the Georgetowne amendment in the new, more conservative Congress that was sworn in in January.

286 Georgetowne Families Face Displacement

Right now, 286 moderate income families at Georgetowne are not eligible for Enhanced Vouchers when "use restrictions" expire. At Georgetowne One, use restrictions for 172 families expired in March 2010. The Georgetowne Tenants Union won a temporary "rent freeze" from Beacon Properties last year.

At a meeting with GTU in October, Beacon announced it will extend the freeze through March 2011, to give time to win legislation in Washington. Without legislation, Beacon can raise rents in April 2013 to "market" levels—as much as \$2,320 for a three bedroom apartment.

MAHT Seeks Amendment in DC, But Senator Brown Blocks Appropriations Bill

Last April, MAHT and NAHT won major support in the House from Representative Barney Frank, who secured House support for the enhanced voucher amendment, which would protect over 80,000 at risk tenants across the country.

On December 4, Senator Scott Brown sent a letter (proposed by MAHT) to Senate leaders urging support for the amendment. Senate and House negotiators initially agreed to add \$25 million to the HUD budget for Enhanced Vouchers for tenants at-risk when HUD use agreements expire. But the agreement collapsed when Senate Republicans, including Brown, withdrew support for the overall \$1.1 trillion Appropriations bill.