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Local tenant organizations and racial justice activists are leading the way to expand the space for housing rights during the COVID crisis, and to make the important link between housing rights and racial justice. The right to safe and secure housing, without economic exploitation, is a basic human right – and because African American and Latinx families are disproportionately subject to housing insecurity and exploitation, it is also a basic civil right.

Anti-racism in housing policy also extends beyond the basic right to housing to the sources of racial segregation and community disinvestment in federal, state and local government policy. These housing policies, which emerged in the mid-20th century and continue today, need to be dismantled through a dual strategy of community reinvestment and enhanced housing mobility opportunities for Black and Latinx families.

These steps will be an important complement to ending some of the fruits (and drivers) of segregation and disinvestment, such as over-policing and mass incarceration in communities of color, separate and unequal schools for low-income children of color, and unsafe and sometimes toxic environmental determinants of health.

We offer here a few ideas for activists and policymakers to consider as they continue the battle for anti-racist policies.

Enhancing Opportunity and Community Investment

- 1) Eliminate barriers to and proactively provide for affordable housing in all communities and neighborhoods, by instituting “fair share” housing requirements and eliminating exclusionary zoning.
- 2) Fund the production and preservation of affordable housing for low- and very low-income households, with a geographic focus on highly-resourced areas and gentrifying areas.
- 3) Ensure that the administration of federal housing programs – such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and Housing Trust Fund – provides access to highly-resourced areas, rather than perpetuating segregation.
- 4) Create a state-funded pool of housing vouchers (and provide counseling) to enable more families to move to areas with healthy environments, well-resourced schools, and other resources.

Combatting Discrimination and Expanding Rights

- 5) Pass and enforce stronger fair housing protections, including source-of-income anti-discrimination laws that protect households receiving housing choice vouchers.
- 6) Provide for expanded tenants' rights, including rent regulation and just cause requirements for evictions.
- 7) Fully fund legal services for tenants to combat eviction, economic exploitation, and discrimination, and support models for collaboration among legal services, tenant organizations, supportive services, and systemic change organizations.

Creating and Safeguarding Black Wealth

- 8) Expand community ownership and control of land and housing through funding of community land trusts, tenant option to purchase laws, and limited equity coops.
- 9) Create and fund community investment programs that focus on bringing employment and community resources to high-poverty areas (without exacerbating segregation).
- 10) Support equitable wealth-building opportunities by establishing homeownership assistance funds and lending programs for low- and moderate-income households, as well as home repair funds for low-income homeowners. Ensure sufficient resources to investigate and enforce fair lending laws.
- 11) Eliminate the reliance on the local property tax – and address the disproportionate property tax burdens faced by Black and Latinx homeowners. Provide tax credits for renters, for greater equity between homeowners and renters.

Specific Policies for Local Public Housing Authorities

- 12) Connect with your state or local fair housing organization to provide anti-discrimination training and referrals for PHA clients.
- 13) Examine all PHA policies, including tenant selection and assignment, waitlist management, and criminal records policies, to identify potential areas of discriminatory impact.
- 14) Conduct implicit bias training for all PHA staff.
- 15) Assure a meaningful management advisory role for housing authority tenants, including both public housing residents and Housing Choice Voucher families.
- 16) Support and help lead campaigns for local source of income discrimination ordinances.
- 17) Adopt Small Area FMRs or Exception Payment Standards based on SAFMRs to expand housing choices for Housing Choice Voucher families, and engage in strong landlord recruitment efforts, housing mobility counseling and search assistance, and extended search times, to ensure that voucher tenants have the right to live in a community of their choice.