

# SENIOR/DISABLED TENANTS FIGHT FOR JUSTICE VS. SAHA

By Pancho Valdez

In early November of 2014, I moved into the Lofts of Marie McGuire of the San Antonio Housing Authority that houses elderly and disabled residents. The building is located on N. Alamo between Travis and Third about two blocks from the Alamo.

Nice building, I love being downtown and it was perfect, so I initially thought.

In February 2015 we had an "election" to select officers for our Resident Council. Despite SAHA management meddling, I was elected vice president.

SAHA management pretty much decided who they wanted as president and even took the ballots to the office to "count" them. Yes, very wrong, very much against the interests of those who reside at Marie McGuire. Problem was only management knew the rules. A practice that I learned is very prevalent at SAHA.

As vice-president my first act on behalf of my members was to contact a TV reporter when our elevator was broken for 5-6 days in September of 2015. No fun in older people having to climb stairs as housing authority bureaucrats take their sweet time repairing our elevator. Turns out several of us notified the media and SAHA was upset. Of course SAHA management doesn't have to climb stairs, so our attitude was screw them!

By October, 2015 the entire Executive Board minus myself resigned in frustration. As vice-president I stepped up and organized a new election. Problem was the only candidate for president, while an intelligent man, was also a racist and misogynist who groped women; disrespected older people and referred to Black tenants by the "n" word.

Within three months the tenants demanded his resignation handing him written notice in a group as per our by-laws. In March of 2016 he resigned and I became president. For a good year or so I had a good executive board and more members getting active. We confronted issues like the use of rotting produce sent for our use by the Food Bank, violation of no smoking rules and younger tenants selling cocaine, heroin and meth. Every two months we would confront the SAHA CEO with real issues adversely affecting our people like when the building manager and her "Born Again" assistant stormed into our apartments under the pretense of a house-keeping inspection writing us up for violations that didn't exist. By exposing them, the ludicrous violations "disappeared."

After a loud and boisterous meeting at the SAHA office I was accused of inciting a riot as tenants from my building and other buildings expressed our disgust with SAHA's disrespect towards us. SAHA tried to suppress us with a long, tedious written griev-



*"Too often the landlord-tenant relationship is unbalanced with all the power on the side of unscrupulous landlords"*

— Lydia Velazquez,  
US District 7 Congresswoman

ance procedure that we voted down unanimously. Again, SAHA bosses we're upset.

In August of 2017 a young, Black disabled war veteran moved to our building. He had graduated from West Point and served in Afghanistan as a licensed physician's assistant. Within two weeks SAHA gave an eviction notice on false allegations of subleasing his apartment. At Precinct 4, the Justice of the Peace Court judge, Yolanda Acuña Uresti, refused to even hear his case. This forced him to dish out \$1,500 to appeal Uresti's denial of due process. He won his appeal, but SAHA found another sympathetic judge and won on false facts from SAHA management. Last I heard, he's homeless and blacklisted by SAHA.

Last November, a lesbian tenant named Carla died. Immediately SAHA manager Priscilla Salazar issued Carla's spouse (Brenda) an eviction notice refusing to acknowledge their marriage. Brenda is awaiting a court date on this eviction that violates local ordinance prohibiting discrimination against gay tenants.

In February we held an election for the Executive Board that was challenged by

SAHA bosses. They falsely accused us of failing to give the tenants a 30-day notice of the election, despite notices being posted not less than six weeks before! Their next objection was that no one from SAHA "oversaw" the election as we learned to hold our meetings on Saturday to prevent SAHA interference.

Finally, as punishment for electing a new board they changed the locks on our Community Room and it is no longer available to us seven days a week from 9am to 9pm as before. Basically SAHA management feels it has the right to determine who our leaders are, and that we must adhere to by-laws written by them, not written by us, the residents! In other words, the inmates haven't the right to a genuine management-free tenant organization!

On May 17 we go before a mediator at the Bexar County Dispute Resolution Center as HUD was ordered to resolve the dispute by Congressman Lloyd Doggett after HUD chose to ignore our calls for help.

We need the San Antonio community's support and assistance. Let HUD know that SAHA denies tenants' rights and must be held accountable.

Send email messages to: SAHA CEO David Nivisiccia at [David\\_Nivisocchia@saha.org](mailto:David_Nivisocchia@saha.org).

Hasta la Victoria Siempre!

*Bio:* Frank "Pancho" Valdez is a San Antonio based activist. He has been involved in the "struggles for civil rights, labor and peace" since 1965 and can be reached at 210-430-2490.