

OPPORTUNITY HOMES RESIDENT SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT

By Kayla Miranda

On May 1, 2024, I stood, yet again, in the boardroom of the *Opportunity Homes Commission*. The last time I was there, I spoke in favor of appointing Ed Hinojosa as CEO of *Opportunity Homes Housing Authority (OHSA)*. Before then, it had been a place of animosity for me and others who were fighting for their homes. Thinking back, I'm truly astonished at the difference since.

Community, who spoke had a very clear message. We support the positive changes implemented by *OHSA's* CEO and leadership staff that resulted in tangible effects. We support public housing residents—the city's most vulnerable families. Public Housing is the last line of defense against Homelessness and the only housing option obtainable by many. We are disappointed that the Commissioners, appointed by Mayor Nirenberg, issued an order of *Notices to Vacate* to public housing residents. It was very clear that the board didn't understand the order nor the repercussions to residents. We weren't there to attack, but to educate. Unlike staff members, the commissioners do not interact with residents on a daily basis. Residents are real people, not numbers. Families, not addresses. There are legitimate reasons for the deficits. While there are two resident commissioners, they are not versed in extracting information. None of the commissioners asked the right questions.

Instead of the Commission realizing their mistake and taking responsibility for issuing the order, OHSA staff was attacked and belittled. I was appalled with the tone and intention of the chair,

Gabriel López. The fact that Ed Hinojosa has such a strong standing in the community is something to be applauded. He didn't get our support easily. The first time I met him, I told him straight out, "I'll give you a chance, but it's up to you to follow through. Actions." He earned that support.

During Public Meetings, the commission can't communicate with



Kayla and Nadia Miranda, Councilwoman Castillo and Ed Hinojosa at resource fair at Cassiano Homes

the public. Had I been able to speak up during the questions to staff, I could have corrected a lot of the mis-information. These meetings are designed to be short. It is up to the board to ask the right questions in a few hours each month. The order specified that anyone owing 13 months or more of rent were to receive a *Notice to Vacate*, the first step in an Eviction Process. It did not consider errors, circumstances, etc., nor did it address the amount owed, meaning you could owe as little as \$1. When people say they have done everything possible to pay, they mean for their limitations. When we get involved, it seems the limits of possibilities rise to new heights.

Another problem is the chaos created by the benefit backlog. Hundreds of residents in the past few years have asked for help with their SSI, food stamps, Medicaid/Medicare and other benefits that have been interrupted, often for months, by processing delays. When you have to use rent money for food or medical, you don't get that back. You'll get the missing months of food stamps but you can't pay rent with it. Medicaid will pay unpaid doctors' bills but will not reimburse medications bought out of pocket. Finally, there are issues obtaining documents. New family members cannot be added without it. I've worked with Rep. Diego Bernal's office on all of these problems. I've also brought this to the attention of Representatives, Liz Campos and Josey García. I have never spoken to a resident that "didn't want to follow the rules or pay rent" as was suggested by the board.

I wish to address the issue of being "fair" to the residents and those on the waitlist. What's fair is to provide housing



Esperanza, Historic Westside Residents Association, Councilwoman Castillo, D5 staff, Coalition for Tenant Justice, Texas Housers, Coalition for Dignified Housing met at Casa prior to Alazan Outreach to divide addresses and collect flyers.

as a human right which includes compassion and understanding and to create truly affordable housing, with all the protections and same rent calculations as Public Housing. The Chair prefers mixed income as he stated in his interview with *TPR*, but that is not the need of the people on the waitlist. It's not about clearing the waitlist by evicting current tenants. That only puts them back on the list at the end of the line, and creates an endless cycle. {quote{The purpose of housing authorities is to create housing no one else does. It is to protect and uplift the most vulnerable. The commission should be in line with that.} This isn't a personal real estate portfolio for someone to play with in order to further their own careers. It is a place of people first—of Housing as a Human Right, which was part of FDR's work that created public housing in the first place. Chair Gabriel López has been on this board long enough to know better. He met with Councilwoman Teri Castillo prior to the notices going out and knew full well what he was doing. He is an "affordable" housing developer and only believes in profitable housing. You can't just sweep the poor under the rug and hope they go away. You can't advocate for unaffordable mixed income properties and hope to address the waitlist. What you must do is advocate for more funding for Public Housing. Until people in general stop balking at funding housing, which is an essential need, but don't blink at the billions going to sports arenas, we will never truly address the issue.

Our community is working tirelessly with residents to address these *Notices to Vacate*. The more we band together, the more we



Kayla and D5 staff outreach at Cassiano

can achieve collectively. As FDR said, "*The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.*"

Unfortunately, the commission voted to fire Ed Hinojosa for their blunder. Look to our next issue for more information on this ongoing battle.

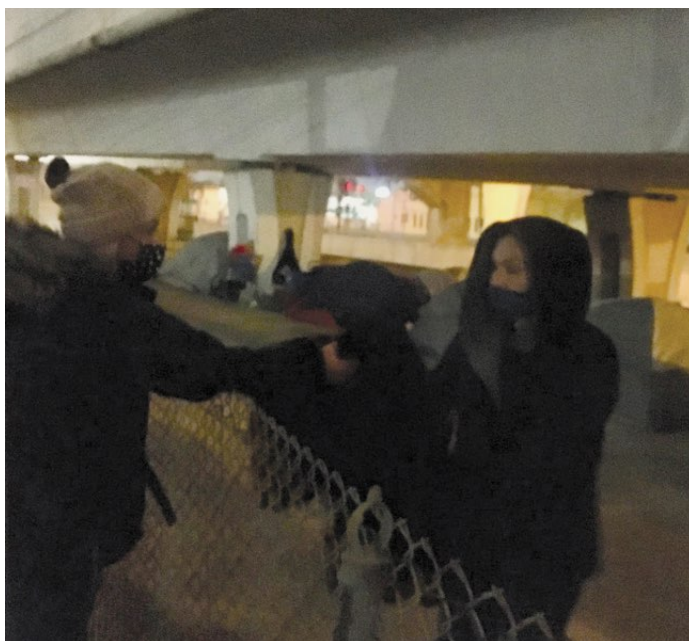
BIO: Kayla Miranda, a housing justice advocate organizing in the Westside of San Antonio, resides at the Alazan/Apache Courts with her family.

Displaced To Death

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measures—abatement, move-along orders, hostile architecture, drug war policies—begins to unravel.

All these components of structural violence work to exclude people not only from achieving basic health and dignity but ultimately from their place in civic life.



The author's sister distributing blankets ahead of Winter Storm Uri in 2021. Image: Greg Harmon

I write this miles away, both temporally and spatially, from my days spent working in outreach on San Antonio's streets. I ultimately left my work in outreach without having secured employment and found my way to study at the University of Colorado Denver. My departure driven by a toxic work environment that was allowed, if not encouraged, because of organizational hostility to my vocal opposition against encampment sweeps.

Still, my guts churn at the thought of what my former clients might think of this writing, at the thought that I have abandoned my community for the comfort and distance of academia. At the risk of projecting my constant feeling of hopelessness, my fear is that all this writing, the countless emails to local officials, is ultimately a useless endeavor. It will not bring Danny back, nor the innumerable others who have languished and died before our eyes as a direct result of the cruelty of policy failures.

These deaths are a reminder, one that often violently bumps up against my self-righteousness, that no matter how well researched our writing, how well written or explained our emails to city decisionmakers, the real question remains: *How do we reach into the chests of people and get them to give a fuck?*

deceleration
FOR THE EARTH AND ALL HER FAMILIES.