

PHOENIX OPINIONS-EDITORIALS

Is Legal Aid Encouraging Black Tenants To Act Irresponsibly?

From its very inception, the Legal Aid Society has championed the causes of the downtrodden. It has allowed those with meager resources the ability to have legal representation equal to that of those with ample resources.

The Legal Aid Society has been a great ally of civil and human rights. It's attorneys have offered expert advice to the many clients that have come through its doors. Without this organization the rights of many blacks would have been infringed upon.

Yet, recent local developments have caused many people to ask questions about this organization relative to the strong hand it now holds in landlord/tenant disputes. Several trends have begun to surface locally that have many real estate investors at an impasse.

Some have become vocal in their disputes with the non-profit organization. A few have even gone as far as to say that blacks and other people are being taught to act irresponsibly as a result of the strong advocacy of the Legal Aid Society in "housing reform".

Upon first glance, some of these assertions might seem ludicrous to the casual observer. But to those with a vested interest in the course of local housing trends, there are ques-

tions that need to be answered.

Within the last six months this situation has really taken form. It

desire to provide housing for the remaining portion of our society. But the reality is that only the private sector

individuals want to get as much income from their investment as possible.

The picture painted by many people of the

month. In some cases that very well could be true. But if an individual has an investment of \$25-50,000, they're going to make sure that the property doesn't lose its value over a period of time.

With the recent legal maneuvering by Legal Aid, many landlords find it difficult to even collect monthly rental payments. The situation has forced many investors to band together into a group, Forsyth County Property Owners Association, to support the rights of the rental property owner.

From an objective standpoint, the situation of the property owners does merit consideration. Who goes out to give the property a clean bill of health and how do you monitor the amount of abuse inflicted upon property by tenants? There really is nothing in place to

monitor that situation.

On the other side of the coin, why would an individual allow the property that he or she rents to become run-down?

Some landlords say that when code violations are found, the tenants believe they will not be forced to pay rent. So in some cases, they deliberately do damage to their housing units. By the same token, tenants say that landlords expect unfair rental payments for inferior units.

The answer to these questions are beyond the scope of this writing. However, we should look at the situation that results from these problems.

Do the members of the Legal Aid Society have a vested interest in the community, particularly East Winston. Are these well-trained attorneys putting notches in



Viewpoint

By Rodney Sumler
Phoenix Publisher

started when a couple who had inherited rental property was severely

can really take up the slack.

Looking at it from a to-

Are these well-trained attorneys putting notches in their legal belts or are they genuinely concerned about the general welfare of the people they represent?

fined for accepting rental payments from individuals who were found to be living in "unsanitary" conditions. Since that time, the argument has continued to escalate until now, some investors are seeking to get out of the business.

Sure there are instances in which landlords have asked tenants to pay rent for shoddy and squalor living quarters. Sure there are cases where the city's housing codes department has found numerous violations in rental property. But what happens when an individual destroys the property that belongs to an investor. And how does the investor recoup his losses.

Quite frankly, someone has to provide housing for those members of our community who cannot afford to purchase a place of their own. The federal and local governments have done an outstanding job of providing affordable housing for many members of the community. Still a void does exist. Someone has to fill that void. Some people or groups might have the altruistic

tally economic view then, investors are attempting to maximize the return on their investments. That also means then that indi-

landlord, particularly in East Winston, is that of a person wanting to do little for the tenant while receiving as much as possible in rent each

Letters To The Editor

Give Investors Chance To Provide Housing

I am a concerned black property owner; concerned about property particularly in the black community. There are hundreds of houses being boarded up because investor/owners are not willing to reinvest more money in property that is continuously being destroyed and because of the increasing amount of lawsuits against them.

Although most tenants will take care of their leased unit, there is a small percentage of tenants that is bounced from property to property with no concept or willingness to take care of property. The court system can be used to avoid paying a property owner by simply destroying the property.

There is a message being sent out into the community - that it is alright to tear up property or alright to withhold rent and that eviction can be delayed. Many tenants know the law better than many attorneys. These acts are creating a housing crisis in our communities.

Being a property owner, I can see the city of Winston-Salem with tax-paid dollars becoming the largest property owner in Forsyth County.

I would like to see churches and support groups invest some money toward solutions to not only housing but social problems as well. Since I have been actively speaking out on housing problems in the last few years, I have found it to be a very touchy subject and very few people in the political arena will tackle this area. It's an area that many people would like to bury.

The city is spending a great deal of money in East Winston. I would like to see the city offer incentives

to investors to regenerate interest.

I would like to see an arbitration board set up to settle disputes between landlords and tenants. Fines collected from landlords could be pooled into a fund to offset the cost of repairs in a dispute settlement. This would be attractive to an investor and the boards would start coming down.

The qualifications and requirements for rehabilitation fund are very rigid. The program should be studied, revised and based on the potential profitability of the property. No one knows the problems in a community better than the people who live there. We have a good Board of Alderman and unless we tell them what is going on or make them aware of the problem they will never know how to help us.

We must show interest in our community or no one else will. Winston-Salem has been hit hard with employment problems and layoffs largely from RJ Reynolds, AT&T and Piedmont Airlines. It is quite common these days to find more than one family in a single household. We should write our Senators, Congressman and Mayor requesting more housing assistance. There are cities or areas where Section 8 certificates are available and should be appropriated to cities like Winston-Salem where more than 3,000 people are sitting on a waiting list for housing assistance. Our representatives should be informed about all matters.

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The AC Phoenix is published monthly by Associate Consultants, Inc. located at 2523 Patterson Avenue, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27105. The phone number is (919) 727-1171.

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