

TENANT TALK

DISASTER RECOVERY AND HOUSING: NAVIGATING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL FROM “INTERVIEW WITH DISASTER RECOVERY EXPERT, NOAH PATTON” BY MRS. BROWN, NLIHC BOARD MEMBER

1. Training and Education: What programs or curricula does NLIHC use to educate residents on climate-related risks and preparedness?

NLIHC facilitates the Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC), a group of over 900 local, state, and national organizations – including tenant organizations – that work to ensure all disaster survivors have access to the assistance they need to fully recover and the protections they need to avoid the worst impacts of disasters. All are welcome on our [bi-weekly working group calls](#) – every other Wednesday at 2 pm ET.

The work of the DHRC – part of NLIHC’s Disaster Housing Recovery, Research, and Resilience (DHR) initiative, includes getting [information](#) and recommendations out that can help community-based organizations better prepare their community for disasters, and working to help reform the country’s broken disaster recovery system to better protect and assist tenants and households with low-incomes. We released a large [toolkit](#) on disaster recovery advocacy last year and will be following it up with a collection of letters and templates to better help community-based groups quickly respond to disasters and prepare for disasters in the future. We’ll also be working on some tenant-specific material that can help folks organize around climate resilience at the building level. **So stay tuned!**

2. Resident Empowerment: How does NLIHC plan to equip residents with the knowledge and tools needed to hold public housing authorities and private developers accountable for climate preparedness and safe living conditions?

Currently, public housing authorities (PHAs) and building managers and developers approach climate resilience and disaster preparedness differently. Some PHA's might have a dedicated emergency manager on staff to assist in planning and responding to disasters. Others might just have a written plan. Many haven't given it much thought at all. While there are HUD recommendations on disaster preparedness and response for PHAs, there is no requirement that PHAs have emergency response and preparedness measures in place. Dealing with this requires a three-pronged approach: 1) we need to make sure that PHAs and those that build and run affordable housing have the funds available to effectively plan and respond to disasters - that will involve asking Congress for such funding; 2) we need to educate tenants, PHAs, and developers about the actions they can take to prepare for disasters and respond to them - knowledge and dialogue is often the first step in accountability; finally 3) we need to better collaborate with tenant groups to make sure that we're tracking how PHAs are responding to disasters, and help address any problems that may occur.

3. Community Engagement: What role will tenant leaders, advocacy groups, and resident councils play in monitoring and providing oversight in collaboration with NLIHC?

While NLIHC's disaster team can cover a lot of ground, we can't be everywhere at once and we can't know everything. We get around this by working collaboratively with a wide range of organizations, from local tenant groups to national networks of legal aid organizations or climate scientists.

Tenant leaders are vital to our disaster response and resilience work. They are often the best folks situated to raise issues with local officials regarding disaster preparedness and have the most information about what is happening on the ground during and after disasters. This lets us at NLIHC more effectively help support these efforts and get lawmakers and federal agencies to address issues. As an example, during the 2023 Atlantic Hurricane Season there was a multifamily building in Louisiana impacted. Residents of that building were being evicted from their building because they had evacuated but couldn't return in time. Tenant leaders alerted us to the issue. We worked with the local legal aid organization to assist tenants who were being evicted while we advocated at HUD to pause the process. Local nonprofits were able to assist the displaced residents while this occurred. This wouldn't have been possible without engaged resident councils and tenant leaders - we wouldn't have even heard about it without them!

4. Oversight and Enforcement Support: Will there be dedicated mechanisms to support residents in navigating the complaint process, accessing government or legal support, or ensuring compliance with housing standards?

Like the story I described above, NLIHC can advocate at federal agencies and Congress to help remove barriers to disaster assistance and limit the impact of disasters. Many members of the DHRC do legal advocacy on behalf of disaster-impacted communities or can help communities navigate the assistance process. We're also pushing for federal legislation that would help simplify the disaster assistance process and ensure that disaster assistance and climate resilience funding can reach those most in need.

5. Disaster Navigation: How will NLIHC train residents to identify and access both governmental and private sector resources in times of climate-related emergencies or disasters?

While we don't provide individual assistance with navigating FEMA applications or disaster assistance programs, we work to provide educational material to community-based organizations on the type of assistance available, and what barriers might exist to accessing it. DHRC members include groups that do direct legal assistance and advocacy, as well as case managers that can help disaster survivors navigate the process. We're always happy to make connections or provide presentations on disaster preparedness and recovery – feel free to reach out!

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