

OPINION

Alternative to homelessness for tenants at Bruce Towers | Opinion



The city of Lorain has filed a lawsuit seeking the have the owners pay for residents to move and then shut down Bruce Towers apartment buildings on Oberlin Avenue. The city is seeking to enforce laws about the level of crime and property code violations there.

By **JESSICA BAGGETT** and **DINOLA PHILLIPS** |
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Last month, Bruce Towers Apartments was declared a public nuisance by the City of Lorain. In its official complaint, the city claimed Bruce Towers' management left residents living in deplorable conditions, citing serious health and safety issues including blocked fire escapes and a complete absence of smoke alarms.



Jessica Baggett (Submitted)



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Under Ohio Landlord-Tenant Law, landlords are obligated to make certain repairs to units and ensure properties are maintained in a safe and habitable manner. The city's complaint also cited "hundred[s]" of calls made to the local police department in recent years for "very serious incidents."

Bruce Towers Apartment has 46 units, and nearly all are occupied. Residents are stuck paying rent to live in a home that requires significant repairs to an absent, unresponsive landlord.



By declaring the apartment complex a public nuisance, the city began a chain of legal proceedings that may culminate in the evacuation of all residents and potentially a building demolition.

Despite the best efforts of local nonprofits, some residents will be left without housing. The costs to the City of Lorain from increased homelessness, increased COVID exposure, and the building demolition are substantial.

Furthermore, during a global pandemic – when people have been trapped in homes with domestic abusers, when mental health services are not as readily available, and when families have doubled-up in rental housing due to financial strain – residents should be encouraged to access public resources such as 911 when necessary.

Court records imply Bruce Towers residents are being penalized for seeking emergency assistance.

Now the residents of Bruce Towers are being told to navigate a shrinking rental market during a pandemic with colder weather right around the corner.

As a basic human right, all people deserve safe, adequate housing. Bruce Towers tenants have specific rights in this situation.

As a community, we must work collectively and thoughtfully to create solutions to this housing problem that respect the dignity of all people.

For example, instead of allowing residents to be displaced, the community could call for a receivership of Bruce Towers. A receiver is a person or organization appointed by a court to temporarily manage a property. Tenants can petition a court to obtain a receiver.

Through a receivership, a landlord can be held accountable for addressing safety issues and repairing units so they meet habitable conditions requirements. Moreover, tenants' rent could be allocated to make the necessary repairs instead of benefiting an absent party (the landlord) whose negligence has harmed an entire community. Finally, a receiver could help find a new owner for the building – one who is committed to providing safe and affordable housing for Lorain residents.

Displacing Bruce Towers residents is a mere Band-Aid that perpetuates the power imbalance between absent landlords and vulnerable tenants.

We as a community should send a clear and impactful message that would put all bad actors on notice that their abuse of the most vulnerable will not be tolerated.



The residents of Bruce Towers are part of this community. Their family, friends, healthcare providers, and faith leaders live here. Life has not always been easy for them, but this is the place they call home and find solace.

We can and should work with the tenants in Bruce Towers to hold their landlord accountable and support their right to safe housing. Calling for a receivership of Bruce Towers Apartments is a strong first step.

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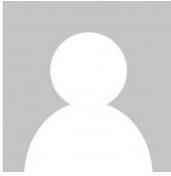
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