

Housing Rights **ADVOCATE**

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Austin Tenants' Council Announces New Executive Director

Austin Tenants' Council announced that its Board of Directors has unanimously chosen Juliana Gonzales as the organization's new executive director.

Gonzales succeeds Katherine Stark, who served as executive director since 1989, and built the organization into what it is today. Stark announced her intention to retire last July. Gonzales took over on December 30, 2015.

Gonzales holds a bachelor's degree in women's studies and Spanish from the University of Arizona. She comes to the Austin Tenants' Council from the Women's Flat Track Derby Association, where she was the chief executive for six years. Prior to that, she managed the federally funded healthcare programs at El Buen Samaritano and launched six healthcare facilities for Whole Woman's Health. A renter herself on the east side of Austin, Gonzales has lived in Austin for 15 years.

"After a thorough search process, the Board is pleased to have found the best individual to assume leadership of this important Austin organization," said board chair Sarah Mills.

"Juliana has 15 years of experience and the management skill set needed to keep the organization financially healthy.

This, combined with her deep dedication to equity and social justice, makes Juliana uniquely qualified to lead Austin Tenants' Council into the next phase of its future."

"Juliana is the best choice from a deep pool of interested and highly qualified candidates," said Trisha Trigilio, who led the search committee process for Austin Tenants' Council. "We're happy to have her on board."

Gonzales' first few days on the job got her involved in just about every aspect of the agency's work, including advocacy in court for tenants without hot water, community meetings with tenants displaced by new development, and re-launching an agency pilot program that assists residents with past housing debt. She has been meeting with leaders in the affordable housing community and settling in to lead the organization that has helped so many tenants fix their rental housing problems.

"I'm grateful to the Board for the opportunity to lead this exceptional organization," said Gonzales.

"Our work makes Austin a fairer and more affordable place for us all to live. I'm honored to help lead these efforts." For media inquiries, contact Austin Tenants' Council at 512-474-7007.

LITE-UP Texas Electric Discount Program End- ing August 2016

The Public Utility Commission of Texas' (PUC) discount electric assistance program LITE-UP Texas is formally ending in August 2016. Long championed by former State Rep. Sylvester Turner, now mayor of Houston, LITE-UP Texas was instituted in 1999 and has provided critical economic assistance to thousands of low-income customers.

According to Utili-Facts, a publication of the Public Utility Commission of Texas, the "Low-Income Electric Discount Program (LITE-UP Texas) provides a discount on electric rates to qualified low-income customers who live in deregulated areas and can choose their own Retail Electric Provider (REP). The program is funded for twelve months starting in September 2015 and will run through August 2016."

Customers that receive SNAP and/or Medicaid through the Health and Human Services Commission are automatically enrolled. Alternatively, if your total household income is at or below 125% of the Federal poverty guidelines you may qualify. For questions or more information call the PUC at: 1-888-782-8477, in Austin 512-936-7120, (TTY 512-936-7136).

Inside:

- 2 — Shared Opportunity
- 2 — Unknown Rental Facts
- 3 — Artículos en Español

Shared Opportunity In Every Community

April is Fair Housing Month and the theme is 'Shared Opportunity In Every Community'.

Austin and Central Texas have seen a lot of changes over the past several years – increase in the volume of traffic, sharp increases in rental rates, increases in the average selling prices of homes, increases in property taxes and large increases in the population of the area. Families that have lived in homes for generations and passed the homes down from one family member to the next are losing their homes and being forced into the outskirts of the city and in some cases, into the rental market.

Disabled citizens with Housing Choice Vouchers are being forced to move farther outside of the city where they don't have as many transportation options because they can't find anyone to accept their voucher in the city. Serious

issues such as homelessness, gentrification, and lack of affordable housing have risen up and demand to be addressed.

Just as serious of an issue is discrimination. Discrimination seriously limits the choices of where people can live and also the quality of life that they will have. The Fair Housing Program at ATC has seen the number of discrimination claims rise steadily over the past several years to almost 400 per year. Discrimination is an issue that affects every individual in our community in one way or another.

"It is hard to believe that in 2016, we still have property owners and managers that claim not to know what fair housing is," stated Fair Housing Program Director Nekesha Phoenix. "It's heart-breaking to see a golf cart used by management or maintenance parked in the access aisle of a handicap parking space in front of

the leasing office – how are disabled residents or potential residents supposed to access the leasing office?" asked Nekesha Phoenix.

So far in this contract year, the FHP has seen complaints based on the following: 62% disability, 19% race, 10% national origin, 6% familial status, 2% sex, and 1% other (City ordinance violations). During this same time, ATC has assisted 70 people receive needed reasonable accommodations/modifications from their housing providers.

In addition, ATC has successfully advocated for clients in 64% of the administrative complaints that have been filed. ATC takes its mission to protect tenants' rights seriously and stands ready to help anyone who, because of housing discrimination, has not fully enjoyed the shared opportunities in our community.

Did You Know? Common Unknown Facts About Renting in Texas

Every day thousands of people sign leases to rent apartments, duplexes, condos and other residential dwellings. Consider these common unknown facts before you rent in Texas:

Renting an RV as a Home

Did you know that if you rent an RV as your permanent residence, you do not have the rights afforded to a tenant as described in the Texas Property Code?

Health and Safety Disclosures

Did you know that a landlord is not obligated by the Texas Property Code to disclose to a tenant if a previous health and/or safety code violation existed in the apartment they have rented? For example, a previous rodent or pest infestation.

A Dwelling Must Be Habitable

Did you know that a tenant has a right to a reasonable expectation of habitability

when renting a dwelling? In other words, when a tenant signs a lease, the tenant has a right to expect that the apartment is livable at the time of move-in.

Landlord's Right to Enter

Did you know that the Texas Property Code does not address a landlord's right to enter a rented dwelling? Advance notice is not required under most leases.

Colonial National Mortgage Provides Financial Support for ATC Efforts

Austin Tenants' Council recently received a generous financial contribution from Colonial National Mortgage in Texas. The contribution comes at a critical time as ATC works to meet the needs of Central Texas residents feeling the pressures of rising housing costs and shrinking housing options. ATC is extremely grateful for the financial contribution. Colonial provided the following statement:

For decades, Colonial National Mortgage has helped thousands of residents across the country realize their dreams of becoming homeowners. The donation from Colonial to the Austin Tenants' Council in December was based on the fact that the ATC actively assists low and moderate income citizens with fair and safe housing, something which enriches the entire community and an effort that Colonial National Mortgage supports on a daily basis.

Oportunidades justas en toda comunidad

Abril es el Mes de la Vivienda Justa, y su tema es 'Oportunidades justas en toda comunidad'.

Austin y Texas Centro han pasado por muchos cambios en estos últimos años: aumento en el volumen de tráfico, altos incrementos en el precio de rentas, subas en el precio de venta promedio de viviendas, aumento en los impuestos a la propiedad y un gran incremento en la población del área. Familias que han vivido en un hogar por generaciones y traspasado la vivienda de un familiar al siguiente están perdiendo sus hogares y son forzados hacia la periferia de la ciudad y, en algunos casos, han tenido que empezar a rentar.

Ciudadanos discapacitados con Vouchers de Opción de Vivienda han sido forzados a mudarse cada vez más lejos, donde no cuentan con tantas opciones de transporte, porque no hallan a nadie que acepte sus vouchers dentro de la ciudad. Problemas serios como la pérdida del techo, la gen-

trificación y falta de viviendas económicas han aumentado y demandan ser tratados.

Otro problema serio es el de la discriminación. La discriminación limita gravemente las opciones de vivienda de la gente y también la calidad de vida que tendrán. El Programa de Vivienda Justa (FHP) de ATC ha visto un aumento continuo en el número de denuncias por discriminación en estos años pasados, llegando a casi 400 por año. La discriminación es un tema que afecta a toda persona en nuestra comunidad de una manera u otra.

"Resulta difícil de creer que en el año 2016 sigamos teniendo propietarios y administradores que dicen no saber qué es vivienda justa", dijo Nekesha Phoenix, directora de programas de Vivienda Justa. "Es doloroso ver un carrito de golf usado por el administrador o personal de mantenimiento estacionado en el acceso a un lugar de parqueo para discapacitados, frente a la oficina de rentas. ¿Cómo se su-

pone que un residente o potencial residente discapacitado acceda a la oficina de rentas", preguntó Nekesha Phoenix.

En lo que va del año, FHP ha recibido denuncias basadas en lo siguiente: 62% por discapacidad, 19% por raza, 10% por nacionalidad de origen, 6% por situación familiar, 2% por sexo y 1% por otros temas (infracciones a ordenanzas municipales). Durante este mismo período, ATC ha asistido a 70 personas a recibir necesarias modificaciones razonables de sus proveedores de vivienda.

Además, ATC ha defendido exitosamente a clientes en un 64% de quejas administrativas presentadas. ATC toma su misión de proteger los derechos de inquilinos muy seriamente y está preparado para ayudar a todo quien, debido a discriminación en la vivienda, no ha podido disfrutar totalmente de las oportunidades justas en nuestra comunidad.

Austin Tenants' Council anuncia nueva directora ejecutiva

El Consejo de Inquilinos de Austin (ATC) anunció que su junta directiva ha elegido unánimemente a Juliana Gonzales como nueva directora ejecutiva de esta organización.

Gonzales sucede en el puesto a Katherine Stark, quien sirvió como directora ejecutiva desde 1989 y desarrolló la organización en lo que es hoy. Stark anunció su intención de jubilarse en julio pasado. Gonzales asumió el 30 de diciembre de 2015.

Gonzales tiene un título universitario en estudios de la mujer y español de la Universidad de Arizona. Ella llegó al Consejo de Inquilinos de Austin después de trabajar en Women's Flat Track Derby Association,

donde fue jefa ejecutiva durante seis años. Antes de eso, manejó los programas de salud en El Buen Samaritano financiados a nivel federal y dio inicio a seis centros médicos de Whole Woman's Health. Ella es inquilina en la zona este de Austin, y ha vivido en esta ciudad por 15 años.

"Después de un meticuloso proceso de búsqueda, la junta directiva se complace en haber hallado la mejor persona para asumir la dirigencia de esta importante organización en Austin", dijo la presidente de la junta Sarah Mills.

"Juliana tiene 15 años de experiencia y la capacidad gerencial necesaria para mantener la organización económica-

mente sólida. Esto, combinado con su profunda dedicación a la equidad y justicia social, hace a Juliana especialmente preparada para dirigir el Consejo de Inquilinos de Austin en su próxima etapa", dijo Trisha Trigilio, quien dirigió el proceso del comité de búsqueda para el Consejo de Inquilinos de Austin. "Estamos felices de tenerla en la junta directiva".

"Estoy agradecida con la junta directiva por la oportunidad de dirigir esta excepcional organización", dijo Gonzales.

"Nuestro trabajo hace a Austin un lugar más justo y económico donde vivir. Es un honor para mí ayudar a dirigir estas acciones".

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Fair Housing Program / Programa de Vivienda Justa This program helps any person in the Austin metropolitan area who has been discriminated against in the rental, sale, financing, or appraisal of housing. FHP investigates complaints and coordinates legal services to assist victims of discrimination when their rights under state and federal fair housing laws have been violated. Este programa ayuda a cualquier persona en el area metropolitana de Austin que se ha enfrentado con discriminación en la renta, compra, financiamiento, o evaluación de vivienda. El FHP investiga las quejas y coordina servicios legales para las victimas de discriminación cuando sus derechos están violados bajo las leyes estatales y federales de vivienda justa. Call / llame al 474-7006.

Telephone Counseling / Consejos por Telefono Trained counselors answer tenant-landlord questions and make appropriate referrals. However, ATC offers no legal advice. Consejeros contestan preguntas acerca de inquilinos-propietarios y hacen referencias necesarias. Sin embargo, ATC no ofrece consejos legales. Call / llame al 474-1961.

In-House Counseling / Consejos en la Oficina Counseling information and materials are provided to clients in need of more in-depth assistance. Se provee información y materiales a los clientes que necesitan mayor información. Call for an appointment / llame para una cita al 474-7006.

Crisis Intervention / Intervencion Crisis Counselors mediate on behalf of tenants to resolve emergencies that threaten their housing. Consejeros median en nombre del inquilino a resolver una emergencia que amenaza su vivienda. Call / llame al 474-1961.

Rental Repair Assistance / Ayuda con Reparaciones en su Vivenda The Renters' Rights Assistance Program helps low-income renters enforce their rights for repairs through advocacy and mediation. El Programa de Asistencia con los Derechos de Inquilinos ayuda a los inquilinos de bajo ingreso da fuerza a sus derechos para reparaciones por medio de negociación y mediación. Call / llame al 474-7006.

Lease Forms / Contratos ATC sells lease packets and brochures describing landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities to landlords for a small fee. ATC vende paquetes de contratos y folletos, por una cuota nominal, describiendo los derechos y las responsabilidades del propietario y del inquilino. Call for more information / llame para mayor información al 474-7006 .

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