

Testimony
By
Monin Hendricks, Resident
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Good morning, Committee Chairman, Honorable Marvin A. Blyden and Members of the Thirty-Sixth Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Committee on Housing, Transportation & Telecommunications, other Senators present today, as well as the viewing and listening audience. My name is Monin Hendricks. I am here representing the Michael J. Kirwan Terrace community as well as other communities which are too many to mention. Although I am not a resident of Kirwan Terrace, I am very active in the community as an advocate for our elders and our disabled community. I am here to testify on the main issues concerning management and maintenance.

One of the main issues affecting residents of the housing communities are the lack of repairs of many units. Issues like broken screens, broken kitchen cabinets, paint chipping on walls and separation of walls, missing tiles, and swollen doors, just to name a few. More than half of these issues create the presence of rodents and harbor an environment that produces large amounts of mold. Simple repairs like fixing a screen and something small should be taken care of within a timely manner to avoid them turning into larger problems going forward. Instead it routinely takes at least two or three weeks, and that is if they have the supplies and materials available, and often they do not. Also, it doesn't seem like the management follows up with employees to make sure that the repairs and work orders are being completed.

Another issue is the mistreatment of disabled residents as well as other residents. I have seen too many times where the management humiliates residents by putting their business out in the street instead of dealing with them in private. Often, the attitude displayed by certain employees is downright rude. Every tenant is a human being who deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. I try to advocate for those residents who may not know their rights , and I see clearly that sometimes, the staff is not effectively communicating to the residents.

Unfortunately, this goes deeper, especially when tenants have to fill out forms such as a complaint, a change of circumstances, or other document that affects them. Time after time, residents complain that the staff just puts a document in front of them and tells them to sign, without allowing the tenant to fill out the document themselves, or to inspect the document. We especially see this with the elderly, the disabled, and persons who don't speak a lot of English. These tenants are basically being deprived of their rights, and from my conversations with tenants in other communities I believe that this problem is not just at Kirwan Terrace.

I could not go back to Kirwan Terrace and face the children if I didn't say a word about the playgrounds. Senators, we need help. Since Hurricanes Irma and Maria we have been living without proper playground facilities for our children in Kirwan Terrace and many other housing communities. This is a serious community health issue! Our children need spaces to play, socialize, and move their bodies. The playground is where they learn the athletic and social skills that will carry them through life, but we have been waiting for years for these playgrounds to be repaired. Please do whatever needs to be done to make this happen.

Lastly, at Kirwan Terrace we are also having a problem with rat infestation. It is one thing to see a mouse sometimes, but what we have been experiencing lately is much more serious. Years ago, management placed bait traps outside the buildings, but it has been years since they refilled the traps. This problem needs to be dealt with before these rats start biting our children and our seniors.

Overall, I have to ask, on behalf of the residents of Kirwan Terrace and other communities, that we receive the same service and the same level of respect that you, the management and senators, would expect to receive, or that you would expect your children or other loved ones to receive. Do we somehow deserve any less? I ask you to remember that a society is judged by how it treats its children, its elders, and the those who.

I would like to thank Senator Blyden for allowing me to speak today on behalf of many residents who have been suffering in silence for far too long. I am open to answer any questions that you may have.