

Dear Gainesville Neighbors,

We, Graduate Assistants United-UF Chapter (GAU), would like to express our formal endorsement of the comprehensive Renters' Rights ordinance proposal put forward by the Alachua County Labor Coalition (ACLC). Renters in this community are due basic rights and protections such as a safe place to live, freedom from discrimination and predatory landlords, affordable utility bills, and disclosure of their rights and responsibilities as tenants. The proposal put forward by the ACLC, in consultation with City and County Commissioners and Florida Legal Services as well as landlords, renters, neighborhood associations, faith communities, civic organizations, and other stakeholders throughout our community, is revenue-neutral, based upon existing programs with a demonstrated track record of success, and builds upon already existing services.

GAU decided to support this campaign because too many of our members suffer from the kinds of practices this campaign seeks to end through innovative policies. Our members include many non-citizens and non-permanent residents, who face discrimination and unfair treatment from landlords who either fear people from abroad or wish to take advantage of the fear many non-citizens have in the current political climate. All of our members are also graduate students, which makes each and every one of us is susceptible to having our lease applications denied due to landlord's uncertainty about our income. Many of our members rent older houses and apartments, which are very energy inefficient and lead to inflated utility costs. The policies proposed by the ACLC would begin to remedy and prevent the harm resulting from these practices.

The proposal put forward by the ACLC is not meant to be exclusive of other initiatives, nor are they a definitive solution for solving our community's affordable housing challenges. But they are a solid start and a good faith measure on the part of our elected officials in a community dominated by rental housing. The supply of affordable housing needs to be increased, and there are a variety of options for accomplishing that goal. We also believe all renters in our community deserve the basic rights and protections described in the ACLC's proposal. Just as employment law establishes a clear set of rules for employer-employee relations in the workplace, both landlords and tenants would benefit from a clearer definition of their rights and responsibilities and a process for addressing negligence by either party.

With Love,  
GAU  
Bobby Mermer, Co-President



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