

*The Alachua County NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Committee (ECJC) focuses on community issues affecting the quality of life and economic equity for all citizens in Gainesville and Alachua County. Environmental Justice recognizes that environmental benefits and burdens are not shared equally among all residents. Consequently, Environmental Justice issues are also civil and human rights issues.*

A home is a basic human need. A home is not only where the heart is, it is where a basic sense of stability is housed. The foundation of mental health, physical health, and capacity to be a productive citizen stems from stable, safe, affordable housing for each individual and each family. In this age of climate crisis, it is also where environmental sustainability begins.

The quality of homes for citizens ripples into the quality of a community. There is a shared necessity for citizens needing employment and businesses needing a productive workforce. Stable housing directly translates into a thriving workforce. Individual mental and physical health directly contributes to a child's capacity to learn in school for future job productivity and an adult's current productivity in the work setting. In terms of sustainability, Gainesville has a goal of 100% renewable energy by 2045. Sustainable homes will contribute to the success of this goal.

It behooves every single citizen and business in Gainesville to have stable, safe, sustainable, affordable housing.

Some 50% of Gainesville inhabitants live in rental housing including students and longer term residents. New housing developments cater to students and residents with ample resources. The area of focus for the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Committee (ECJC) is the many long term residents who cannot afford quality housing. There is an abundant quantity of older homes that are not properly rehabilitated or maintained, particularly on the east side of Gainesville. Some of them are rentals, some lie as untapped potential. Housing prices are increasing which pushes up rent that is not supported by increased wages. A long term problem of affordable housing is being compounded. Real lives are affected. Businesses are affected. Schools are affected. We are affected. The fundamental need for housing needs help.

Another problem is that many rental properties are not adequately maintained for safety and energy efficiency. Some renters pay significantly more for their utilities bill than they pay for rent because of lousy or no insulation, leaky windows, leaky plumbing and/or ancient appliances. If every landlord had a business model that allowed for property maintenance and improvement within their profit margin, we wouldn't have a problem. If every renter was an informed, conscientious consumer, we wouldn't have a problem. But neither situation is the case. Landlords don't always keep their properties in the same quality condition that they keep their own homes. And renters may be uninformed or uncaring about the need to change HVAC filters or smoke detector batteries, or basic upkeep of appliances and property. It is surprising that there is no state or local licensure for landlords. Hair stylists, nail technicians and lawn service providers require licensure. But there is none for landlords to ensure knowledge and compliance with basic safety and energy efficiency of a residence. That doesn't make sense.

For some months, the City Commission Rental Housing Subcommittee has been meeting to find a balance between the needs and responsibilities of renters and landlords. The Alachua County Labor Coalition has leant ideas, momentum and has produced a position paper, Safe & Healthy Housing for All, that can be read here: <https://laborcoalition.org/safehealthyhousing/our->

[position/](#). The NAACP ECJC applauds and supports these efforts. Specific concepts that we support include universal landlord licensing with a small fee that would be deposited into a designated account for running the rental properties program. Rentals should have minimum standards for safety and energy efficiency with some sort of inspection system for verification. Properties free of complaints could have less frequent inspections. Expectations for the landlord/renter relationship would be provided in a standardized written document, provided and signed in addition to the lease agreement. Disagreements or noncompliance with the agreement could be addressed through arbitration, modeled after Alachua County's very successful Wage Recovery Ordinance.

The NAACP ECJC strongly thinks that a thoughtful, collaboratively built Renter's Rights program would serve landlords, renters and businesses in the shared quest for a thriving community. It would also advance Gainesville's goal of energy sustainability despite certain continued growth. Our vision is quality housing for occupants while allowing the business of property rental to make a reasonable profit while all parties contribute to environmental sustainability. We can do this.