

February 22, 1967

Attorney Edward Sterne  
Chairman, Atlanta Housing Authority  
Trust Company of Georgia Building  
Suite 639  
36 Edgewood Avenue, S. E.  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Dear Attorney Sterne:

Last May, my class in "Issues in Social Work" had the opportunity to tour some of Atlanta's slums and urban renewal sites as the guest of the Citizens Advisory Committee for Urban Renewal. We found the tour to be of untold educational value because it gave the students the opportunity to observe first hand the vast need for slum clearance, urban renewal and the concomitant problems of the people directly affected by these important programs.

We were heartened by the efforts that the Atlanta Housing Authority is making to provide adequate housing for low-income families. We recognized, too, the almost insurmountable task you and the Board has in planning such a vast program. The class was aware of the proposed renewal and slum clearance program which the Authority is implementing, or has on the drawing board and complimented the Authority for its foresight and vision.

The class was disturbed, however, about some aspects of the program. They were left with the impression that urban renewal became "urban removal" for many of the Negro families. It was the strong feelings of the class that the City of Atlanta did not have enough concern nor did it assume responsibility for setting up an adequate relocation program for all the displaced families who needed help.

The students agreed that groups of people cannot stand in the way of economic progress. It is the responsibility of our city and federal government to see that citizens are not hurt too greatly in bringing about physical and economic change. They saw the need for a strong relocation program, sponsored by the City of Atlanta, whose services, listings, and resources are available to displaced families without discrimination as to race, color, or creed. Although a relocation program is sponsored by the Housing Authority, it is too limited to meet the present and future needs which slum clearance and urban renewal will create.



During the tour, we visited the Antoine Graves Homes on Hilliard Street, S. E., and the John O. Chiles Homes in the West End. On reviewing these two new public facilities for the aging, we were aware immediately of the vast difference in the appearance, appointments, and the surroundings. The Graves Homes was, by far, the less attractive. In fact, the bars in the front reminded us of a prison entrance. On the other hand, the Chiles Homes has an attractive entrance which appears to extend you a friendly welcome as you approach the building. The general color scheme of the Chiles Homes is bright and cheery while the scheme at the Graves Homes is a dull prison gray. The view we had from the balcony of one of the apartments of the Graves Homes was far from inspiring because it looked out on a junk yard. The surroundings of the Chiles Homes was pleasant and invigorating.

We understood that the two projects were constructed, or the plans for them had been completed before the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 1965. The foregoing reactions have real pertinence since we were informed that the Graves Homes initially had all Negro tenants while the families in the Chiles Homes were white. It was our opinion that they were constructed under the old practice and policy of "separate and unequal" where housing for Negroes were concerned. We were happy to note that with the growing trend toward integration in Atlanta's public housing program, there is no further need for this invidious differentiation in the quality of public housing which is available for citizens who need and qualify for it.

As we analyzed the needs of the families displaced by slum clearance and urban renewal we agreed that just moving families from slums into public housing does not automatically change the living habits. Bad habits as well as good habits are transferred along with the families from slums to public housing. If these families are to be helped to live fully, they have to be taught how to live in an improved housing situation.

These families bring from the slums their problems--inadequate education, juvenile delinquency, broken homes, poor health, poor management of money, exploitation by unscrupulous salesmen are but a few. Thus, the Housing Authority becomes more than a real estate agent than rents living space to a tenant. It has the obligation as well to help these people in the socialization process. Thus, adequate recreational services, community and social services must be a primary concern of the Housing Authority. We felt that a Department of Social Service should be established as an official arm of the Atlanta Housing Authority. It should be adequately staffed with qualified staff which can help families with social, educational, economic, and health problems which interfere with their achievement of self-realization.

We were of the opinion that the membership of the Authority should be broadened to permit greater representation from areas other than business and industry and law. Physical and social planning should be a joint enterprise with the helping profession involved in a meaningful way at the level of planning where they can be effective. There is the growing recognition of the contributions that experts in the field of social welfare can make to public housing when social rehabilitation is needed, and in developing a preventive approach to social disintegration. We recommend that the Authority considers the appointment to the body qualified professionals in the field of social welfare.