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June 24, 1969

The Honorable Ivan Allen
Mayor of Atlanta
Georgia

Dear Mayor Allen:

I read in Alex Coffin's column in the Constitution yesterday that Mr. Edwin Sterne's term as Chairman of the Board of the Atlanta Housing Authority has expired and that you are thinking of reappointing him for a second ten year term. The purpose of this letter is to urge you not to reappoint Mr. Sterne, but to appoint instead a younger man -- preferably a Black man -- who has greater sympathy with the needs and aspirations of public housing tenants than does Mr. Sterne.

Let me make it clear at the outset that I have the greatest respect and admiration for Edwin Sterne. I know him to be a kindly and concerned man who has in recent months been deeply and constructively involved in public housing in Atlanta. His frequent meetings with tenants and his willingness to discuss troublesome questions with Legal Aid and other representatives of the public demonstrate the depth of his commitment to public service, as well as the seriousness with which he takes his responsibilities as Board Chairman. That he is a man of good will and good intentions is, in my opinion, an incontrovertible fact.

But Atlanta in the 1970s needs men who have more to offer than good intentions. We need men

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who can not only understand the needs and desires of poor people, but can respond to those needs positively and effectively.

The Atlanta Housing Authority has now been embroiled in public controversy for over a year, and with each passing month the controversy deepens and broadens, constantly assuming new facets and subtle new dimensions.

Under Mr. Sterne's chairmanship the Authority adopted a regulation that forbade TUFF from meeting on Authority property, and a regulation creating a residency requirement as a precondition to applying for public housing. These regulations have created ill will for AHA, and have now been repealed.

Under Mr. Sterne's chairmanship the Authority failed to apply for funds allocated under the 1968 Housing Act: a failure estimated by HUD to have cost the city approximately \$3,000,000. The cost to tenants who are thus obliged to live in outmoded facilities cannot be estimated. This failure was a major error on the part of the Board and its Chairman.

Under Mr. Sterne's chairmanship the Board has delayed, wavered, and failed to provide leadership to its staff or the community. The Authority, for example, has failed to act on a Bill of Rights submitted to it on January 16, 1969 by TUFF, although such organizations as Good Government Atlanta, the Concerned Clergy, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and the Urban League have all endorsed the provisions of that Bill of Rights. It has made no response whatsoever to the HUD circular of March 22, 1968, entitled "The Social Goals of Public Housing."

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As a result of these failures, the rights of tenants have now become a major issue in the city's low income community, provoking an investigation by a State legislative committee, the resignation of Mr. Satterfield, and several vocal demonstrations on Authority property. Much -- if not all -- of this controversy could have been avoided by firm and sympathetic leadership on the Board.

The Atlanta Housing Authority under Mr. Sterne is a well-motivated organization out of touch and sympathy with the realities of 1969. These realities demand that poor people be given a voice in managing their own lives, and that part of the power formerly wielded by a small group of men be distributed to the people from whom that power is derived. In my opinion, it is time for Edwin Sterne to step down and for his responsibilities to be turned over to a younger man.

Needless to say, I am not writing this letter on behalf of any candidate. I would urge you only to seek a man who will have the authority and the good will to deserve the tenants', as well as the larger community's respect. The Chairman of the Board should be a person who can help Mr. Persells make the many changes Mr. Persells hopes to institute: not a man tied to the policies of the past. He should be a strong man, a liberal man, and a man who believes in and trusts the tenants.

I know you understand the volatility of public housing in our city, and the importance of the issues I have raised in this letter. I know too that whatever decision you make will be designed to serve the interests of all Atlantans -- poor as well as rich,

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black as well as white.

This letter brings my continued respect and good wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Michael D. Padnos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Michael D. Padnos
Director

MDP/gp

CC: Mr. Edwin Sterne