



Sunnydale Public Housing Tenants hold protest against HOPE SF redevelopment, HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Mayor London Breed

San Francisco, October 15th, 2021



On Friday, October 15th, residents of the Sunnydale public housing development in San Francisco held a protest at a new Mercy Housing development built on the site of demolished Sunnydale units. San Francisco Mayor London Breed, Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Marcia Fudge held a press conference and tour of the latest Mercy Housing development built as a part of the HOPE SF redevelopment plan. This press event and tour was organized by the politicians and San Francisco Housing Authority in secret, without informing residents. Once the word spread that politicians had come to Sunnydale to do a photo op, tenants organized a protest. When residents tried to enter where the politicians were touring the Mercy Housing building, the San Francisco Police Department barred them from entering. SFPD told tenants that they could not enter because the building was a “construction site” and that it was private property. The politicians and reporters had entered just moments before, but residents voicing concerns about what was happening to their own homes were deemed irrelevant.

While police were keeping residents out of the press event, Pelosi said, “And just viewing this project at Sunnydale, it's about respect. Respect for the tenants – they are the VIPs. We're here to speak, but they are the VIPs, whose needs we're here to meet and to meet in a way that is respectful [...] I say this because it is a model for the country. It is a model for the country to see how San Francisco deals with this [...] to see that they are treated with respect by housing that meets their needs in a way that they had some say in putting together and everything that goes with it.”

In Sunnydale public housing, tenants have leases with the San Francisco Housing Authority, have front and back doors, gardens, washers and dryers in each unit, and are not charged for utilities. Mercy Housing developed the “Casala” building at Sunnydale and Hahn which opened in 2019. In the conversion from public to private leases, tenants have fewer legal protections than in public housing, and the stability of public housing is replaced with Project Based Section 8 Vouchers that residents lose if they move, meaning that they lose their subsidy. Tenants who moved to Mercy’s Casala building from Sunnydale public housing units have been charged upwards of \$140 for utilities, have to share washers and dryers, and Mercy Housing imposes restrictive rules about how people can live and who can visit.

Tenants say the Casala building was cheaply constructed, that one resident's ceiling started leaking when her upstairs neighbor took a shower, and that maintenance is neglected. Mixed immigration status families have been told they will not qualify for any subsidy in the Mercy Housing buildings, meaning they will pay thousands of dollars for rent. The new Mercy Housing building that Pelosi, Fudge, and Breed toured will have 167 units, 3 times the size of Casala. The building is slated to open in November, and many residents have resisted as SFHA and Mercy Housing employees have pressured them in recent months to sign leases to move there.

The contradiction between what the politicians say and what the people say couldn't be clearer. While Pelosi touts HOPE SF as a model for the country, the residents she called "VIPs" were being barred from entering by the police just down the block. The truth is that the politicians and developers are afraid of people knowing what's actually going on and organizing to stop it. When Pelosi says the HOPE SF redevelopment is the model for the country, what she means is it's the model of how to destroy public housing and displace residents, all to line the pockets of the housing developers. But residents refused to let the politicians use the redevelopment at Sunnydale to further the national plan by HUD, Congress, the big banks and the developers of privatizing public housing.

Sunnydale resident Raymunda said at the protest: "We are speaking out and we cannot run because we have children. We cannot walk the streets in fear and we will not sleep on the streets. Another thing, these people in the office won't pick up the trash but want our rent. They treat us bad because we have less but we are good people, dignified people and we deserve to be treated well by these managers. We will not leave, we will fight. We will not be thrown onto the street with our children we will defend our rights as people. We will not leave. We will not surrender."

Andres said: "There's real crime in the city going on. Not this. We're all residents, we live here. Who's asking the questions inside? They don't want to hear from the real people. The millionaires in there are just conspiring and evict us, trying to eliminate Section 9 [public housing]."

Sunnydale and Potrero Hill are the two remaining public housing developments in the city after SFHA privatized all other public housing in recent decades, leading to people being displaced and pushed out of the city. HOPE SF, created by governor Gavin Newsom when he was the mayor of San Francisco, is a plan to demolish public housing and replace it with "mixed income developments" of luxury condos for the rich and cheap "replacement" units for current residents.

The total disregard for residents was also exemplified by employees of the San Francisco Housing Authority and HOPE SF. SFHA Executive Director Tonia Lediju, SFHA Director of Public Housing Kendra Crawford, and HOPE SF employee Elizabeth Chilton all ignored residents protesting when they walked out of the press conference. They went so far as to say that none of the people at the protest even lived at Sunnydale. In the past, SFHA, Mayor Breed, and Mercy Housing ignored a petition signed by 100 Sunnydale residents sent in February, and the Mayor's Office for Housing and Community Development ignored a letter from Sunnydale Tenant Association president Shelly Leonard in 2019.

Tenants at Sunnydale and Potrero Hill have continued to organize against the HOPE SF redevelopment, and to demand SFHA repair buildings after neglecting them for years. Tenants are holding another protest this Monday, October 18th at 4:30pm at San Francisco City Hall (press release).

Videos from the October 15th protest can be found on Twitter.