

## Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice 2021-2022 Housing Policy Priorities

Georgia thrives when its children thrive. Children succeed when their communities and schools come together to support their specific needs. Unfortunately, current housing policies place many thousands of children in Georgia in unstable, unhealthy housing. These housing conditions increase the children's risk for physical and mental health problems, with disproportionate impacts for Black and Brown children, children with disabilities, and children in poverty.

Inadequate housing also perpetuates racial and social inequity in Georgia and increases children's risk of poor school outcomes, justice involvement, and entry in the foster care system. The pragmatic public policies listed below will unlock the full potential of these children and create a better Georgia for all our children.

Georgia Appleseed developed the policy priorities below in conversations with community members and members of the Georgia Healthy Housing Coalition.

### **1) Use Available Funding Now.**

**The Governor, legislature, and local governments should prioritize the rapid and complete distribution of renter and landlord relief funds.** Where landlords refuse to accept funds, communities should provide funds directly to tenants. Funds will help families negotiate settlements with landlords, cover moving costs, make deposits on new rental properties, and pay back debts to landlords, etc. Governments should not prevent or delay federal relief dollars for Georgians who need them.

### **2) Prioritize and Protect Children with Legislative Remedies.**

**The Georgia legislature should continue to enact legislation that encourages stable, healthy rental housing,** like Georgia's 2019 law that prohibits landlord retaliation for tenant complaints about unhealthy housing conditions and laws that give tenants more time before eviction. The legislature should immediately adopt enhanced protections for children to protect them from lead exposure and other contaminants. In addition, the state should ban landlord misuse of eviction filings to discriminate against low-income tenants.

**The legislature should allow local governments to exercise home rule.** Lawmakers should pass legislation that will permit:

- Local Georgia governments to establish annual rental housing registration and inspection;
- Local housing code enforcement to investigate dangerous properties by establishing a less onerous legal standard than probable cause; and
- Local governments to impose rent control programs.

Currently, O.C.G.A. 36-74-30(b) bans local annual registration and inspection and limits code enforcement authority. O.C.G.A. 44-7-19 bans local rent control.

**The governor and legislature should embrace a tenant's bill of rights** that will protect families and increase their access to stable, healthy housing for families.

### **3) Invest in More Effective Code Enforcement**

**Local governments should provide greater investment in local housing code enforcement programs** to increase the capacity of these programs to protect families from unhealthy and dangerous living conditions.

### **4) Create housing courts for fairer outcomes for families.**

**State legislators and the judiciary should empower Magistrate's Courts, or create housing courts, with a mission to preserve tenancies and homes** for better outcomes for families, landlords, and communities.