

GEORGIA HEALTHY HOUSING COALITION  
STRATEGIC ADVOCACY PLAN  
2023-2033

## Introduction

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### Who is the Georgia Healthy Housing Coalition (GHHC)?

The Georgia Healthy Housing Coalition (GHHC) is Georgia’s only statewide coalition dedicated to improving housing stability and living conditions. GHHC’s 80 member organizations innovate solutions to Georgia’s housing conditions crisis and collectively advocate for equity-driven policy reforms at the local, state, and federal level. Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice founded GHHC in 2018 and leads and staffs the coalition.

GHHC developed this Strategic Advocacy Plan in conversations with coalition members and housing advocates across the state. GHHC’s Strategic Plan is Georgia’s only plan informed and developed by community organizations (through a lens of racial and economic justice and equity) that seeks to stabilize housing for low-income families and improve unhealthy housing conditions.

### How are we changing Georgia?

Over the next ten years, GHHC will craft and successfully advocate for new laws and policies that ensure that every Georgian has access to a safe and stable home, with a particular focus on the 14% of Georgians who live in poverty (US Census (2021)). These reforms will include legal protections for tenants and incentives for landlords to keep existing properties safe and invest in new construction.

GHHC members (facilitated by Georgia Appleseed) will collaborate and achieve the following goals:

- 1) Generate state legal reforms that require safe living standards for all Georgians.
- 2) Incentivize landlords through tax credits and direct funding to provide safe housing.
- 3) Empower and inspire local housing advocates in every geographic region in Georgia to lead housing reform efforts in their communities.
- 4) Educate and equip local government officials, policymakers, and community leaders to identify and address necessary housing reforms in their communities.
- 5) Develop tools to measure the number of children and adults living in unsafe housing and track Georgia’s progress by 2033.
- 6) Secure the funding needed to achieve the 10-year plan.

# 2023-2033 GHHC STRATEGIC ADVOCACY PLAN

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## Priority Legal Reforms and Policies

By 2033, GHHC’s collective advocacy will result in the following reforms:

### Short-Term Goals (Years 1-5)

- Propose and pass legislation that constitutes a Tenants’ Bill of Enforceable Rights, including:
  - Georgia’s first enforceable Warranty of Habitability that includes specific safety standards for landlords.
  - A written notice of eviction and a pre-eviction filing, i.e. “Right to Cure”, as recommended by the American Bar Association and championed by GHHC member Georgia ACT and other members.
  - A right for tenants to withhold rent to ensure that landlords make necessary repairs.
  - A right for tenants to abate rent, as championed by GHHC member Housing Justice League.
  - Extend tenant protections to families living in hotels. [The Supreme Court of Georgia is currently considering this issue.]
- Protect the State Low-Income Housing Tax Credit to encourage construction of new affordable multi-family housing statewide, including GHHC support of efforts by the Georgia Affordable Housing Coalition.
- Advocate for a \$10 million increase to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund for the Homeless (currently limited to approximately \$3 million state dollars) with regular increases tied to need.
- Advocate for new property tax exemption for non-profits that rent affordable units to families at 0-80% AMI.

### Long-Term Goals (Years 5-10)

- Propose and pass legislation that constitutes a Bill of Housing Rights for Communities, including:
  - Authorization for home-rule authority for local governments to conduct rental registration and inspection programs (e.g., amend O.C.G.A. § 36-74-30(b)).
  - Expand housing safety code enforcement authority, e.g., to add fines and fees to property tax bills for collection and offer such fines with lien priority junior only to property taxes (with exemptions for owner-occupants).
  - Amend O.C.G.A. § 44-7-19 to repeal the state pre-emption prohibiting local rent control ordinances.
  - Comprehensive mobile-home safety and other regulations, modeled on Florida’s warranty of habitability for mobile homes.
  - Advance policies to mitigate high utility rates in South Georgia, as championed by Georgia Watch and SOWEGA Rising.

**GHHC** will harness the strengths of its diverse collective membership (including their experience, expertise, influence, and networks) to generate concrete action and increase access to healthy housing for all Georgia’s children and families.

## Operational Plan

### Background

In Georgia, and throughout the nation, there is a tension between (1) policy that advances deeper regulation and oversight of community development (that may slow construction of new homes or remove unsafe housing units from the rental market) and (2) an urgent need for shelter of any kind given the critical shortage of affordable housing. Georgia needs a multiplicity of policy reforms and experiments to face the crisis — property tax reforms, housing and building code enforcement reforms, and ongoing and sustained federal, state, and local funding for broader housing affordability.

### ***Focus Area 1: Foster connectivity between statewide housing stakeholders and improve accessibility of related housing information.***

#### Background

Across Georgia, local and regional communities and their leaders are generating important potential solutions to the housing conditions crisis. Limited local capacity and resources limit the sustainability of their efforts by restricting needed *connectivity* among leaders and the *implementation* of their proposed solutions. To create a Georgia with sufficient and safe housing requires that communities must work together. Effectively working together will require sustained connectivity and organizing around policy development, advocacy, and implementation.

GHHC is perfectly positioned to support connectivity and organizing. It has experience winning important legislative victories and a diverse membership from across the state bringing a wide variety of perspectives, skill sets, resources, and networks.

#### Short-Term Strategies (1-2 years)

##### 1.1: GHHC Convenings

Continue regular GHHC convenings. All convenings create a space where housing advocates from around the state can find support and network with other stakeholders, learn something new, offer knowledge and experience, and practice using their voices to affect change. *(Timeline: Years 1-2)*

##### 1.2: GHHC Leadership Committee

Continue GHHC leadership committee to make decisions and speak on behalf of the GHHC (e.g., agree to legislative amendments, quickly write letters to legislators, offer testimony) during legislative session. *(Timeline: Years 1-2)*

##### 1.3: GHHC Convening Committee

Establish new GHHC committees focused on coalition building, convenings (through a lens of social and racial equity), staffed by individuals with commitment and experience in coalition building and organizing at the state, regional, and local levels. *(Timeline: Years 1-2)*

##### 1.4: GHHC Logo & Branding

Create GHHC Logo/Simple Branding. Engage a local Georgia artist to prepare possible logos and other branding materials for GHHC. Recruit and retain artist(s) with lived experience in housing insecurity and organizing for structural change. *(Timeline: Year 2)*

## Long-Term Strategies (2-6 years)

### 1.1: GHHC Online Portal

Develop a separate GHHC website independent from the current Georgia Appleseed landing page. Site content will include, but not be limited to: a list of GHHC members and a link to their organizations, the organization's location and mission; tracking and sharing all housing affordability and housing safety news from around the state; sharing GHHC membership success stories on the website; sharing GHHC member needs on the site (e.g., job openings, surveys, need for recommendations for design or facilitation, otherwise); a map (updated in real-time) with policy information at the local level (e.g., communities with welcome-stranger property tax laws, communities that utilize judicial in rem demolition liens on substandard housing, communities that have a housing plan in place, communities that have a local housing trust fund, communities that have a land bank). *(Timeline: Years 4-6)*

## ***Focus Area 2: Develop healthy housing educational materials for local government leaders, community leaders, and state policymakers.***

### Background

Georgia communities and leaders need greater education and understanding of the range of policy options for residents, government leaders, and legal/policy advocates. The need is particularly acute for information on existing state tools for housing and building code enforcement on occupied properties.

## Short-Term Strategies (1 – 3 Years)

### 2.1: Housing Education Committee

Establish a GHHC committee to develop healthy housing educational materials, case studies, toolkits, through a lens of social and racial equity. *(Timeline: Year 1)*

### 2.2: Survey Existing Code Enforcement

Survey existing housing safety codes to better understand local protections currently available under Georgia law for occupied property. *(Timeline: Years 1-2)*

### 2.3: Community Conversations

Conduct site visits and host conversations with local housing and building code enforcement offices and community organizations to understand the level of implementation of existing housing safety codes and identify needed reforms. *(Timeline: Years 2-3)*

### 2.4: Expert Insights

Conduct interviews with real estate litigation experts and property law experts in local jurisdictions. Gather information to better understand whether state and/or local laws are ineffectual or where local government lacks expertise to enforce existing laws. *(Timeline: Years 2-3)*

### 2.5: Investigate Barriers

Conduct interviews with tenant attorneys to ascertain barriers to stable healthy housing experienced by tenants under existing law. *(Timeline: Years 2-3)*

### 2.6: Stakeholder Surveys

Conduct interviews with stakeholders like GACE, GMA, and ACCG to determine housing and building code enforcement challenges. *(Timeline: Years 2-3)*

## Long-Term Strategies (3 – 10 Years, earlier if funding permits it)

### 2.1: Tailored Toolkits

Use information and insights derived from Short-Term Strategies 2.2-2.6, to develop comprehensive legal tool kits, including templates and sample forms, for local attorneys and code enforcement practitioners who represent local governments in code enforcement actions of various kinds.

*(Timeline: Years 3-6)*

### 2.2: Regional Partnerships

Partner with entities including the Georgia Municipal Association, the Association of County Commissions of Georgia, the Carl Vinson School of Government, and the Georgia Association of Code Enforcement, to offer training utilizing the comprehensive tool kits developed in 2.1 at events like the Annual City and County Attorney’s Institute or the Georgia Institute of Community Housing.

*(Timeline: Years 3-10)*

## ***Focus Area 3: Develop GHHC into a leading voice of policy reform.***

### Background

To maximize its advocacy power, GHHC will take strategic steps to grow its reputation as a thought-leader:

### Short-Term Strategies

#### 3.1: GHHC Policy Committee

Establish a GHHC committee focused on policy agenda development (through a lens of social and racial equity). Recruit committee members with commitment and experience in developing coalition-based-policy agendas informed by the experience of those most impacted by unjust policies.

*(Timeline: Year 1)*

#### 3.2: Policy Catalog

Continue to add to a working list of federal, state-level, and local-level policy reforms, and regulatory and judicial policy reforms, as members identify promising policy solutions. *(Timeline: Years -2)*

#### 3.3: State-wide Policy Review

Institute GHHC process to partner with non-member organizations and other coalitions. *(Timeline: Years 2-3)*

#### 3.4: Legislative Engagement

Begin each legislative session with an introductory letter sent to Georgia legislators, including both a “thank you for service” and an urge to “support Georgia’s children and families in healthy housing.” Outline current policy priorities in each letter. *(Timeline: Years 2-10)*

#### 3.5: Advocacy Training

In partnership with state and national experts, conduct advocacy training for GHHC members and opportunities to implement training at the state and local levels. *(Timeline: Years 2-3)*

#### 3.6: Safe Housing Training

Offer training to new state and local elected officials on safe and healthy housing laws and policies. *(Timeline: Years 3-5)*