

Sisters in Diaspora Collective
25 Temple Street
New Haven, CT 06511

January 21, 2022

New Haven Board of Alders
165 Church Street
New Haven, 06510

Re: Use of ARP funds

Dear New Haven Board of Alders,

As a group that includes Arabic and Spanish-speaking migrant women, mothers, workers, and Greater New Haven residents, we, the Sisters in Diaspora Collective, would like to formally make a proposal for the use of ARP COVID-19 relief funds to reduce housing inequity in our city and make safe, dignified housing more accessible for thousands of residents.

We are aware of the Mayor's office's proposal to allocate 10 million dollars to housing initiatives and 4 million dollars to a New Haven Land Bank from ARP funds, but we know that this amount is hugely insufficient compared to the scope of the problem.

According to the federal government, housing is considered affordable if it costs 30% or less of a family's income. But based on a recent report by New Haven's Affordable Housing Commission, 54% of New Haven residents spend more than 30% of their income on rent, meaning that **over half of New Haven residents are housing insecure**. This means that over half of our neighbors and community members struggle tremendously to afford rent month to month. This does not even count the approximately 400 people in our New Haven community who are homeless and live on the street. Even those that have a roof over their heads live in homes that are far too small for their families (which COVID has shown us is a public health concern). According to a 2019 report by DataHaven, the average renter in New Haven is about 17 thousand dollars short of affording a 2 bedroom apartment (DataHaven).

While federal housing subsidies exist, they exclude thousands of immigrants who live in our city from eligibility and even for those who are eligible, the waitlists for Public and Section 8 housing are **thousands of people-long**. Nearly every one of us in our group and our broader community has been on one of these waitlists for years, with no indication that we will ever be placed in a unit. Meanwhile, the housing that is being built is completely inaccessible to us, even most housing that is called "affordable."

Safe, dignified housing is a human right and an essential building block of a healthy life. Given the housing crisis in our city and the fact that existing housing access programs have been proven to be insufficient, we urge the Board of Alders to increase the proposed amount of 10 million dollars allocated for housing to \$62.5 million. This number is 54% of the total 115.8

million in ARP funds, which is proportional to the 54% of New Haven residents who lack access to a basic right which is affordable housing.

Here is a breakdown of our proposal for the use of \$62.5 million:

- 1. \$50.5 million. Buy buildings currently owned by corporate, absentee landlord companies, such as Mandy Management or Pike International, and preserve these buildings as public property to be used as alternative affordable housing.**

Private landlords are legally allowed to raise rent prices at their discretion, causing tremendous stress and hardship. It is unjust and unnecessary for working-class families to be at the mercy of private companies who don't know or care about us and have no stake in us or our communities. Starting to build an alternative stock of affordable housing and limiting the power of multi-million dollar private management companies would be a step towards housing justice in New Haven. This housing stock should be managed separately from federally subsidized housing, so that it is made available to the hundreds of residents who are not receiving it.

An example of how this could work:

- In 2021 alone, Mandy Management spent \$58 million buying 179 properties – or 558 apartments – throughout New Haven. With 50.5 million dollars, the City of New Haven could buy back 485 of these apartments and turn them into publicly owned affordable housing, providing an urgent, immediate solution to the housing crisis in a time of dire health need.

- 2. \$12 million. Provide monthly subsidies for 1000 families on the waitlists for Section 8 and Public Housing for two years.**

- a. This is an adaptation of a proposal submitted to the City of New Haven by Elm City Communities/Housing Authority of New Haven on Sept. 10, 2021. There is an extreme shortage of units available through the Section 8 and public housing programs, which means that thousands of us wait for five, ten, or more years before our names get pulled from a waitlist. There is currently no support for those of us on waiting lists, no plan for how to help the thousands of us who will not have access to subsidized housing for years. This subsidy would be undoubtedly transformative for many, many people in our community.

We urge the Board of Alders to seriously consider our concerns and demands. If we want everyone in our city to have access to a life of health and wellbeing, we must urgently prioritize making sure that safe and dignified housing is available to all.

