

“Time to Show Up”

Mayor Aidsand F. Wright-Riggins

I am trying to emotionally process the fact that 8 children and 4 adults died in a three-story Philadelphia rowhome where 26 people once lived last week. This past Sunday, 19 Bronx building residents were killed when a five-alarm blaze broke out about in a bedroom of a duplex apartment spanning the second and third floors of the 19-story tower in Fordham Heights. Our national grieving is appropriate. But we must offer more than just thoughts and prayers.

It should not be lost on us that these fires took place in inadequate, unsafe, and deteriorating housing structures. Building new public housing or repairing existing ones is an enormous task for our nation to take on. But it is one that is a life-or-death need for those who sit in or on the margins of poverty.

Currently in Philadelphia, there is around \$1.5 billion in deferred capital and maintenance needs for public housing. Public housing infrastructure around the country continues to deteriorate due to a lack of funding and far too many families are suffering for it.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines affordable housing as housing in which the occupant does not spend more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs, including utilities. As of 2019, more than 37 million renters and homeowners spent more than 30% of their income on housing, according to HUD.

Grieving the tragic deaths of those lost in the fires in Philadelphia and New York is appropriate. Without our tears, this would be a heartless world indeed. Tears well out of the heart of love and restore to the human family the ability to love. But our tears must not stop with our emotional support. Our tears must take the form of actionable cries and struggles for justice for those on the margins. Access to decent, affordable, and safe housing ought to be a right for everyone of in this country.

President Joe Biden's \$2 trillion social spending Build Back Better Act, which allocates \$170 billion for affordable housing. That bill passed the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives but has stalled in the Senate, where all Republicans and two conservative Democrats – Joe Manchin of Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona – oppose it.

Alice Walker once counseled, *"Those who love us never leave us alone with our grief. At the moment they show us our wound, they reveal they have the medicine."* It is time for America to show up with the medicine.