



Friends & Residents of Arthur Capper and Carrollsburg

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Todd Cherkis: 202/483-1368

DC Housing Authority Locks-Out Public Housing Residents from Community Meeting

- Threatens to arrest residents who expressed dissent at the meeting
- Removes all residents under age 18

Youth and other public housing residents planned to stage a protest at a May 7, 2003 community meeting of the DC Housing Authority. The community meeting was held at Van Ness Elementary School, adjoining the Arthur Capper and Carrollsburg public housing community. The housing authority billed the meeting as an opportunity to get community input on the HOPE VI project at the public housing community. HOPE VI is the federal program financing the demolition and rebuilding of Arthur Capper.

The protest, organized by youth and adult leaders of Friends and Residents, was aimed to express resident demands for clear written guarantees that all residents will have the right to return to the neighborhood after the housing authority demolishes and rebuilds their homes. Residents wanted to express doubts that they will be allowed to move back, citing the carefully worded and highly qualified claims made by the housing authority. “The slippery wording hedges any commitment the housing authority claims to make, especially with them refusing to put things in writing. We have a right to move back to our homes and we want them to put this in plain writing,” said Friends and Resident organizer and Arthur Capper resident Linda Cuffey. “Once they move us out, we’ll be displaced. They need to do something before then to make sure we return and not just let us get lost in the system,” added Cuffey.

But when housing authority officials, including the housing authority’s executive director Michael Kelly, saw protest signs at the meeting, the officials first removed some community advocates of public housing and then threatened to arrest any remaining resident who expressed dissent at the meeting. According to organizer Selina Musuta, housing authority police officer G. E. Bellinger threatened to arrest anyone who “disagreed at the meeting.”

“They kept us out of the meeting tonight, saying to us that we aren’t residents. But I am,” said Cuffey, who remained in the lobby because she was too tired after a day of work to push the matter. “Besides, what right do they have to stop anyone from speaking up about what’s happening in our city? This issue is about more than just Arthur Capper. It’s something we should all care about” said Cuffey.

Later, housing authority officials removed all residents under age 18 who were at the meeting. “Michael Kelly wouldn’t listen to us. But even though it was raining, when we were kicked out we stayed outside so we could talk to him. He needs to give us a chance and let us stay in our homes, instead of moving us out,” said Darrell Holt, 14, a Friends and Residents youth leader who was part of the planned protest. Holt, like all the youth leaders present, is a resident at Arthur Capper.

Friends and Residents is a resident-led organization made up of residents of all ages, from grandchildren to grandmothers, formed to provide meaningful resident input in the HOPE VI process at Arthur Capper and Carrollsburg. Friends and Residents is the voices of residents concerned about being permanently kicked out of their community.