

at&t Choose a **FREE** phone from some of the most popular top-rated models.

- Moto™ EM330
- Pantech C630
- Sony Ericsson W350

Get a Free Phone

\*Two-yr. contract and signif. restrictions apply.

Other editions: Mobile | E-news alerts | RSS | Twitter Find it: Site Map | Coupons | Weekly Deals | Apartments | Dating | Jobs | Cars | Real estate | Classified ads | Subscribe

**honoluluadvertiser.com**  
Tuesday, June 2, 2009

SEARCH  
ALL

All Local News Calendar Jobs More »

Sponsored by:  
**careerbuilder**



HOME LOCAL NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS MY ADVERTISER ISLAND LIFE TGIF OPINION MULTIMEDIA BLOGS/FORUMS CLASSIFIED ADS HELP



**Comment, blog & share photos**  
Log in | Become a member | Find your friends

powered by you and



The Honolulu Advertiser

## OPINION

Posted on: Sunday, May 31, 2009

Print this page E-mail this article

# Public housing: Deplorable conditions demand action

*Kuhio Park Terrace public housing project suffers from decades of neglect*

- Housing Authority should deliver

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: INSIDE KUHIO PARK TERRACE AND KUHIO HOMES

Gene Strickland  
Sii Tuia  
Katherine Vaiola

Read comments (21) Recommend (2) Share ?

The minimum expected of public housing, according to multiple federal laws on the books, is that it be "decent, safe, and sanitary." It's simply unconscionable that there are still public housing projects in Hawai'i that can't even reach that low bar.

ADVERTISEMENT Yet for years, if not decades, Kuhio Park Terrace and Kuhio Homes have been plagued by neglect and conditions making them unfit to live in by almost any standard: chronically broken and overcrowded elevators, posing troubling challenges for disabled residents; a lack of proper fire safety equipment; trash chutes boarded up by plywood, posing safety and sanitation risks; unsafe aging stairwells; and severe infestations of roaches, rats and bedbugs.

Built in the mid-1960s, the federally backed, state-run projects are also home for roughly 3,000 lower-income residents. These residents will tell you that the neglect spans multiple administrations, and passed through dozens of legislative sessions.

They'll tell you about elevators that don't run much of the time, of the filthy, wet and slippery stairwells they can be forced to use, sometimes carrying disabled family members up and down; of units with persistent leaks in ceilings and walls; and of hot water that's rarely available due to broken water heaters.

Sii Tuia, who has suffered two strokes and has difficulty navigating stairs during the frequent elevator breakdowns, fell on wet steps that lacked nonslip treads.

Gene Strickland, whose spinal cord injury left him unable to walk unaided, can't get in and out of the shower without help. He's been asking for more than two years for hand rails to be installed in the shower; at one point he fell and was trapped between the shower and toilet for six hours until his wife came home from work.

He finally decided to install them at his own expense.

And there's Katherine Vaiola, who lives in a street-level unit in adjacent Kuhio Homes but because of an amputated leg can't get upstairs to bathe or use the toilet. Long on the waiting list for a unit with a more accessible floor plan, she is confined to the downstairs living area. For five years, she has used a plastic toilet in her living room and has taken sponge baths in the kitchen sink.



Kuhio Park Terrace high-rise public housing project in Kalihi.

Advertiser library photos




The project's broken and hazardous garbage chute.




Ads by Adblade


**"My Wrinkles Are Gone!"**  
Learn How a Mom Combined (2) Products to Easily Get Rid of Her Wrinkles. [Learn more](#)




**DON'T Pay For White Teeth**  
Learn the trick, discovered by a mom, to turn yellow teeth white w/under \$10. [Learn more](#)




**Top 3 Wrinkle Creams for 2009**  
Skin Secrets Revealed. Before you buy, see what's been voted the Top Wrinkle cream of the year! [Learn more](#)



**#1 Rule to Build Muscle**  
Learn how a student gained 10 Lbs. of muscle by obeying this one rule. [Learn more](#)



**'I Lost 25lbs'**  
I lost 3lbs per week by obeying this rule. Plus, It's totally free [Learn more](#)



Beyond the chronic health and safety issues that demand action, liability issues just may leave taxpayers holding the bag.

The Hawai'i Public Housing Authority, which oversees the project, has long been plagued by problems of its own. The agency has had five directors in seven years. And for years it has suffered from insufficient funding for repairs at Kuhio projects or other public housing.

But armed with an infusion of capital from lawmakers about three years ago, the state embarked on a "turnaround plan" to attack its maintenance backlog.

Unfortunately, it has progressed too slowly to avert a pair of class-action lawsuits, one in state Circuit Court and one in federal District Court, that seek orders to correct numerous shortcomings in the living conditions.

In the federal case, residents are seeking accommodations for their various disabilities, charging that the state and its project managers have violated the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The residents are represented by the firm Lawyers for Equal Justice at both the federal and state suits; the latter case alleges that the housing was not kept in habitable and safe condition and breached the terms of its leases

with the tenants.

Chad Taniguchi, the authority's executive director since 2007, said efforts to chip away at the problem began independently and without prompting by lawsuits. He defended the progress made so far and cited a change in contractors among reasons for delay. The six elevators will be replaced in pairs, the first two done next April, the completion of all six is by May 2011.

Two water boilers have been replaced. Fire alarms are due to be finished in December. The garbage chutes will be repaired by April 2010, he said, because a building permit is still pending. And the authority says it is working on a plan to provide more disabled-accessible units.

Mark Bennett, state attorney general, declined to comment at length on the court actions. But he did make a general characterization of the argument: "We're not saying there are no problems, but legally it doesn't justify the relief the plaintiffs are seeking, in either case."

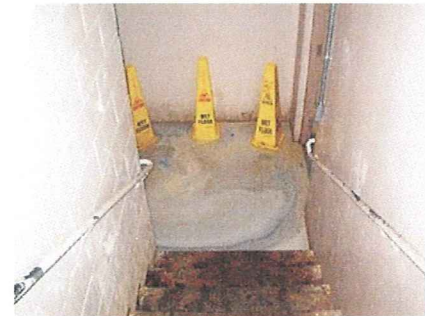
However, some residents have waited decades for some fairly basic improvements to be made. Vaiola, for example, has lived in the complex since 1976, in her apartment since 1993. Her confinement downstairs has been going on for five years, with no relief.

Chronic inaction has prompted the tenants' attorneys to seek a court order forcing improvements to be made, in particular for the disabled tenants. They are expected this week to file for an injunction in the federal case.

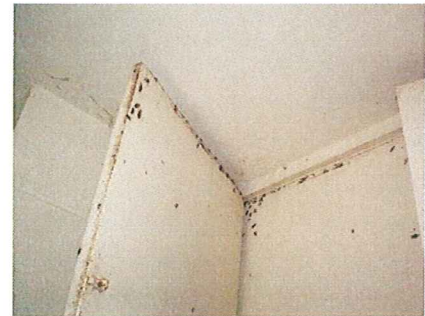
"For decades, the state hasn't made the structural changes they need to make to the buildings and the premises," said attorney Elizabeth Dunne. "They haven't been following a policy to provide accommodation to people with disabilities.

"Because they continue to fail to do so, we need the court to order them to do so."

Any visitor can see — and smell — the basis for complaints. The editorial board of The Advertiser visited both projects last week and found many of the conditions persist. Noxious odors, which tenants say result from rodent feces and roach dander, filled corridors and stairwells. The single working elevator, which also reeked, was packed to the gills. Garbage chutes covered only by flimsy plywood, if at all, were within reach of young children on several floors of the high-rise. Some living units had persistent leaks in the ceilings and walls. And there was a clear shortage of parking stalls and ramps for the handicapped.




Residents say KPT's aging stairwells, wet and slippery have caused many falls.



Roaches climb the walls in one of the housing units; pests and rodents plague the public housing project.

ADVERTISEMENT

Ads by Media Force



**"My Teeth Are Now White"**  
Read the trick, discovered by a mom, to turn her yellow teeth white! [Read More](#)



**DON'T Pay For White Teeth**  
Learn the trick, discovered by a mom, to turn yellow teeth white w/under \$10. [Read More](#)

#### MORE OPINION HEADLINES

- Labor talks must yield reasonable savings (2)
- Islam Day an act of tolerance (7)
- Rigor, incentives can improve schools (2)
- Animal abuse (14)
- Editorial cartoon

#### ADS BY PULSE 360

Get Listed Here

#### Honolulu Mom Cures Wrinkle Problems!

Mom from Honolulu combined two items and lost wrinkles in 7 days!

[www.MyWrinklesAreCured.com](http://www.MyWrinklesAreCured.com)

#### Honolulu Mortgage Protection Insur.

Pays off your mortgage in the event of your death. Get a free quote!

[www.NAALife.com](http://www.NAALife.com)

#### Colon Cleanse Exposed

Warning! Dont try colon cleansing products until you've

Some tenants are paying upward of \$900 per month for the right to live in such conditions. Equally intolerable: Letting health and safety hazards persist here has left the state fighting these lawsuits, and vulnerable to more, with taxpayers forced to pick up the tab.

seen this.

[www.ColonCleanseReport.net](http://www.ColonCleanseReport.net)

The question of whether the state has met its legal obligation to its Kuhio tenants will be answered as the court challenges play out, but the state should immediately take a hard look at its contract with the firm managing the complex, Realty Laua Inc., to ensure its duties are being fulfilled. Resident complaints about building conditions, as well as about security provided to tenants, must be addressed.

Lawmakers this session also passed a resolution demanding a management audit of state public housing projects — including the Kuhio projects. The state auditor should conduct and deliver a thorough study as quickly as possible, so that systemic problems can be properly and promptly addressed.

Additionally, the state needs to give the tenants a real voice in the upkeep of their place of residence. A tenants' association should be created, one that can serve as a sounding board and an intermediary between tenants and project managers.

Taniguchi called on residents to get involved in planned cleanup projects and overall stewardship of the property. Some of the responsibility over the care of the buildings and grounds should fall with the residents. As in many public housing projects, some tenants have been guilty of vandalism and behavior that damages the property. A tenants' group can help hold residents accountable for doing their part to keep the project livable.

But the onus remains on the state to provide — at minimum — repairs and adjustments that bring this project in line with decent health and safety standards.

It's time to fix this problem. Hawaii's leaders have not met their obligation to the state's neediest residents. They deserve housing that's decent, safe and sanitary — anything less is a simply a disgrace.

## In Your Voice | [READ REACTIONS TO THIS STORY](#)

[Hide Comments](#) ▲

Newest first



alohawg wrote:

Our neighbors are the 4th Section 8 people in 11 yrs. here and we have yet to have any that were quiet, responsible, respectful, clean etc..... Instead we get the opposite, women with multiple kids, the live in boyfriend loser drug addict who blames everyone else for his problems and on and on. It is a class of people who by all accounts are lazy physically and mentally and to top it off have a chip on their shoulder, the world owes them. On the other hand, the homeowners around us take care of their stuff and watch out for each other, amazing. The mentality is bad here, really bad and honestly I doubt it will better anytime soon, especially as the economy tanks

06/01/2009 8:36:37 p.m.

[Recommend](#)

[New post](#)

[Reply to this Post](#)

[Report Abuse](#)



Kalawow wrote:

And people will still demand that the government run health care! Where has it ever worked?

06/01/2009 4:29:05 a.m.

[Recommend \(1\)](#)

[New post](#)

[Reply to this Post](#)

[Report Abuse](#)



soundofreason wrote:

Replying to allie19:

*Lingle has been a no-show governor as everyone agrees. But I do think the residents of KPT need to take responsibility for being guests of the tax payer. IHS is right to encourage and enable KPT residents to clean up the mess they created and to take some pride in their guest quarters. We need more of this.*

When you mis-state facts - your valid point loses credibility

05/31/2009 6:16:02 p.m.



Recommend New post Reply to this Post Report Abuse



karnak wrote:

/> If the private sector can do it, why haven't they done it?[/QUOTE]

Your question is answered every where you look. There are single family homes, duplexes, condominiums and rental apartments all over the islands that privately house all economic, ethnic and social levels.

If they can do it, so can the others in public housing. All it takes is effort and the will to do it.

05/31/2009 6:09:53 p.m.

Recommend New post Reply to this Post Report Abuse



allie19 wrote:

Lingle has been a no-show governor as everyone agrees. But I do think the residents of KPT need to take responsibility for being guests of the tax payer. IHS is right to encourage and enable KPT residents to clean up the mess they created and to take some pride in their guest quarters. We need more of this.

05/31/2009 10:55:00 a.m.

Recommend (6) New post Reply to this Post Report Abuse

1 2 3 4 5 >> Last

[FULL PAGE VIEW](#)

See more comments per page and quote other replies

You must be logged in to leave a comment. [Login](#) | [Register](#)

1000characters left

**Honolulu Weight Loss Story**  
I Lost Over 47lbs in 3 Months Using this Secret. Read More.  
[www.tinasdietstory.com](http://www.tinasdietstory.com)

**Honolulu Mom Lost 57 lbs**  
I Cut Down 57 lbs Stomach Fat In A Month By Obeying This 1 Old...  
[KelleysWeightLoss.com/Secret](http://KelleysWeightLoss.com/Secret)

**Honolulu Mom Cures Wrinkle Problems!**  
Mom from Honolulu combined two items and lost wrinkles in 7 days!  
[www.MyWrinklesAreCured.com](http://www.MyWrinklesAreCured.com)

National Partners: [Apartments.com](#) [Cars.com](#) [CareerBuilder.com](#) [Homefinder.com](#) [ShopLocal.com](#) [Metromix.com](#) [eHarmony.com](#) [4info](#) [USA Weekend](#)

Local partners: [101 Things to Do](#) [Around Hawaii](#) [Hawaii.com](#)

[Home](#) | [Local news](#) | [Sports](#) | [Business](#) | [My Advertiser](#) | [Island Life](#) | [TGIF](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Multimedia](#) | [Blogs/Forums](#) | [Classified ads](#) | [Help](#) | [Site Map](#)

[Terms of service](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Contact us](#) | [About us](#) | [Work for us](#) | [Gannett Foundation](#) | [Subscribe](#)

©COPYRIGHT 2009 The Honolulu Advertiser. All rights reserved.

Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy , updated March 2009.