Prior to the onset of the pandemic, spiking rental rates had become an increasingly insurmountable obstacle for low-income families. In the last decade, rents in our region have increased by 65%, compared to a national average increase of 36%. Nearly half of all households in the City of Atlanta and nearly one in three households in the region are housing cost-burdened. Making matters worse, unemployment levels have soared, placing as many as 28 million families nationally in immediate jeopardy of eviction - including families in Georgia, which has 16 cities in the top 100 for eviction rates.

After a brief period of moratoriums, Federal, state and local protections for vulnerable residents impacted by the COVID pandemic are expiring and courts are beginning to resume eviction proceedings. According to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, it is estimated that more than 40% of renters in Georgia could be at risk of eviction. The same data suggest that Black and Hispanic communities will be disproportionately affected.

The problem is also troubling for landlords, especially those providing affordable rental options, as their mortgages on the rental properties are in danger of being foreclosed.

Philanthropic organizations in metro Atlanta and beyond were quick to establish funding to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, including some rent relief measures. But the problem will soon far outpace any current philanthropic funding.

For impacted families, evictions cause more than a temporary state of housing instability. Matthew Desmond, the author of “Evicted,” notes that “families who are evicted regularly lose their possessions, lose their jobs, and experience higher rates of depression. For children, the instability caused by eviction can result in worse outcomes in education, health, and future earnings.”

Where are the hot spots in our region where evictions are most likely to swell? What steps need to be taken to stop a wave of evictions that will uproot families and render thousands homeless? What are the best local and national best practices for eviction relief efforts? How can we encourage collaboration between private and public sectors to tackle this potentially devastating crisis?
BILL BOLLING is the founder and moderator of the Atlanta Regional Housing Forum. Bill served as executive director of the Atlanta Community Food Bank since founding the organization in 1979 until June 2015. Over the span of 36 years, he led the Food Bank's distribution of more than half a billion pounds of food and grocery products through a network of more than 600 local and regional partner nonprofit organizations that feed the hungry across 29 Georgia counties. As a charter member of Feeding America, the national network of food banks, Bill was instrumental in the start-up of food banks across the country. He is a frequent speaker on topics related to hunger, poverty, regionalism, affordable housing and public policy reform.

SARAH STEIN is an adviser on affordable housing and neighborhood stabilization on the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta’s community and economic development (CED) team. Prior to joining the Atlanta Fed, Stein was an attorney representing seniors and low-income Atlantans on housing matters with Atlanta Legal Aid. There, she spearheaded the Generational Poverty Law Project, developing educational and clinical programming to address long-term homeowner displacement and to help low-income families build generational wealth. She has developed legal expertise in the areas of fair housing, residential real estate finance, property law, property tax, estate and probate matters, and affordable housing. Previously, Stein was a research fellow with the Emory University Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Her work examined the legal frameworks and human geographies of homelessness. Stein holds a JD from Emory’s School of Law and an MA from Emory’s Laney Graduate School. She earned her BA in modern studies at the University of Virginia.

CASSANDRA KIRK - In 2014 Governor Nathan Deal appointed Cassandra Kirk Chief Magistrate Judge and tasked her with creating the newly independent Magistrate Court of Fulton County. In May 2018 Judge Kirk successfully defended her seat in a contested election to become the first ever elected Chief Magistrate Judge of Fulton County. Her mission is to Inform, Engage and Empower Our Community. Under her leadership, the Magistrate Court: created its first website; selected 8 full and 22 part-time judges in a public process; provided mediation services at the North and South Annexes; implemented civil e-filing with a user-friendly Guide and File; supported the Housing Court Assistance Center, providing navigation services to tenants in Landlord-Tenant cases; guided Fulton's first Misdemeanor Mental Health Court with other Justice Partners; successfully eliminated the Court’s 30,000 small claims case backlog; and was one of four courts nationwide awarded a Grant from the National Center for State Courts to pilot our High Volume Court Simplified project. Prior to Magistrate Court, Judge Kirk served Fulton County as a Juvenile Court judge, where she spearheaded its first Juvenile Drug Treatment Court. Judge Kirk's over twenty-five year legal experience includes service as a jurist, prosecutor, criminal defense attorney, civil litigator, and Administrative Director. Cassandra supports the community through Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., North Avenue Presbyterian Church (Elder), alumni activities with the Regional Leadership Institute and Leadership Atlanta, and the Boards of Directors of The Atlanta Resource Foundation, Star C, the Southern Advisory Committee to Children’s Rights, and Street Grace, a non-profit aimed at eradicating domestic minor sex trafficking.

MICHAEL LUCAS is Deputy Director of The Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation (AVLF). As Deputy Director, Michael is responsible for AVLF’s day-to-day operations, managing its relationships in the community and overseeing all of the Foundation’s provision of legal services. Michael previously served as the Director of Housing and Consumer Programs at AVLF, managing a variety of programs that provide legal representation to low-income individuals and litigating in the areas of landlord-tenant law, unpaid wages, debt-defense and debt collection. In addition to his work at AVLF, Michael sits on the Executive Committee of HouseATL and the Steering Committee of the Atlanta Regional Collaborative for Health Improvement (archi). Michael will begin serving as AVLF’s Executive Director beginning January 1, 2021.

LIZ OSBORN is the Vice President of Policy Advocacy at Enterprise, where she oversees the organization's advocacy efforts. A versatile public affairs and communications professional, Liz has spent 15 years shaping policy and media strategy on Capitol Hill, in the executive branch and in the international non-profit sector. Prior to joining Enterprise's public policy team, Liz served as the manager of external affairs and policy advisor at the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, where she led the agency’s legislative affairs and media relations efforts and directed a policy portfolio that included health care and criminal justice. Liz received her bachelor’s degree in music and communications from UNC Chapel Hill and holds a master's degree in international public policy and management from NYU.
STEPHEN DAVIS began his professional career as an aide to United States Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL) in 2007. He has over a decade of experience in government and government affairs; including eight years as a Congressional staffer in Washington, D.C., two and a half years as a federal government lobbyist, two years as the Government Affairs Director for the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association (GAHBA), and has been Director of Government Affairs for the Atlanta Apartment Association (AAA) since the Spring of 2020. At the AAA, Stephen focuses his efforts on improving the local business climate for the multifamily housing industry; and facilitates communication between association members, elected officials, and community leaders. He holds a Master of Arts degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the United States Naval War College, as well as a dual Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and History from The University of Alabama.

LEJLA PRLJACA - As the Lawrenceville Housing Authority’s (LHA) Executive Director, and CEO of the Gwinnett Housing Corporation (GHC), Lejla Prljaca is responsible for the planning, organizing, and directing of operations for one of the largest affordable housing agencies in Gwinnett County. Her realization of the growing need for affordable housing inspired her to expand GHC’s programs to include construction and rehabilitation of rental and homeownership properties. Since then, GHC has invested over $13M of HUD funding, and has an additional $54M of LIHTC funding in the pipeline. She is the co-lead for City of Norcross program with the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH), and co-founded the Lawrenceville Response Center (LRC), a community collaborative created to combat housing instability caused by COVID-19. Lejla is also active in state and national housing associations. As a Legislation Chair of the Georgia Association of Housing and Redevelopment Authorities (GAHRA), she has lobbied the state and federal government for adequate funding, and deregulation of public housing. She completed a five-year term as a GA Department of Community Affairs Homeless Continuum of Care, and currently serves as a Board member of the Gwinnett County Housing Authority and Regional Housing Task Force. Lejla holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the University of Georgia, and a Bachelor's Degree from Georgia State University.

PROTIP BISWAS serves as Vice President, Homelessness at the United Way of Greater Atlanta. In his current position, he provides staff leadership to the Regional Commission on Homelessness (RCOH) which provides ensures coordination and implementation of the strategies to end homelessness in the region. The RCOH team has been the catalyst in creating over 2500 units of supportive housing, creating 1200 jobs for homeless persons, reunified over 8000 persons and raised over $80 million for homeless projects. Prior to his current position he has been active in the field of community development, affordable housing, community building and economic development. He has worked with organizations in neighborhoods in Ohio, Virginia and North Carolina. He has also worked for a national intermediary in affordable housing. He has a graduate degree in architecture from University of Cincinnati and another in construction management from SPA, Delhi, India. He is a drop out! after completing course work for doctoral studies in Urban Planning at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. His research interest includes affordable housing finance, community economic development and social capital. He is an adjunct faculty at Georgia Tech and Neighbor Works America.