

THE PRICE OF BEING POOR – PART 7

“Built on Promises, Standing on Questions: What Is Really Happening Inside Alice Griffith Apartments?”

A MALIK WASHINGTON INVESTIGATION

Destination Freedom Media Group | The Davis Vanguard



Photo Credits:

Bottom: <https://www.kqed.org/news/38840/feds-award-30m-to-remake-sf-housing-project>

Top: <https://tyrafennell.wordpress.com/tag/double-rock/>

Background: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8Kg077PO8o> background

The land was studied. The risks were known. The mitigation was required. So why are residents now asking whether the system designed to protect them is failing in real time?

THE BODIES ARE FORCING THE QUESTION

In Bayview–Hunters Point, accountability rarely begins with policy. It begins with loss.

Since January 2026, residents of Alice Griffith Apartments have been sounding an alarm that has yet to be met with a formal response: a reported cluster of deaths—approximately ten lives lost in a matter of months—including community activist Dewayne Gaines, a man whose work stood firmly on the side of tenant protection, environmental justice, and community survival.

No official agency has yet confirmed a causal connection between those deaths and environmental exposure. But that is not the standard that triggers investigation.

The standard is far simpler—and far more urgent:

When a pattern emerges, the City investigates.
And here, the pattern is undeniable.

I have pondered over these deaths for months. I thought to myself, “Where’s the corporate-owned mainstream media?”

Is it because the people who are dying are predominantly Black, Brown, Asian, and poor and **they don’t deserve attention from the corporate-owned mainstream media?** I suppose that this is why I’ve taken this struggle personally. I’ve talked to tenants who have told me that they have recently been diagnosed with Cancer. I’ve also spoken to the family members of loved ones who have died recently at Alice Griffith. I’ve even had private conversations with employees of the local City and County government who have said that a pattern is forming, but there is no political will to admit anything.

THE PRICE OF BEING POOR HAS ALWAYS INCLUDED THE LAND

Alice Griffith is not just a housing development. It is a location. And in Bayview–Hunters Point, location is history.

Public environmental records—long before the first new unit was built—document a neighborhood shaped by:

- Industrial operations involving chemicals, metals, and petroleum byproducts
- Tanneries, dry cleaners, and manufacturing sites known for hazardous waste streams
- Land created through artificial fill, often composed of mixed debris and unknown materials
- Shallow groundwater systems, sometimes less than 15 feet below the surface

The Targeted Brownfields Assessment makes clear that Alice Griffith sits within a corridor where contamination risk is embedded in the geography.

And the redevelopment record acknowledges something even more critical: The land beneath and around Alice Griffith includes recognized exposure pathways, including the potential for soil-vapor intrusion from contaminated groundwater into indoor living spaces.

That is not speculation.
That is the official record.

THEY STUDIED THE RISK—AND MOVED FORWARD ANYWAY

**Let's remove the illusion that this was an oversight failure.
It wasn't.**

The redevelopment of Alice Griffith underwent:

- A Targeted Brownfields Assessment
- A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
- A Final Environmental Impact Statement
- A Record of Decision (ROD)

Under San Francisco's Maher Ordinance (Health Code Article 22A), these steps are mandatory.

The record shows that:

- Soil and fill were to be characterized before construction
- Soil-vapor sampling was required
- Developers were required to prepare site mitigation plans
- Contingency protocols were established
- Mitigation could include soil removal or vapor barriers

So the truth is clear:

**Risk was identified.
Mitigation was required.
Construction proceeded.**

Which leaves one unavoidable question:

Is that system still protecting residents today?

A SYSTEM UNDER ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS

A 2022 San Francisco Civil Grand Jury report warned that rising groundwater could mobilize buried contaminants and create new exposure pathways, including vapor intrusion into buildings. Environmental protection is not a one-time certification. It is a long-term obligation.

And when conditions change—groundwater rises, infrastructure ages, buildings deteriorate—the original assumptions must be tested again.

INSIDE THE BUILDINGS: NEGLECT IS ALSO A HEALTH HAZARD

Even if the land beneath Alice Griffith were stable, conditions inside the buildings point to a separate and urgent crisis.

- Residents and reporting describe:
- Rodent and roach infestations
- Mold and water intrusion
- Broken elevators
- Failing fire systems
- Malfunctioning ventilation systems

The John Stewart Company, the property manager associated with Alice Griffith Apartments, has faced ongoing criticism across multiple properties for poor maintenance practices, neglect, and tenant mistreatment. Those concerns are not abstract—they align directly with the conditions residents say they are living through right now.

This is where the analysis becomes sharper:

- Residents may be facing a stacked exposure environment—where environmental risk and property management failure intersect.
- Legacy contamination concerns
- Potential vapor intrusion
- Mold exposure
- Poor ventilation
- Deferred maintenance

This is not a single failure. It is a system failure.

LEGAL SUPPORT EXISTS—BUT WILL IT REACH THE TENANTS?

Accountability does not only come from government—it also comes from access to legal advocacy.

I recently spoke with Adrian Tirtanadi, Executive Director of Open Door Legal, which maintains an office in Bayview on Third Street. Mr. Tirtanadi stated that he and his colleagues are committed to supporting the tenants of Alice Griffith Apartments. After receiving a recent influx of resources from the City and County of San Francisco, Open Door Legal has emerged as a leading provider of pro-bono legal services.

The question now is straightforward:

Will District 10 residents—specifically those at Alice Griffith—see the benefit of that commitment?

Because access to legal support is not theoretical. It is often the difference between enduring unsafe conditions and challenging them.

THE DEATHS DEMAND MORE THAN SILENCE

Let's be disciplined and clear. There is no verified public finding linking the reported deaths at Alice Griffith to environmental exposure.

But there is also:

No confirmed cluster analysis
No public toxicology review
No transparent investigation by SFPD

That absence is not reassurance. It is the problem. Because public health systems are designed to investigate uncertainty—not avoid it.

A DIRECT DEMAND TO THE CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

The San Francisco Department of Public Health must immediately initiate a formal investigation. That investigation must include:

- A cluster analysis of reported deaths
- Review of causes of death and toxicology data
- Indoor air testing, including vapor intrusion
- Mold and ventilation system assessments
- Carbon monoxide evaluation
- Soil and groundwater testing, where warranted
- A full audit of Maher Ordinance compliance and long-term mitigation performance
- A public report and community hearing

I recently watched and observed silently as community advocate, Arieann Harrison, the Executive Director of the Marie Harrison Community Foundation confronted employees of SFPD in regard to questions that she

had about DPH's lack of involvement and attention to the deaths that have taken place at Alice Griffith Apartments. The DPH employees did not have a logical explanation as to why their department has not launched a formal investigation into the deaths at Alice Griffith Apartments.

Anything less is not oversight. It is avoidance.

It is important for me to notify the community that we are just beginning this struggle for freedom, justice, and equality in San Francisco. Our readers will soon discover that the problems we face are citywide and not just relegated to District 10. **While Mayor Daniel Lurie is firing health workers and defunding programs that have aided communities of color, human beings die quietly at Alice Griffith Apartments.**

Tabernacle Community
Development Corporation

Vision. Integrity. Unity. Commitment. Success.



Dr. James McCray, Executive
Director



Letitia Howard, Project
Manager



Todd Clayter, Project
Manager II



Gerald Green, Project
Manager I

"...the primary objective has expanded to developing affordable rental units to keep Black families from leaving San Francisco..."

"Individually, each minister has significant experience with affordable housing development. The five parishes currently own and sponsor over 1,000 units of low-income and senior housing."

BUT I THINK WHAT ANGERS ME THE MOST IS A GROUP OF PASTORS KNOWN AS THE TABERNACLE GROUP (<https://www.tcdc-sf.org/>)

CONTINUE TO PORTRAY ALICE GRIFFITH APARTMENTS AS SOME UTOPIAN PARADISE! THESE HYPOCRITES AND VIOLATORS OF THE PUBLIC’S TRUST DON’T HAVE THE COURAGE TO STAND UP FOR THE COMMUNITY THAT THEY PROFESS GUARDIANSHIP OVER. IT’S OBVIOUS THAT THESE “GOOD BROTHERS AND SISTERS” ARE OBTAINING SOME TYPE OF BENEFIT FOR THEIR SILENCE. IN MY OPINION, THEY SHOULD BE KICKING DOWN THE DOORS OF JOHN STEWART COMPANY AND THE OFFICE OF MAYOR DANIEL LURIE.

This is what TCDC says about one of its projects, Alice Griffith Apartments:

“In partnering with McCormick Baron Salazar, TCDC built the multi-phase new Alice Griffith residential community. It opened in May 2018 and is located at 2500 Arellano Walker Drive in San Francisco. The project includes 339 100% affordable apartments and homes. 226 of the apartments were reserved for returning Alice Griffith families. This project is part of the Hunters Point Shipyard/Candlestick Point for Neighborhood Development LEED certified plan. All phases are registered with USGBC under the LEED® for Homes program, with a certification goal of LEED® Gold; the first two phases are certified LEED® Gold.”

Link to LEED Certification: <https://www.usgbc.org/leed>

Just this past week, I’ve heard fresh stories of roofs collapsing on residents at Alice Griffith Apartments. I’m sure there are community leaders and people of faith who are ready to organize on behalf of their fellow citizens.

DEWAYNE GAINES AND THE COST OF IGNORING THE PATTERN

Dewayne Gaines understood what too many officials ignore:

In Bayview–Hunters Point, harm rarely comes from one source.
It comes from layers—environmental, structural, and political.

His passing now sits inside a pattern that demands scrutiny. Not speculation. Scrutiny.

THE PRICE OF BEING POOR—REVISITED

This series has exposed:

Unsafe housing conditions
Weak enforcement
Retaliation against tenants
Political silence

Part 7 adds a deeper truth:

When poor communities are placed on environmentally burdened land, the risks do not disappear—they compound.

Alice Griffith is now a test:

Are San Francisco's protections real—or performative?

THE BOTTOM LINE

The record shows:

- The land carried known risks
- The City required a study
- Mitigation was mandated
- Residents report dangerous conditions
- Deaths have raised urgent concern

This article does not claim causation. It demands investigation. Because in Bayview–Hunters Point, history has already shown what happens when warnings are ignored.

Here's our song/video for this article:

Bryann T - Living Water Ft. Antwoine Hill & Brandon Trejo

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7doOeCzBmU&list=RD7doOeCzBmU&start_radio=1

RESOURCE LIST

- 1.) San Francisco Department of Public Health – Maher Ordinance (Health Code Article 22A)
<https://www.sfdph.org/dph/EH/HazWaste/maher/default.asp>
- 2.) Alice Griffith / Candlestick Point–Hunters Point Shipyard Redevelopment Environmental Review (EIS & Record of Decision)
<https://sfmohcd.org>
- 3.) Bayview–Hunters Point Targeted Brownfields Assessment
San Francisco Department of the Environment
- 4.) San Francisco Civil Grand Jury (2022) – Hunters Point Shipyard: Environmental and Public Health Risks
<https://civilgrandjury.sfgov.org>
- 5.) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – Hunters Point Naval Shipyard Superfund Site Overview
<https://www.epa.gov/hunters-point-naval-shipyard>
- 6.) Mission Local – Reporting on Conditions at Alice Griffith Apartments
<https://missionlocal.org>
- 7.) San Francisco Planning Department – Environmental Review Documents
<https://sfplanning.org/environmental-review-documents>
- 8.) Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) – CalEnviroScreen Data
<https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen>
- 9.) Bay Area Air Quality Management District – AB 617 Community Health Program (Bayview–Hunters Point)
<https://www.baaqmd.gov/community-health/community-programs>
- 10.) Committee to Bridge the Gap – Hunters Point Radiological and Environmental Oversight Materials
<https://www.committeetobridgethegap.org>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Malik Washington is a San Francisco-based journalist and co-founder of Destination Freedom Media Group, an independent nonprofit newsroom dedicated to accountability reporting at the intersection of civil rights, public integrity, disability justice, structural accountability within American institutions, and community survival. He has been a published journalist for over 14 years.

His work—published in partnership with the Davis Vanguard—focuses on government power, criminal justice, environmental justice, and the human consequences of policy decisions too often insulated from public scrutiny. Washington’s reporting amplifies the voices of impacted communities while insisting on documentary evidence, transparency, and the unvarnished truth—especially when institutions demand silence.

His work appears on platforms such as Muck Rack and Black Voice News, examining the intersection of justice, governance, and community.

You can reach him via email: mwashington2059@gmail.com or call him at (719) 715-9592.

Facebook: facebook.com/destfreedom13

Instagram: [@destinationfreedom13](https://instagram.com/destinationfreedom13)

X: [@dest_freedom](https://x.com/dest_freedom)