



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | DISTRICT 3

COUNCILMEMBER KSHAMA SAWANT

March 15, 2017

Dear Mayor Murray, Sheriff Urquhart, and Chief O'Toole;

I am writing to urge you to immediately halt the physical eviction of the UmojaFest PEACE Center House, a pillar of the Central District community. Nothing demonstrates the unacceptable impacts of gentrification and de facto redlining taking place in Seattle like the eviction of the Umoja PEACE Center, Black Dot, and the other centers for culture and organizing in Seattle's historically black Central District.

Over and over again, we see the basic rights of Seattle's working people and people of color subordinated to the greed of landowners, big developers, and Wall Street speculators. In this particular case, we are talking about an entire block of black cultural landmarks that have been critical spaces of art, ingenuity, and community. This is a historic slice of the Central District, and City politicians need to be accountable for prioritizing its preservation.

The Sheriff's Department and the City of Seattle are aiding the interests of corporate developers even though there is no legal obligation to carry out an eviction today. I have heard from activists and community members that the eviction is currently being appealed in the courts. I urge Sheriff Urquhart to direct officers to stand down today, and initiate no confrontation with demonstrators conducting non-violent civil disobedience to prevent today's eviction.

I also urge Mayor Murray to use his political position to begin a process of genuine dialogue with the community to understand their needs, and how such social, cultural, and economic displacement can be prevented. We cannot simply say Seattle is a sanctuary city while our communities of color are systematically being disrupted and disintegrated. In order to truly turn Seattle into a sanctuary, politicians need to actively work to fulfill the housing, education, health care, and cultural rights of our communities.

Please join me alongside our sisters and brothers who are fighting to keep the Central District a living and breathing black cultural center, and to make Seattle an affordable and livable city for all.

Thank you,

Councilmember Kshama Sawant, District 3