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## Healthy Food, Healthy Toledo

Food access is more than just a matter of convenience; it's a cornerstone of community health, education, and economic opportunity. On October 30, 2024, The Fair Housing Center addressed the Housing & Community Development Committee to discuss the urgent need to tackle food deserts in Toledo.

### Understanding the Problem

Food deserts are areas where residents lack easy access to fresh, nutritious, and affordable food. As George explained during his presentation, these deserts often stem from decades of historical economic disinvestment in communities of color. The systemic nature of this issue has far-reaching consequences:

- **Health:** Limited access to fresh food increases the risk of chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease.
- **Education:** Poor nutrition affects concentration and learning outcomes for children.
- **Economic Growth:** Communities without access to grocery stores miss out on local jobs and economic activity.

### Proposed Solutions

TFHC shared a range of actionable strategies to address food deserts and foster vibrant neighborhoods:

- **Zoning Changes:** Adjusting local zoning policies to attract grocery stores and farmers' markets.
- **Incentives for Grocery Stores:** Offering financial incentives to encourage grocery chains and small businesses to establish themselves in underserved areas.

- Equitable Policies: Developing programs that prioritize investment in historically marginalized communities.

## Why It Matters

The message was clear: Food deserts harm Toledo's residents and limit the city's potential. Addressing this issue requires reversing years of disinvestment and committing to sustainable solutions. By implementing these strategies, Toledo can create a future where everyone has access to fresh, nutritious food, regardless of their neighborhood.

## Want to Learn More?

The solutions discussed by TFHC represent a roadmap to a healthier, more equitable Toledo. Listen to the meeting recording to dive deeper into the conversation and explore how these strategies could transform our city.

[Click Here to Listen!](#)



### An Interview with Rev. Donald Perryman, Ph.D.

Rev. Donald L. Perryman, Ph.D., is a leader, advocate, and scholar whose work spans the intersections of faith, social justice, and community empowerment. As Senior Pastor of Center of Hope Baptist Church and a frequent contributor to dialogues on equity and systemic change, Rev. Perryman has been at the forefront of addressing critical issues impacting marginalized communities. In this interview, he shares his insights on food deserts and discusses the strategies necessary to foster greater equity in food systems.

**Question #1:** What are the main factors which contribute to creating food deserts in urban and rural areas?

**Answer:** The most immediate manifestation of the societal trauma known as food deserts in communities across the United States stems from one root: economic divestment in communities of color. Local issues might change the tune slightly, but the song remains the same. Understanding the historical context of food justice reveals how power, driven by social, racial, and economic inequalities, has consistently shaped food access and control. From slavery to the industrialization and mass food production era to redlining and the proliferation of dollar stores and predatory retailers, these power-driven systems have contributed to the persistence of modern food deserts.

**Question #2:** How do food deserts disproportionately affect marginalized communities, and what are the long-term impacts on health and economic development?

**Answer:** Food deserts, being deeply rooted in race and ethnicity, create disparities that have implications for equal healthy food access and food security. For example, our Englewood neighborhood, a predominantly Black neighborhood in Toledo, exemplifies a national issue: limited access to fresh food fuels health challenges. Over a third of adults and many children are obese, with high rates of high blood pressure, cholesterol, heart disease, and stroke, as reported in a Lucas County Health Assessment. Limited access to nutritious food fosters unhealthy eating habits and exacerbates the community's obesity crisis. In addition to chronic disease, inadequate nutrition is linked to poor mental health, delayed child development, and reduced academic performance for children. Moreover, being a premium, nutritious food is often out of reach for those with limited incomes. Thus, food deserts also perpetuate economic disparities.

**Question #3:** What strategies or policies have been most successful in addressing food deserts, and how can they be adapted to Toledo's unique challenges?

**Answer:** The vision begins with addressing food deserts as the foundational step toward revitalizing our community. By establishing a Healthy Food Overlay District as residents have done in Birmingham, Tulsa, and Fate, Texas, we can remove barriers, attract investment, and foster thriving neighborhoods and commercial districts. The groundwork has already been laid through the City of Toledo's Master Plan and the Equal Access Alliance of Toledo's (EAAT) research. We now urge city leaders to engage in meaningful discussions about developing and implementing a Healthy Food Overlay zoning mechanism to tackle this issue.

**Question #4:** What role can community members and local organizations play in improving access to fresh, affordable food in underserved areas?

**Answer:** Community members and local organizations must first remember that the fight for food equity is about more than food—it's a broader struggle for justice, dignity, and recognition. Throughout history, from initial agrarian or agricultural societies to today's global systems, the control and allocation of food have been shadowed by social, racial, and economic inequalities despite various resistance efforts to establish a fair food system -- especially within underserved communities. The community's response now should be to build a contemporary movement around improving access to affordable, nutritious, culturally significant food as a first step toward a larger project to promote reinvestment in our community. This effort highlights the importance of relationships and networks, which are not without challenges. Building a movement is downright "messy," especially when working with groups that have historically competed against each other for limited resources. This is a struggle where potential allies take on adversarial roles, and bureaucratic obstacles abound. Yet, despite these challenges, the overriding goal should be to cement lasting solutions prioritizing the community's needs. Thus, the aim isn't just to introduce another grocery store; it's about establishing a sustainable foundation for the community's future.

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# Justice for the People



## Advocating for Accessibility

We recently had a client who primarily used a wheelchair. Our client was in a battle to protect their rights and their home. The client alleged discrimination based on their disability. They confronted the property manager, who accused them of violating lease terms by allowing supposed "additional tenants" to reside in her unit. In reality, these individuals were family members assisting them with daily tasks due to their disability. Despite their explanations, the property manager issued an eviction notice and charged them for damages our client contended they did not cause, including a broken toilet drain and fixtures.

Seeking justice, the client contacted The Fair Housing Center. Our Senior Housing Specialist was able to help our client file a complaint with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission and assist with requesting reasonable accommodations and modifications, such as a portable ramp to improve accessibility. The case proceeded to mediation, where their perseverance paid off. The mediation successfully resolved the dispute, benefiting the client and others in their household. With \$10,000 in

damages awarded, the resolution underscored the importance of fair housing rights and advocacy in ensuring equal treatment for individuals with disabilities.

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To learn more about how individuals with disabilities can advocate for their housing rights, please click the button below.

[Disability Rights Brochure](#)

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## A Parent's Fight for Safe Housing

When our client's child was found to have elevated lead levels, they grew deeply concerned about the safety of their home. Although the lead levels did not meet the mandatory health department intervention threshold, the landlord performed only minimal lead remediation in a few areas. Despite these efforts, the child's elevated lead levels persisted, leaving our client in a precarious position. Unable to afford further testing to identify additional hazards, they faced a landlord who refused to take further action without a formal order.

Seeking help, they turned to The Fair Housing Center, where TFHC's Housing Conditions Attorney guided them through the rent escrow process. This allowed them to recover four months of rent and terminate her lease, providing a pathway to move their family to safe and healthy housing. Through this process, our client protected their children's well-being and underscored the critical importance of advocacy and access to safe living conditions.

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To learn more about the rent escrow process, please click the button below.

[Rent Escrow Guide](#)

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# the FAIR HOUSING center

## The Fair Housing Center's 50th Anniversary!

2025 marks a monumental milestone for The Fair Housing Center: our 50th anniversary! Since 1975, we've been dedicated to promoting equal housing opportunities and fighting discrimination in our community. None of this would have been possible without your support, and now it's time to celebrate this remarkable journey together.

We will celebrate this milestone with a variety of exciting events throughout the year, including community gatherings and a special anniversary event. These events will celebrate our progress, showcase inspiring stories, and recommit ourselves to the work ahead to ensure fair housing for all!

Watch for announcements about the upcoming events and how you can get involved. Whether you've been with us since the beginning or have just joined our mission, we can't wait to celebrate with you! Let's keep building a future where everyone has access to safe, affordable, and inclusive housing.

Be part of history in the making—keep an eye on our website and social media for updates!

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### Meet our new Staff Attorney!

We are thrilled to welcome B. Noah Woods to our team as our Staff Attorney! Recently sworn in by Judge Myron C. Duhart on November 15, 2024, Noah is ready to bring his passion and expertise to our mission of promoting fair housing and inclusive communities.

Noah joined The Fair Housing Center in May 2024 as a Certified Legal Intern after completing his third year of law school at the University of Toledo. During his time as a student, Noah demonstrated an unwavering commitment to advancing fair housing rights. He invited The Fair Housing Center to speak at events, organized



fundraisers to support our work, and brought greater awareness to fair housing issues among his peers.

In addition to his contributions as a student, Noah's professional experience reflects his dedication to equity and justice. Noah worked as a Summer Associate with Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (A.B.L.E.). Noah also gained valuable legal experience through his roles as a Law Clerk with Mackewich, PLLC, and as a Legal Extern with Legal Aid of Western Ohio (L.A.W.O.).

We are confident that Noah's passion for justice and legal expertise will strengthen our efforts to create vibrant, inclusive communities. Welcome aboard, Noah!



## Tree Planting!

In October we had the opportunity to volunteer and work alongside the wonderful folks at Keep Toledo/Lucas County Beautiful, Inc. at Salem Lutheran Church. Together our staff planted 12 native trees in Toledo's Vistula neighborhood, including Paw Paws, Serviceberries, Tulips, and Black Gums.



## Are You Ready to Be an Ambassador for Justice?

Are you ready to be an Ambassador for Justice? Testing is an investigative tool using trained individuals to gather credible information about housing practices. Like mystery shoppers, testers pose as renters or buyers of real estate to determine whether unlawful housing discrimination is occurring. This work is vital to ensure equal housing opportunities in our community. The valuable experience of being a tester allows you to give back to the community and serve in the fight for justice.

The Fair Housing Center is currently recruiting testers. We are looking for diverse individuals of all backgrounds. For more information or to sign up, contact The Fair Housing Center, at 419-243-6163 or visit the link below.

[Ambassador for Justice Program](#)

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[For more information visit our website](#)



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