

# Part I: Tenant Rights & Resistance Transcript

## Seg 1

***[rhythmic music with low notes and ringing high notes]***

**Jia Lian:** Hey everyone, its Jia Lian

The pandemic triggered a major housing crisis, resulting in millions of renters and unhoused people across the country becoming at risk for being evicted or displaced.

Meanwhile, those living in apartments with mold or pests have been stuck with environmental conditions that exacerbate asthma and COVID-19.

In St. Louis, tenants and housing advocates are pushing back by advocating for eviction moratoriums, holding landlords accountable, and working to create a tenants bill of rights...

On May 1st, I joined a small, but mighty group of canvassers for a sunny walk through a tree-lined neighborhood in South St. Louis City.

They were distributing flyers and spreading awareness of a local effort to create a tenants bill of rights on behalf of Homes for All St. Louis, which is part of a national movement to defend and expand affordable housing.

Here's Shuron Jones, the group's Tenants' Bill of Rights Organizer explaining to a South City resident some of the protections in the proposed Tenants Bill of Rights.

***[music fades out; outdoor bird sounds, wind chimes, car sounds fade in]***

***Shuron: Full disclosure is a is a big one for me because like it requires that you talk about anything that's happened in the apartment. So like, what if there was mold and you didn't know? What if there were bugs and you didn't know? Landlords should be disclosing this information. And further than that, landlords should be disclosing like how much you pay in utilities. 'Cause like I remember I had this apartment that was like six something, [Resident: Mhm?] but the utility was like three, four hundred dollars.***

***[Resident: Right. It's almost a little false advertising there.] It almost is! [You're paying a thousand when you thought you'd be paying six, four hundred bucks.] Because I'm basically paying a thousand, not paying five or however much it was!***

***And then the last one is free reporting, which is a good one because it means that if you report your landlord, your landlord can't retaliate against you. [Resident: That seems important. That seems very important, yeah.] That does seem important because we have landlords who are out here who are like targeting and like targeting folks and like, you***

**know, retaliating against folks just for... [Resident: Sticking up for themselves, I'm sure it happens a lot. ]**

**Exactly. We don't want that. So now that I've done that... is it-- would you be willing to sign one of these pledge cards and support for tenants bill of rights [Resident: Yeah, this sounds like a great idea!] Excellent. Thank you. So take that, that's the pledge card. Here's a marker because I like markers. How many did I give you... [Resident: Just the one] so if you don't mind putting your John Hancock there...**

**Jia Lian:** This was Homes for All St. Louis' second day of canvassing about the Tenants Bill of Rights and Shuron looks forward to taking the effort city wide.

**[outdoor bird and traffic sounds]**

**Shuron: When you talk to folks about a Bill of Rights, first, most folks are like wait, what's that? And then folks who are like, who do know what it is are like, "Yes! We want to see a Tenants Bill of Rights! Excellent." I don't love to educate people about how few rights folks have, but I do like talking to people about the fact that we need more rights in St. Louis City.**

**Making people aware of what the issue is so we can rectify the issue or at least get to a point where we start to like try to rectify the issue, which is a lack of protections on the part of tenants.**

**Jia Lian:** It's not just renters like Shuron who are getting involved.

Joshua Lawrence, another canvasser, is a homeowner and former landlord who says that a person's ability to access quality housing shouldn't be determined by their zip code.

**[outdoor bird and traffic sounds]**

**Joshua: Part of my neighborhood that I live in, we have a lot of illegal dumping, right? And the people who are dumping aren't the people who live there right, it is the contractors, it is the developers who don't want to pay the extra funds to actually go dispose of their stuff. It's just saying, "Oh, OK. Well, we know that this area where, you know, the poors live, we don't care. We're going to throw it out and be done with it." Right?**

**And that's, candidly, that's environmental racism right? [pensive music fades in] Like, even though, you know, I am white, I benefit from all of these things, I'm not oblivious to what's going on in my neighborhood. You know, so obviously racism doesn't affect, like it does affect me personally because I benefit from it. But at the same time, when you benefit from something, you have to call it out for what it is. You can't just-- if you stand by and just go, oh, you know, it is what it is, but I'm going to reap all these benefits like, no, that's screwed up. You've got to call it out for what it is. And so I know everybody**

***hates the phrase, but acknowledge privilege, and say here's what we can do to actually get others into a better spot.***

**Jia Lian:** As Shuron, Joshua, and other tenants' rights advocates canvass for protections, government leaders and property owners are still making decisions that can set their efforts back overnight.

On May 5th, a federal judge vacated a nationwide CDC eviction moratorium, which was set to expire on June 30th.

Then, the US Department of Justice filed a notice of appeal, resulting in a temporary administrative stay on the order so that the eviction moratorium remains in effect across the country for now.

But local housing advocates believe that housing is a human right and that access to quality, affordable housing shouldn't be constantly subject to change.

So in this episode, we hear more from Shuron, and two other members of State Street Tenants Resistance about the stories and lived experiences that motivate them to advocate for a tenants bill of rights.

And an organizer from a local community development corporation will explain how to hold problem landlords accountable and what's at stake, when large companies and the state need to be held accountable, too.

From St. Louis Public Radio and PRX, this is We Live Here.

***[music fades out]***

Seg 2

***[rhythmic music with low notes and ringing high notes]***

**Jia Lian:** Back in 2017, Shuron was getting fed up with the conditions of her apartment. S2VO1

***Shuron: I had a problem with pests, I had a problem with mold, I had a problem with water leakage, and I had a problem with garbage. There was two bushes in front of my apartment in front of the fourplex. There was constantly debris under there, there was broken glass on the back steps.***

**Jia Lian:** She began talking to Myisha Johnson, a tenant organizer who was trying to bring the Homes for All movement to St. Louis.

***Myisha: We started in conversation around issues that we were having with our landlord and then realized we had the same landlord who was the slumlord. We started discussing and what issues we were having in our homes and how we felt that they needed to be addressed. And also, the landlord needed to be held accountable for the conditions of the properties that he continued to rent out.***

**Jia Lian:** They met other tenants, like Sarah Watkins, who had bad experiences with the same landlord.

***Sarah: I had transitioned from blaming myself for my conditions and was finally starting to understand, like the bigger picture around housing in St. Louis and why certain neighborhoods look the way they do. My friend and I, we were roommates and we were naturally organizing and finding information and researching and talking to other tenants and not really understanding that that is how you build a tenant union.***

**Jia Lian:** Their shared experiences motivated them to become the three working members of State Street Tenant Resistance, a tenant union located in South St. Louis City.

***Sarah: Our hope is that tenant unions would blossom everywhere in all neighborhoods and that people will talk to their neighbors, talk to the people closest to them and find connections to issues that they have and take those issues to the creator.***

**Jia Lian:** Shuron remembers visiting a young mother of four children.

***Shuron: You can see the cracks in the walls. You can see like, the remnants of pests. You can see the chipping away of paint. Without any hesitation, she invited me in her home with her children to go through these conditions that she was in and the first thing that blew my mind was how inviting she was. The second thing that blew my mind was that she was experiencing the same things that I experienced and was willing to show me what was going on.***

**Jia Lian:** She says that's because landlords often use intimidation to discourage their tenants from speaking up.

***Shuron: We can tell that there are certain things that are going on in their apartment that shouldn't be going on and that there are things that need to be fixed. And they tell us, no, everything's OK, but that's because they fear that the landlord will kick them out, which is a real thing, or they fear that the landlord will retaliate in other ways or just not do anything at all.***

**Jia Lian:** Sarah has witnessed both retaliation and inaction from landlords.

***Sarah: The landlords will call the police on tenants. They'll take your persistence as aggression, especially as a Black woman. Just me just being persistent in wanting to get things fixed, you see that as a threat because I won't go away.***

Sarah adds that out-of-state landlords might use property managers to shield themselves from tenant complaints.

***Sarah: They lived in Hawaii, bought the unit and had owned it for about six months before even seeing it. And I had done my research and learned all this and had even tried to reach out to the property owner to get certain things fixed. And instead of talking to me, they would talk to the property manager and just continue that cycle of nothingness. [chuckle]***

**Jia Lian:** It can be even harder to hold landlords who use multiple shell companies accountable.

***Sarah: If you're operating under one name and people start giving you bad reviews, you have a terrible BBB rating. If you just change your name and put a, slap a new sticker on it, then no one knows. You know, it's harder to to connect those those dots and that history.***

**Jia Lian:** But low-income tenants who have poor credit, past evictions, or criminal history are unable to shake *their* past, making them even more vulnerable to problem landlords who want to collect rent without making necessary repairs.

When the pandemic came, tenants fell into an even more precarious position.

***Sarah: The moratorium doesn't protect all tenants, there are still loopholes and reasons that a landlord can find to get someone out.***

**Jia Lian:** St. Louis City eviction moratoriums were piecemeal, had multiple extensions, and only applied to the last step of the eviction process.

In contrast, the national three-month-long CDC eviction moratorium applied to all steps of the eviction process, as long as a tenant filled out a form that states that they didn't make over \$99,000 a year or receive a stimulus check, couldn't make housing payments because of income loss or large medical bills, and that they would be unhoused or forced to live with family or shelters if they lost their home.

On top of that, they needed to show that they applied for government assistance for rent or housing and paid as much rent as possible.

***Sarah: So there are already evictions piling up, and then when you leave this window of time of uncertainty and for things to open back up and keep going, the landlords are rushing [laughing] to evict people. And the sheriff will tell you that, you know, a lot of people are making calls and asking what they can do. And evictions are still going on if-- with a judgment or without a judgment. Landlords will take it upon themselves to, like, change the locks or shut off utilities or just make it so a tenant will have to leave.***

**Jia Lian:** Myisha points out that the staggering number of evictions is especially troubling in a city where eviction is twice as common among renters in majority Black areas, than renters in majority white areas.

**Myisha:** *Why is evictions-- eviction dockets mostly filled with Black and Brown women? How do we dismantle that? Why is it that they're the target and when and how do we show up without being angry? Because the reason we show up angry is because we feel we're never heard. We're overlooked, and they'll pat us on our head and say, it's OK, it's not OK! It's not OK that our children are the ones that is affected by the asthma, by the lead, by the environmental issues that not only show up on the outside, but inside our homes where we're supposed to be safe and feel secured. Let's break that stigma, because it's not that we're angry, Black women, we're women that want our families to be safe and secured in their space.*

**Jia Lian:** State Street Tenant Resistance and other local housing advocates took legal action, hosted rallies, held press conferences, and created petitions to stop illegal lockouts, and call for eviction and utility moratoriums.

Last April, they participated in a statewide car protest against evictions, but when I interviewed them in early March, Shuron said that things hadn't gotten better.

**Shuron:** *Because we're starting to see more illegal evictions. We're starting to see landlords take it upon themselves to change locks, to kick people out, to threaten folks that they're going to kick them out for the most asinine of reasons. So things are staying the same in the sense that, like, we have these moratoriums that are in place for a month and then they're put in place for another month. So these piecemeal, these piecemeal responses to the pandemic and housing. And then we have illegal evictions that are occurring at like a large rate, so things are are staying the same or they're getting worse.*

**Jia Lian:** Meanwhile, Shuron, Myisha and Sarah and continuing to educate tenants about their rights on Facebook live and at the doors.

**Myisha:** *No, the tenant is not at fault, you're not at fault for the building deteriorating. You're not at fault for the high electric bills. You're not at fault for the paint chipping, the mold in the home, the lead, whatever it is going on with that building, you're not at fault. That's the landlord's responsibility. And there are other entities that you can reach out to, such as EHOC, Equal Housing Opportunity Council, ArchCity Defenders. They have housing lawyers now and legal services. Those are the spaces that you can reach out to to see if you can get assistance with legal representation, because a lot of times the landlord would say, well, it's your fault or you have to fix it. No, it's their property. And if it isn't in the lease, then it is their responsibility to handle that.*

**Jia Lian:** They're motivated by their victories in holding problem landlords accountable for conditions such as faulty electrical wiring, sewage in basements, inaccessible stairs, pests, leaks and mold.

**Sarah:** *He was a landlord who would abuse like the L.L.C. names and hide and just make different shell companies so it's hard to track, but we found him and [chuckles] we put pressure on him and eventually got him to move from the building he was operating out of. Which, I think about it every day, really, because I walk past it and I see the sign that says, you know, the mail [laughs] is no longer coming to this address for his for his business, I mean, but the other part of that is now we have to find him again, you know?*

**Jia Lian:** They're also driven by their success in holding utility companies accountable for high energy costs.

When Myisha realized she was paying more for utilities than rent, she contacted her friend, Leah Clyburn, the Beyond Coal organizer for the Missouri Chapter of the Sierra Club.

**Myisha:** *We compared our bills. My bill was three times the amount of hers, and she just lives a few blocks like five, six blocks west of me. And so I compared it with another person. I was like, this isn't right. So as Sierra Club started fightin'-- pushing back on Ameren on how they do their market rate and the extra charges that they put on folks in the Black and Brown zip codes, that they needed to change that and revamp how they show up in those communities. There's, so there's been more programs and the rates have been lowered. But we continue to see in those communities that those bills are still higher than other spaces.*

**Jia Lian:** They're hoping to prevent housing inequities, by following the example of other cities where tenants have proactively organized for protections.

**Shuron:** *Kansas City has a Tenants Bill of Rights. They have an office that deals with tenant complaints and tenant issues specifically that came from their Tenant Bill of Rights being passed as a resolution. We have cities like Oakland that have passed just cause statutes and just cause means that that the landlord can't kick you out just because they want to. They have to have a specific reason to evict you. So places like New York City have just cause evictions. They have rent control.*

*So there are other cities that have loads more protection than we do in St. Louis. Likem landlords can come in the apartment whenever they want to. Landlords can retaliate against organizing. Landlords can evict people with limited notice. Like, there's a lot of things landlords can do in St. Louis that that they can't do in other cities.*

**Jia Lian:** With Homes for All St. Louis, they've come up with 10 clauses for a proposed tenants bill of rights based on protections won in other states.

**Shuron:** *Certain parts of the Tenants Bill of Rights that we want to see is: no retaliation for organizing, we want to see rent caps, and we want to see fee caps so that folks aren't paying like more than first and last month's rent for a deposit, but maybe only the first month's rent for the deposit. We want to see just cause on it. So we want to make sure that people are evicted for only specific reasons.*

**Sarah: I would add right to counsel. Because landlords and property managers have attorneys when they show up to housing court and a lot of times a tenant does not and they might get a deal or agree to something that is more hurtful than helpful to them.**

**Sarah: Banning the eviction box on rental applications, because we know the eviction on your record makes it almost impossible sometimes to find housing after that. Yeah, and I think also criminal history too. Banning that question.**

**Jia Lian: Their hope is to get the tenants bill of rights passed as legislation through the St. Louis City Board of Alderman.**

**Myisha: We can hold the aldermanic board accountable, like they can make change. They just need the right folks pushing them. And community, [music fades in] community needs to be a part of a lot of the conversations of what change looks like in their area, because what it looks like in my area may not look like change in your area.**

**[pensive music]**

**Sarah: For me personally, I think that politics and policy and budgeting has been so removed from the people and that we see City Hall and our leaders as these, I don't know, godly beings that [laughs] are just over the rest of us, and that's not it. That's not what it's supposed to be, they are supposed to represent us. We represent them, vice versa. And that's why I fight, because I want to change that perception and I want to help people understand that we are powerful, but we have to do it together. And I do it for my son because I know these issues. If we don't fight now, then it's going to just be worse for the next generation. And we have to teach people, including our kids, you know, what, what's right and how, and how to get what we want and how to get what we deserve. [00:59:49]**

**[pensive music]**

**Myisha: What Sarah said, so my children and my grandchildren don't have to continue the struggle that I've lived and that my mother and grandmother has lived. I come from a family of fighters and to change the dialog that it's the renter's fault of the way they're living and the experience that they're having, and also just showing community that they hold the power to make change in their community and how to lift their voices up and be heard.**

**[pensive music]**

**Shuron: [chuckling] My absolute anger sustains me. My, like, disdain for folks having to live in in deplorable conditions keeps me going. And also what keeps me going is the fact that, like, we can win, the fact that we can get to the place where where everyone in St. Louis has safe, affordable, dignified housing. We're seeing-- that sustains me. The fact that we have had wins, the fact that we-- that I met Myisha and Sarah like these are the things that sustain me personally and make me want to continue to do the work. And seeing that and seeing the light bulb go off in tenants' heads. Like, oh, wait a minute,**



***you're right. None of this is my fault or you're right, I should be organizing with other people that sustains me as well.***

***[pensive music]***

**Jia Lian:** State Street Tenants Resistance came from a deep well of frustration among tenants like Shuron, Sarah and Myisha.

It also arose from Community Empowerment Meetings held by a local community development corporation.

So up next, we learn about how local community meetings help educate tenants about how to hold problem landlords accountable... and inform residents about polluters in their neighborhood.

***[music fades out]***

Seg 3

***[rhythmic music with low notes and ringing high notes]***

**Jia Lian:** To help us understand how community meetings can help educate tenants on their rights and inform them about polluters in their neighborhood, we spoke to Karisa Gilman-Hernandez, Community Empowerment Organizer at Dutchtown South Community Corporation.

***Karisa: Community Development Corporation is a remnant of a HUD program. I believe we've been here for about 50 years now. We are publicly funded as well as privately funded organizations that focus on developing the communities around us, so Dutchtown South serves Dutchtown, Marine Villa, Mount Pleasant and Gravois Park.***

**Jia Lian:** Those neighborhoods contain over 28,000 residents, with over a third of households living below the poverty line, and over half of households being low-to-moderate income.

Many areas are over 50 percent Black, with close to a third of residents being white, and the rest of the residents being Latino, Asian, Native American, other race or multi-racial.

***Karisa: I believe it's important for everybody to get involved in environmental justice work. With Dutchtown South, we got really involved in it because our community was really concerned. And what they were seeing was the direct impacts of generations of decisions the city has made. And that was what was really concerning. But the more we learned about it, the more we saw that it was part of a greater pattern.***

***[music fades out]***

**Jia Lian:** Residents were most concerned about vacancies and illegal dumping.

**Karisa:** *Our alleyways were just not clean. They were unsafe. There's trash being dumped constantly, tires, broken glass, pickups were not frequent. There was a lack of dumpster space, recycling, things like that. And so we applied for a grant with the EPA for the So Fresh, So Clean, So Creative. And with that funding, what we did was we started doing some deep research into what was happening in our alleyways and really getting a sense of what's happening in St. Louis in general when it comes to solid waste and how that's handled.*

*But we also were able to do our Community Champions program through that as well. And so these are community members who are committed to a safer and cleaner environment. And so they host cleanups, education events. We have done large art projects in the past with the trash we've collected. They kind of think through different ways to get people involved and kind of lead the direction of how we want to address illegal dumping and solid waste in our immediate community.*

**Jia Lian:** But Karisa points out that vacancies and illegal dumping are just some of the more visible effects of structural racism and systemic disinvestment.

**Karisa:** *We really can't address those without addressing the fact that there is high mold in the buildings in our area, that there's lead paint, there's lead in the pipes in our schools. And so kids are drinking lead water. And you really can't address all of that without really looking at like where are the grocery stores, what are people eating? What is-- what options do they have? Once you start looking at individual pieces of that environmental justice work, you just see that it's connected to everything else. And so it's important that we not just address like one or two items, but really take it from a holistic approach.*

**Jia Lian:** That means treating resident concerns as part of larger patterns that can be addressed through education, advocacy, or systemic change.

**Karisa:** *A tenant will notice that there is mold in their apartment and they will address it with the landlord. And the landlord will either tell them like, oh, we fixed it, or they might get evicted because they're causing problems. And the landlord kind of uses this as a way to get them out of their house or will refuse to renew their lease if there is an issue like that.*

*What we're seeing is that landlords are painting over the mold without actually addressing the problem. And so a new tenant will move in and say, oh my gosh, this is a freshly painted apartment. Everything is great. They move in and then the problem just happens all over again, or if it's still the same tenant. And the landlord just said, oh, we fixed it. But really, they just put a fresh coat of paint over it. It'll take a little bit for that tenant to see the problem come back. And then they're starting from ground zero with this landlord all over again.*

**Jia Lian:** Community organizers like Karisa can connect tenants with legal services to demand action from landlords or help them navigate how to get their concerns addressed in other ways, such as a rent strike, which rose in popularity during the pandemic.

**Karisa:** *In Missouri, I want to say I believe this is a statewide thing, not just city, but you have to live inside a building for six months before you can deduct your rent for maintenance issues that like, maybe you covered it yourself. You call, you know, they didn't fix it. So I just brought in a handyman and they fixed it for me. And I'm going to bill, for lack of a better word, my landlord for it. You can do that. But you have to live there for six months. And there are specific parameters that you have to, like, give your landlord time to get that issue taken care of themselves.*

*But if somebody is going to go on a rent strike, I always recommend that they talk to lawyers first. And it's not just 'I didn't pay my rent this month and my landlord is going to like feel that.' What it really is is you put that money into a secure account that the city acknowledges, an escrow account. And so what you're showing the city and a judge potentially, is that I'm willing to pay my rent. I want to pay my rent because I'm living in this location. But the item, it's not habitable. These things are not being taken care of. And until they're taken care of, my rent is going to go into this account and my landlord will not get it until these issues are addressed.*

**Jia Lian:** In addition to educating tenants on their rights, Karisa has found herself in the position of informing tenants about state-level decisions that could affect their quality of life when Dutchtown South Community Corporation received communication from Great Rivers Environmental Law Center, a Missouri-based public interest law firm focused on the environment and public health.

**Karisa:** *They reached out to Dutchtown South to let us know that we had a pretty large pollutant in our footprint, the Kinder Morgan facility.*

**Jia Lian:** The Kinder Morgan Transmix Terminal is a loading facility for gasoline and fuel oil products.

It can emit volatile organic compounds, hazardous air pollutants, and particulate matter, which can irritate the eyes and respiratory system, cause headaches and dizziness, visual disorders and memory impairment and are associated with cancer.

**Karisa:** *There is a weird smell in our area that happens on different days. And so, you know, if it's not the Kinder Morgan facility, it's another facility. But people don't trust that air. They don't feel safe and confident in having that facility in their area.*

**Jia Lian:** Great Rivers Environmental Law Center informed Dutchtown South Community Corporation that Kinder Morgan had applied for a permit renewal with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources or MDNR and requested to speak to residents at one of Dutchtown South's Community Empowerment Meetings.

*[pensive music]*

***Karisa: And then a pandemic hit. [chuckles] And so that kind of pushed back a little bit. We were eventually able to get them on a Zoom meeting and they kind of laid down like, pollutants that were coming from the Kinder Morgan facility.***

***And they talked about the health concerns related to it, and they were like, you know, they're applied for this permit and they actually didn't follow the procedures that they're supposed to in reaching out to the community.***

***They were like, we've already told the state this, and we're going to wait for the state to either refuse the permit and say, no, you need to go follow the EPA guidelines of community involvement.***

***Or if the state does issue the permit, then we will file a complaint with the EPA. And so they laid out all of the ways that could happen.***

***And so we just kind of waited and waited. And then they reached out to us again and said, well, the permit got issued. So we would like to file a complaint to the EPA on behalf of Dutchtown South and the NAACP of St. Louis.***

***So what I did was I had them speak again at our Community Empowerment Committee meeting and they answered questions. And then we sent out a poll essentially to community members and said, "Would you like Dutchtown South to sign on to this complaint or not?"***

***So it was a unanimous decision. Nobody voted against it. And so we signed on.***

**Jia Lian:** So on September 4th, 2020, Attorneys Bob Menees and Sarah Rubenstein of the Great Rivers Environmental Law Center filed an administrative complaint to the federal EPA and Office of Civil Rights on behalf of the Missouri State and St. Louis City NAACP and Dutchtown South Community Corporation under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The complaint alleged discrimination by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources or MDNR in its March 10th, 2020 issuance of an operating permit to Kinder Morgan.

Great Rivers Environmental Law Center also worked with Dutchtown South to create and distribute fliers about the complaint, pollutants, and tenant rights along with contact information for legal assistance.

*[music fades out]*

***Karisa: We canvassed the immediate neighborhood around the Kinder Morgan facility, I picked, you know, four blocks and I just went around and we dropped these fliers at all these houses, so people knew more about it. And when we were having events, we would hand those out.***

**Jia Lian:** But Karisa wishes that instead of having to inform residents about the complaint after the Kinder Morgan permit was already issued, that MDNR would proactively seek community involvement in the permitting process.

**Karisa:** *It's disrespectful to those who live here to think that it's OK to pollute their air and water and to not explain what's happening, to ignore health concerns. If it's truly safe, if it's truly not a problem, then that would be the easiest thing in the world to explain. And that would be easy to say. Like, this is what these chemicals are and this is how they interact with the human body. And you shouldn't be worried.*

*And instead it's secretive and it's behind closed doors and there's not any involvement. And so if people are afraid, if they're scared, if they don't trust, then that's on the people who issued that permit, that's on the people who ask for the permit.*

*And it's just it's disrespectful of the citizens. It's disrespectful of taxpayers who are the ones that keep those departments open for the state and the city and the government and the federal government. And it's just it's-- it makes me angry and it makes me sad and hurt for so many people that are being disrespected like that.*

*[pensive music]*

**Karisa:** *They're going to have to be the ones that put in the work to make that trust happen again. And so they're going to be the ones that have to figure out a way to either acknowledge what they are putting into our air and what impact it could have on people's health short term and long term. And they're going to have to put in the work on how to combat any ill side effects of what they are putting into our air and to our water, be that by offering to put in, put money towards air home filters or planting trees in the neighborhoods or other things that they could possibly be doing, but they have broken the trust and I believe that any of the other pollutants in our area who apply to get these permits, who aren't doing that due diligence, of letting folks know what chemicals they're putting out there and what the side effects may be from those chemicals are the ones that have broken our trust. And so it's up to them to work to regain it.*

*[pensive music]*

**Karisa:** *I want to see an environment where people can be outdoors. I want to see an environment where people want to be outdoors, where there's lots of trees and there's lots of green spaces, and you can trust the air is healthy around you. And that if you wanted to walk or bike or just take a bus to easily get somewhere you can, you don't need to necessarily hop in your car. And just to create that space where kids can ride their bikes and we have lots of parks that are well taken care of. And, you know, it's just everybody has that option to be outdoors and to enjoy the outdoors.*

*[music fades out]*

**Jia Lian:** The EPA has since issued a preliminary finding regarding the administrative complaint filed by Great Rivers Environmental Law Center on behalf of the Missouri and St. Louis City NAACP and Dutchtown South Community Corporation.

Attorneys Sarah Rubenstein and Bob Menees will explain that finding in Part II of this two-part series and what it means for the rest of Missouri in the next episode of We Live Here, so make sure you're subscribed to the podcast.

***[pensive music]***

**Jia Lian:** This show is produced by me, Jia Lian Yang.

And my co-producer, Lauren Brown.

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From St. Louis Public Radio and PRX, this is We Live Here.

***[music continues, then fades out]***