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## OUR OPINION

# Public housing neglect threatens tenant safety

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Complaints about squalid public housing conditions are often met with indifference from taxpayers, particularly during tough economic times.

Nonetheless, the problems at two state projects aren't cosmetic - they are real threats to tenants' health and safety and should not be disregarded.

The state, as a landlord, has an obligation to provide living quarters that are in good repair, just as private property owners do.

Lawsuits filed against the Hawaii Public Housing Authority and its property managers seek to improve conditions at Kuhio Park Terrace and Kuhio Homes, two of the state's largest and oldest properties. The suits say the apartments are infested with rats and roaches, that elevators don't work reliably and that fire alarms are missing. Garbage chutes are clogged and corroded. In addition, some apartments assigned to disabled residents aren't properly equipped.

To be fair, the state recently has begun to correct problems, but the backlog of repairs has ballooned after years of neglect.

As part of its \$1.87 billion economic stimulus plan, the state should direct more spending toward reducing the millions in delayed improvements at the projects. It also should attempt to form public-private partnerships, as it has done for transitional housing for homeless people and try to reach a settlement with tenants so that money goes toward improvements instead of court costs.

Both housing projects have had problems for decades, some due to irresponsible tenants and criminal activity. Tenants can contribute by maintaining their apartments and common areas and monitoring vandalism.

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