

# Police Called When Senior Citizens Show Up On CEO's Door To Protest Ouster



By [Ariel Cheung](#) | October 6, 2015 8:49am  
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Presbyterian Homes Residents Bus To Evanston To Deliver Plea to CEO

LAKEVIEW — Senior citizens being ousted from Presbyterian Homes affordable housing were tired of waiting for answers from the nonprofit's CEO, so they traveled to Evanston on Monday to see him.

Almost 50 residents — out of about 100 — took a school bus and car pools to the [Presbyterian Homes](#) headquarters at Huss Pavilion, 3200 Grant St., in Evanston.

### **Seniors take a stand**

Ald. [James Cappleman](#) (46th), state Rep. [Sara Feigenholtz](#) (D-Chicago) and community supporters joined the seniors to deliver letters of protest to CEO Todd Swartzel asking he commit to selling the three apartment buildings to developers who would keep the residences affordable.

About 20 minutes later, Evanston police and security guards arrived on the scene, ordering Cappleman, Feigenholtz and members of the press off the private property.

Residents were told they could stay and speak with [Keith Stohlgren](#), the vice president and executive director who oversaw the affordable housing program, and [Robert Werdan](#), vice president of marketing.

Swartzel, they said, was not in the office.

### **Owners allege funding gap**

Presbyterian Homes told residents the rent-subsidized apartments were no longer financially sustainable. Anticipated maintenance and capital expenditures, "along with current operating deficits," would overwhelm its Geneva Foundation Outreach Fund, which supports the program.

Some residents said they believe the money is available, but is being spent elsewhere. They cited the Geneva Foundation's winter 2015 update, which touted "an increase in [all levels](#)" of donations and said it "grew more than ever before."

In 2013, the foundation generated \$10.6 million to pay for the [affordable housing](#) program, campus building [renovations](#), employee [appreciation](#) and [fellowships](#) that keep residents in sudden financial trouble from facing eviction.



Evanston police and security guards blocked the path of Crowder Place resident Betty Holcomb [right] and state Rep. Stara Feigenholtz on Monday, Oct. 5, 2015.

[DNAinfo/Ariel Cheung]

About \$4.9 million in grant money was put into fellowship fund in 2013, while the outreach fund received \$981,000.

Since news of the closure surfaced last month, Presbyterian Homes has [removed mention](#) of the Outreach Fund and the Neighborhood Homes Program from its website.

The program was the only one to cost the company money in 2013, tax records state. The five suburb communities house about 1,000 residents and generated about \$5.3 million in profit in 2013, tax records state. The nonprofit's health care centers generated \$8.1 million.

The Neighborhood Homes program cost the company \$546,074.

### **A matter of choice?**

Swortzel has said he must sell the buildings at market rate, ousting the residents who said they were told they could live in the homes for the rest of their lives, Cappleman said on Monday.

But three affordable housing developers — [Preservation of Affordable Housing](#), [Chicago Metropolitan Housing Development Corporation](#) and [Mercy Housing](#) — have come forward saying they will purchase the buildings at market rate while keeping rent affordable for residents. Their efforts to negotiate with Presbyterian Homes have been so far rejected, they said.

The nonprofit did not return requests for comment.

Cappleman and Aids. [Tom Tunney](#) (44th) and [Debra Silverstein](#) (50th) have been lining up affordable developers and researching legal options for the residents. They've also earned support from Mayor Rahm Emanuel and a handful of state and U.S. congress members, they said.



Ald. James Cappleman (46th) joined residents of Presbyterian Homes affordable living apartments to protest the nonprofit's decision to sell the apartment buildings at market rate. [DNAinfo/Ariel Cheung]

"One of these options, we hope works. There's no guarantee, but we're going to fight," Cappleman said.

### **Stress takes a toll**

Residents say the past month has affected their physical and mental health as they consider their scant options [for relocating](#).

"What can we do? We love this place. It's a jewel. You'll never find a place like it," said Marge Lilek, who has lived at Crowder Place for 13 years.

The residents say the [Lakeview and West Ridge communities](#) are perfectly suited to their needs, with doctors nearby and access to public transportation. There's also a strong sense of family in each building, with daily walking buddies and laundry room chats, Lilek said.



Patricia Healy [left] and Marge Lilek rode the bus with other senior residents of three apartment buildings Presbyterian Homes will be shutting down to protest the closures and deliver letters to the company's CEO. [DNAinfo/Ariel Cheung]

Presbyterian Homes has given the low-income residents until November 2016 to move, but many said waiting lists they've encountered for other affordable housing stretch three to five years.

The stress is taking its toll, said Crowder Place resident Patricia Healy.

"It's not good for senior people, and now we're getting sick. It has been affecting some people's medications — their meds have been increased," she said.

Monday morning, the seniors stood in front of the Evanston building and expressed their distress over the past month.

Linda Armitage moved into Crowder Place five months before the closure was announced, leaving her "stunned and angry" that she didn't receive warning before moving in.

"We are being sacrificed to ensure that the wealthy people who live in the Presbyterian Homes communities in the suburbs can continue to live comfortably and safely. We deserve the same treatment," Armitage said.



Linda Armitage said she moved into Crowder Place seven months ago and was "stunned" soon after when Presbyterian Homes announced it would sell the buildings at market rate and evict the senior citizens living there. [DNAinfo/Ariel Cheung]

Presbyterian Homes has announced no plans to sell its five senior living communities in Evanston, Lake Forest and Arlington Heights. That program

and the company's health care centers both generate revenue, tax records show.

Werdan said the CEO would meet with residents, but denied the seniors attempted to set up a meeting prior to Monday. Residents say they wrote to Swortzel and tried to contact company leaders, but "we've been ignored," Healy said.