

**Lord Baron fire: DeFranco visits with displaced residents
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Burlington, Mass. - U.S. Congress candidate Marisa DeFranco visited displaced Burlington residents on Wednesday, Nov. 20.

It was exactly four weeks ago when a fire swept through building 8 at Lord Baron apartment complex on Oct. 23, leaving 89 residents displaced from their homes.

The purpose of her visit was to hear the concerns of residents.

Gregore Bernard described his journey to find housing since the fire. At one point, while temporary housing solutions were being sought, he was advised by a state-level office to go to the nearest homeless shelter for services, which is in Malden, only to be turned away because he was not also seeking temporary housing for a child.

He is currently living in a studio apartment at an extended stay hotel with his 70-year-old father. On a part-time basis, his young son lives with them too, under a split custody arrangement. The Burlington Community Life Center (a town department that handles youth and family services) has arranged a group rate at the hotel and displaced residents living there are paying their regular monthly rate toward their hotel stays, while a Burlington nonprofit, People Helping People, is raising funds to make up the cost differential (the hotel rate is more than double the cost).

Bernard is employed as an aviation line technician at Hanscom in Bedford. He holds an A&P aircraft maintenance license and is taking classes at UMass Lowell toward a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering to further his career. He is also a first-generation American citizen originally from Haiti.

"I don't know if anyone has noticed, but Lord Baron probably has the most diverse population in the entire town of Burlington. It is nicknamed 'the little U.N.' because people are from so many different cultures —African, Asian, Indian — you name it. It hurts me to think that we might have been overlooked [when it came to finding resources after the fire] for just that reason, and I'm not the only displaced resident who thinks that. Out of sight, out of mind."

He also said that he has found it expensive to live in a hotel and is finding it difficult to pay his share of the hotel stay. "There are so many extra costs when you're not living at home. We have a small kitchenette with a stove in our room, but it only has two burners. You can cook a few things, like warming up a can of soup or boiling water for noodles, but beyond that, you really have to eat your meals out, and that's expensive."

Earl Stanley Burley, along with his wife and three children were also displaced due to the fire and are living at the hotel until building 8 is ready for re-occupancy. At this time, the estimate for residents returning to their homes is sometime during the first week of December.

Burley said, "There are no sprinkler systems at Lord Baron, maybe because it's an older apartment complex. Residents from other buildings are scared. Now that they've seen what's happened to us, they see how easily this could happen to them too."

Both Burley and Bernard said there were two previous kitchen fires in the same unit of building 8 prior to the one that ravaged the building on Oct. 23. The men believe one fire occurred in September and the other in June. "I don't know if Lord Baron management has any responsibility when it comes to fire hazards, but in this case, there were certainly warning signs that something like this could happen," said Burley.

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