Meet Lauren Westmoreland, Policy Program Director, National Initiatives

How did you first get involved with affordable housing?

I first got involved with affordable housing as an AmeriCorps member with a nonprofit in North Carolina. I traveled around to new affordable housing sites throughout the state to ensure they were meeting energy efficiency and sustainability standards. It was eye-opening to see the lack of quality housing around the state and ended up changing the trajectory of my career.

What has surprised you most about working for state and local policy change?

I better understand and appreciate how much policy change happens at the local level and through state regulatory bodies. It’s expanded my mindset to how I can help make change happen.

What do you find most challenging about policy work?

I continually see that most of the voices providing feedback or influencing regulatory bodies focus first on the costs. Example: when building codes are developed, representatives of the design and construction industry make up almost 100% of voices in the room and are, understandably, concerned about first costs. However, they are not the people who will live in these buildings and will be impacted long term by operating costs, safety or quality issues. Voices of those who live and work in buildings need to be heard as well.

What do you wish other people knew about how to effect policy change?

I want them to know to share their voices, especially at the local level or through regulatory proceedings, whether it’s writing a letter or attending a public hearing!

What might someone be surprised to know about you?

I’m a North Carolina licensed architect, although I’ve never actually signed and stamped a drawing.

What do you think will change over the next five years by having this new position?

I hope I can help improve the quality of housing. It’s not enough to provide a place for people to rest their heads at night; if someone can pay the rent but not the utility bills, that’s a problem. If someone can afford the rent, but there’s mold that makes them sick, that’s a problem. Everyone deserves a healthy, safe and affordable home.

What do you do when you aren’t working?

I have two young children and a third on the way, so they keep me busy! We spend a lot of our time enjoying our community, whether it’s the playground, splashpad or the Atlanta Beltline. When I get a little free time, I enjoy sewing and refinishing furniture.