Women Leaders: Sign-on in support of a tenant anti-harassment ordinance for the City of Concord

Dear Councilmembers,

The last two years have been devastating to low-income, immigrant and refugee renters in the City of Concord. As community leaders in Concord, we have seen the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women, which is why we feel the need to speak up concerning the pending legislation addressing landlord harassment of vulnerable renters.

Renters are being impacted by the rising tide of landlord harassment which threatens to displace renters, particularly women. This harassment takes many forms, such as illegally entering to demand rent, refusing to address pests or replace appliances, and otherwise permitting unsafe living conditions. Harassment is an effective tool to push people out of their homes, often creating the hostile conditions for renters to self-evict under pressure.

In Contra Costa County, harassment is most experienced by women of color and their families. In fact, 3 in 5 women of color renters describe themselves as rent-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their household income on rent. It’s no surprise that low-income women of color, and women who do not speak English, are also most likely to face harassment and eviction threats. Those who are trying to recover economically from the pandemic are the easiest to harass, as they are least likely to have the financial means or time to seek defense against harassment or illegal eviction or find an affordable place to relocate. Single mothers are especially targeted, and in particular face rampant harassment and eviction attempts. In fact, 1 in 4 households in the Bay Area are headed by single mothers.

Service providers see this every day. For example, more than half of the calls for help received this year by Monument Impact were regarding some type of harassment, and out of the 160 calls, 130 were from women. All tenant calls highlighted stress and concern for future housing and family safety. Meanwhile, 80% of the 24 tenant harassment cases EBASE has worked with were from women, a significant portion from single moms. For many, the stress of living with intimidation or unaddressed, problematic living conditions has caused health problems. Many gut-wrenching stories accompany calls for help, which you can read in the appendix on page 3.
We are committed to not being silent in the face of such abuse of power by the hands of a few unscrupulous landlords. What has been learned from the #MeToo movement is that we need to be vocal and vigilant to not just denounce abusive behavior, but to proactively provide laws and protections to stop harassment before it starts. Yet this kind of harassment persists in Concord. As lawmakers, on December 14, you have the power to change that, ensuring renters have a fair shake and can live free from such abuses of power—by passing a strong ordinance that outlaws harassment. This ordinance would ensure communities most impacted, particularly women, have the tools to protect themselves and their families. That’s why we, as women leaders, are committed to supporting women renters and their families in Concord and urge you to take action.

It’s been a tough two years for all our neighbors in Concord, but especially for families struggling the most to make it here. But 2022 promises to be better—if there is a strong foundation for it. That foundation starts with a safe, stable home.

If you have any questions, please reach out to debra@monumentimpact.org and kristi@workingeastbay.org

Thank you for your consideration.

1. Sarah Alyousfi
2. Jackie Andrews
3. Silvia Barajas
4. Rev. Dr. Barbara Barkley
5. Mara Berton
6. Fran Biderman
7. Ronnie Boyd
8. Roxanne Carrillo Garza
9. Contra Costa for Immigrants Rights Alliance – Kimberly Galindo, Coalition Manager
10. Contra Costa Labor Council – Amy Scott-Slovick, Sergeant at Arms and Traci Young, Community Services Director
11. Susie Criscimagna
12. Roxana Damas
13. Rev. Sophia DeWitt
14. East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy – Kristi Laughlin, Senior Campaign Director, Concord
15. East Bay Housing Organizations - Gloria Bruce, Executive Director
16. Ensuring Opportunity Campaign to End Poverty in Contra Costa – Mariana Moore, Senior Director
17. First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Concord – Leslie Taylor, Senior Minister
18. First 5 Contra Costa – Ruth Fernández, Executive Director and Rhea Elina Laughlin, Community Engagement Officer
19. Jenny Gonzalez
20. Healthy & Active Before 5 – Ali Uscilka, Director
21. Zonia Ibarra
22. Paula James
23. Jewish Family & Community Services East Bay – Robin Mencher, CEO
24. Alyssa Kang
25. Amy Kumar
26. Raj Kumar
27. Isabel Lara
28. Bambi Marien
29. Soraya Martinez
30. Monument Impact – Debra Ballinger, Executive Director
31. Laura Nakamura
32. NAMI Contra Costa – Gigi Crowder, Executive Director
33. Monica Navarro
34. Ady Olvera
35. Rev. Milie Phillips
36. Michelle Queirolo
37. Suzan Requa
38. Andrea Rios
39. Leta Seletzky – Monument Impact Board Secretary
40. Chris Schildt
41. Rachel Shoemake
42. Swostika Timalsina
43. Charlene Tuckerson
44. Elba Velasquez
45. Jan Warren
Appendix: Tenant stories of harassment

“Berta” experienced an issue with her plumbing that made the bathroom unusable while repairs took place. She offered to rent an Airbnb and pay out of pocket during the repairs if the landlord could later deduct those expenses from the rent. Her landlord refused and instead suggested that she use a bucket to dispose of feces in the backyard. Berta was not comfortable with this and instead offered the idea of a portable bathroom. The landlord again refused her suggestion and gave the tenant an eviction notice in retaliation for asking for repairs. Along with this incident, the landlord would regularly enter the house without permission.

“Angela,” suffers from enormous stress made all the worse by her landlord. She wrote to say, “I have been a resident of Concord for twenty years. I live with my partner, who has just been diagnosed with cancer, and my daughter, who has a mental disability. I have been at this apartment for eight years. The pandemic has had a devastating impact on our health and our finances. My partner and I both got COVID. Even through all of this heartbreak, we have been able to pay the rent on time. But we have roaches and bedbugs, and every time we ask the landlord to fumigate, he tells us it is our problem. We are forced to go to Home Depot to buy the materials to fumigate our place ourselves when it is the landlord’s responsibility. Last month, the fridge broke down, and our landlord refused to provide us with another one. He told us we had to buy it ourselves and pay to get rid of it. I also had to throw away all the food because it was spoiled. We cannot afford to throw food away. Our landlord willfully neglects to make the necessary repairs in our apartment. He terrorizes us constantly, entering our apartments without warning and intimidating us with threats of eviction. He warns us that he will call the police or ICE if we dare to ask for repairs. This has created an unsafe living environment for my family. We would like to escape this situation, but we have nowhere else to go.”