

Communication from Public

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Housing Is a Human Right
6500 Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90028

19 August 2019

Los Angeles City Council
200 N Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: SUPPORT FOR COUNCILMAN RYU'S AND BONIN'S MOTION(S)

Dear Members of the City Council,

We are writing in support of two motions before the Council submitted in June 2019: one moved by the Honorable Councilmembers Bonin, Harris-Dawson, Koretz and Ryu to study the impacts of a potential Empty Homes Penalty (Council File [19-0623](#)) and the second moved by Councilmembers Bonin and Ryu to study reforms of Ellis Act relocation assistance (Council File [14-0268-S16](#)). While fundamental reforms will require policy movement by the State Legislature, we commend innovative thinking locally to address the housing affordability crisis.

At Housing Is a Human Right, we believe that we will not be able to build our way out of the current crisis. Homelessness is skyrocketing in the City of Los Angeles at a time when more resources than ever before have been made available to assist those living with housing precarity. Meanwhile, the construction of market rate housing in the private sector has done little to alleviate the burden on our working-class renter families. We believe both state and local policy must do far more to keep people in their homes before they become homeless, through the expansion of tenant protections, and by discouraging vacancies and mass evictions.

These motions would address key policy loopholes contributing to the housing affordability crisis gripping the city. According to the most recent homeless count published by LAHSA, the overwhelming population of the unhoused are not chronically homeless. The

overwhelming majority of the unhoused do not have mental health or substance-dependency issues. In fact, the biggest increases in this year's homeless count were among seniors, youths and victims of domestic violence. The rental housing market isn't working for Angelenos, especially not for our most vulnerable residents.

The Ellis Act was intended to allow small property owners to retire from the rental housing market. It was not intended for domestic and overseas corporations to purchase our housing stock and displace tenants in a relentless pursuit of profit whatever the consequences. Unfortunately, we have seen a dramatic increase in the use of the Ellis Act to reshape our communities—at the rate of seven rent controlled units lost per day. We need urgent reforms to the Ellis Act at the state level to address the situation.

Meanwhile, we are seeing the growth of homeless encampments existing alongside luxury developments with shockingly high vacancy rates. It is a policy failure that at a time of increasing homelessness, large landholders should prefer to keep rents high and units vacant without being challenged by our elected officials.

Los Angeles is plagued by low wages and exorbitant rents. We need to ensure the preservation and expansion of our existing, 'naturally-occurring' affordable housing, while discouraging the inefficient vacancies at a time when nearly 40,000 residents go unhoused in our city.

We support the motions brought forth by the Councilmembers to address two major facets of the housing affordability crisis: Skyrocketing rents and increasing homelessness. It is long past due that we recognize that whenever rents go up, tents go up. We urge City Council to assign both motions to the necessary committees as quickly as possible.

In Solidarity,

Housing Is a Human Right