



News from Oakland City Attorney Barbara J. Parker

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Oakland City Attorney Barbara J. Parker Launches Housing Justice Initiative, Along With New “Know Your Housing Rights” Campaign With Rent Adjustment Program

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*Oakland, CA — Today, Oakland City Attorney Barbara J. Parker is formally launching a new **Housing Justice Initiative (HJI)**, a project that will be a force multiplier for her work protecting vulnerable tenants in Oakland’s diverse neighborhoods. Through the HJI, City Attorney Parker will increase her office’s capacity to advocate in numerous ways to defend the basic rights of Oakland tenants to safe, healthy, and dignified housing. The HJI will coordinate with partners across non-profit and philanthropic sectors to advance this crucial work.*

The launch of the HJI and its accompanying Know Your Housing Rights campaign, a collaboration with the city’s Rent Adjustment Program, is particularly crucial at this challenging time in the city, state, and nation’s history, when so many are facing health and economic disaster, harms that are persistently worsened by abusive landlords. Since March of this year, the City Attorney’s Neighborhood Law Corps has filed multiple lawsuits and sent dozens of demand letters in response to landlords violating tenants’ basic rights. The City Attorney’s Office has successfully secured restraining orders against landlords engaging in some of the worst abuses against tenants during the pandemic, including illegal, self-help evictions involving lockouts and utility shutoffs, that threaten tenants’ ability to safely shelter in place. The HJI will build on this foundation to assist even more tenants in Oakland through litigation, policy efforts, and public education campaigns.

“Our city, like our country, is facing multiple, overlapping pandemics: the pandemics of COVID-19, systemic racism, the destruction of the social safety net, and climate change disaster,” said City Attorney Barbara J. Parker. “In the context of those crises, the harms of housing insecurity—and housing injustice—are multiplied. This initiative and campaign aim to protect Oakland residents from those harms, and lift up the rights of all Oaklanders to access and maintain their housing free of discrimination and other illegal actions.”

As part of her Housing Justice Initiative, the City Attorney's Office is also launching a Know Your Housing Rights campaign with the Rent Adjustment Program, which will include widely disseminating information in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese to help tenants self-advocate and understand what resources are available to protect and defend their rights. This campaign is being coordinated with East Bay Community Law Center, Centro Legal de la Raza, Eviction Defense Center, Bay Area Legal Aid, Housing and Economic Rights Advocates, Family Violence Law Center, and Public Rights Project, whose work on housing rights the City Attorney is honored to more fully join.

As part of the HJI and the Know Your Housing Rights campaign, the City Attorney's Office is launching a new website, www.housingjusticeoakland.org, designed to educate tenants about their rights, empower tenants to submit complaints of harassment online to the Neighborhood Law Corps, and connect with City of Oakland and nonprofit resources. The City Attorney partnered with the David E. Glover Education and Technology Center to develop the website, and with Youth Impact Hub to develop videos capturing the stories of both tenants and non-profit advocates.

“I am thrilled about the launch of the City Attorney's Housing Justice Initiative,” Oakland City Councilmember Nikki Fortunato Bas stated. “It's so important for the City of Oakland to partner with community-based organizations to protect the most vulnerable members of our community and seek housing security, especially during these very difficult times.”

“I am very supportive of our City Attorney's Housing Justice Initiative,” said Oakland City Councilmember Dan Kalb. “As a steadfast advocate for protecting our renters, I support stepping up our efforts to inform tenants of their rights through the Know Your Housing Rights campaign. In this incredibly difficult Bay Area housing market and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must continue to engage with innovation and determination to prevent homelessness and protect our lower income and marginalized communities from displacement. The Housing Justice Initiative and the Know Your Rights Campaign are great examples of leadership and programmatic excellence that support tenants' rights and help create an Oakland where people who work here can also live here.”

The City Attorney's HJI will create opportunities for interested Oaklanders and other supporters to help advance housing justice in Oakland. Those opportunities are expected to include: (1) sharing materials like the Know Your Rights flyer with family, friends, and colleagues; (2) supporting the City Attorney's nonprofit partners in their essential work to protect tenants from harassment and wrongful displacement; and (3) staying informed and engaged on legal and policy developments through HJI updates in the monthly City Attorney newsletter.

The Housing Justice Initiative received its first grant from the San Francisco Foundation, and City Attorney Barbara J. Parker thanks SFF for its investment in bringing this bold new idea to life.



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