

AFFORDABLE HOUSING ADVOCATES

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A Qualified Legal Services Project

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April 21, 2009

Kevin O'Neill, Executive Director
Mid-City Community Advocacy Network
4275 El Cajon Blvd., Suite 101
San Diego, CA 92105

RE: Building Healthy Communities Initiative-City Heights

Dear Kevin:

I am the Director and Supervising Attorney of Affordable Housing Advocates (AHA), a nonprofit,501(c)(3) corporation and qualified legal services project. I am pleased to submit this letter to advise you and the Mid-City Coordinating Council of AHA's current work on the Initiatives' Outcomes, as well as our support for and commitment to be meaningfully engaged in the planning process.

Significant Current Activities

Since 2006, AHA's Tenants' Rights Project (TRP) has provided free legal services in a wide variety of housing cases, to individual tenants and groups of tenants, in City Heights. AHA targeted City Heights because of its large and vulnerable population, as well as the fact that its housing stock ranks as the worst City-wide.¹ SANDAG, our local Council of Government ("COG"), and the City of San Diego's Planning and Code Enforcement Departments are sources for more current and property specific information.

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City Heights is the densest, most diverse and poorest community in the City of San Diego. City Heights has the largest population of people who are limited English proficient of any community in the City (18,357 people over 5 years of age, or 24% of the population, speak little or no English). Two-thirds of the households speak a language other than English at home. Over ¼ (26%) of the adult population has completed less than the 9th grade. These factors combine to make them particularly vulnerable. 2000 US Census.

The housing stock in City Heights ranks as the worst City-wide. The housing is old (2,648 units built before 1940), primarily tenant occupied (18,272 of 23,875 dus) and the tenants have the heaviest rent burden: 9,111 (49.86%) households pay more than 30% of their income for rent, with 4,646 (50.99%) of these classified as "severe overpayers", using more than 50% of their income for rent. 2000 US Census. Much of the rental housing is grossly substandard. For our clients, infestations of vermin and cockroaches, roof and plumbing leaks and the accompanying mold and mildew are among the most common problems.

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Our efforts to abate substandard conditions are hampered, in part, because of an ineffectual rental code enforcement program in the City of San Diego. The current code enforcement system is based solely on tenant complaints, is not accessible to all and is limited in scope.²

In 2009-10, we are undertaking a systemic approach, working with tenants and community organizers to develop a model (proactive and comprehensive) code enforcement program under a new Project Renters United for Better Housing (RUBH). If successful, education and outreach to tenants and landlords as well as monitoring of the program to ensure its full and fair implementation would be undertaken.

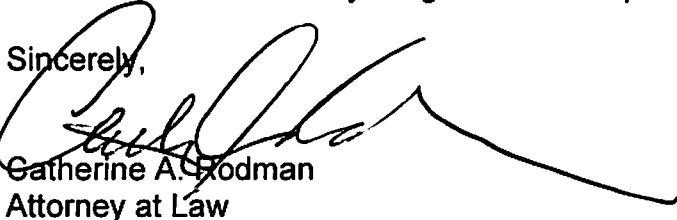
Our TRP continues to provide representation to tenants, both individually and in groups, in habitability cases. Intake is conducted weekly at the City Heights Center.

Since healthy homes are an essential part of a healthy community, abating substandard conditions which affect the health and safety of individuals and families living in City Heights is of paramount importance. Though we may be appropriately categorized under one of the following Outcomes, I believe that AHA's TRP and RUBH Projects help accomplish Outcomes 3, 4 and 7.

Commitment To Planning Process

I have read the information on the California Endowment's website and attended the meetings hosted by Mid-City CAN regarding this Initiative. AHA commits to participate in the planning process by dedicating .1FTE staff person to planning activities including data collection and analysis regarding substandard housing conditions in City Heights, and sharing or incurring costs for translating and/or printing/copying costs associated with notice or outreach to City Heights tenants up to \$500 per year.

Sincerely,



Catherine A. Rodman
Attorney at Law

cc: Mid-City CAN Coordinating Council

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First, a tenant must call the City or complete a Request for Investigation Form. The form is only available in English and the City's bilingual staff only speak English and Spanish. If the complaint does not involve mold, mildew, infestations, or other problems which the City does not currently enforce (see <http://www.sandiego.gov/nccd/about/enforcement.shtml>), then the City writes to the landlord and advises them to abate "substandard conditions at the property or unit", without identifying the tenant's specific complaints. The City does not inspect the unit to see what other problems may exist, unless the tenant calls back and reports that the landlord has not repaired the reported problem(s). By that time, tenants are generally told that their case has been closed and the compliant process begins anew.