

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [-- City Clerk](#)  
**Subject:** April 17 2023 City Council Agenda Item #10: "Strengthen Just Cause"  
**Date:** Friday, April 14, 2023 3:50:03 PM

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Dear City Council and Staff:

My name is Alejandrina Hernandez and I am a former Petaluma renter who still travels to Petaluma for jobs. I commute from Rohnert Park where I was able to secure a safe, habitable rental unit after leaving the long-term home my husband and I raised my daughters in.

Prior to our recent move to Rohnert Park, we rented a single family home in Petaluma, since 2005. When we moved in our rent was \$1400. We lived there with our two daughters, who were 1 and 6 years of age when we moved in, 19 and 25 now. The property housed a few buildings, some permitted, some not.

Starting last year, our landlord verbally asked us to move out. In fact everything about our communications with him were verbal...we were not allowed to pay our rent by check until the last few years of our renting. It was demanded in cash prior to the landlord finally agreeing to let us pay in a way that could be documented. Our lease was verbal, our requests for repairs were made over the phone, though repairs were never made. Even our frequent rent increases were imposed verbally each year...illegal both because they were not in writing and they exceeded the annual allowable amount.

After months of being asked to leave, the landlord increased our rent a final time to \$2750. \$300! We could not afford this increase and moved out in February of this year. Despite the high rent, our home was riddled with black mold. We did not feel safe living there. When getting ready to move out, the landlord discontinued our water, causing water to whole property to be cut off. At that time we realized that we were paying for all 4 units! Since 2005! We suspect that was also the case for the PG&E bill. This is a violation of California Civil Code, Chapter 2, Section 1940.9. Who knows how much we overpaid for utilities over the years!

We endured a lot of costs related to the move, and would have benefitted from relocation benefits under the Petaluma Ordinance. My husband, who works in Petaluma and commutes there by car, now has significant commute related costs. We paid out of pocket for moving costs, including a deposit of \$2450. Our former landlord made no offer of giving our deposit back. A month after moving out, I was visiting a friend at the property and the landlord verbally harassed me, getting in my face and asking for more money for something he refused to repair when we were living there. It was intimidating and scary. We are now considering legal action to get our deposit back and for rent abatement due to the awful living conditions we suffered, in addition to a refund of the illegal rent increase amounts we paid.

I share my story because I want you to know what others go through in this community. Just because we rented a single family home does not mean we did not endure poor living conditions, threats and harassment by our "mom and pop" landlord. My community rarely

speaks up about their rights to safe, habitable housing free from harassment. Some stay silent due to fear, fear of legal matters due to their immigration status. Some stay silent due to fear of retaliation by their landlord. Even my landlord made a point to tell me that his family worked in the court, and that his son was a police officer. Please do not expand the exemption for small property owners. My former landlord needs more accountability, not less.

I want to thank the Petaluma City Council for passing tenant protections in Petaluma. I strongly encourage you to permanently adopt the Just Cause Ordinance, after strengthening it, as it will stabilize my community, my friends and my family who still live in Petaluma. I also ask that you please consider adding the school aged child and educator protections in for owner move in evictions. I do not know what I would have done had we been displaced from our community during the school year as my daughters were growing up. Tenants deserve more protection than the baseline protections offered by the state Tenant Protection Act. They deserve safe housing and when displaced for substantial rehabilitation of their home, should be given the right to return once repairs are complete, not turned onto the street just so a landlord can do what they are legally required to do.

I appreciate your support for strong protections. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,  
Alejandrina Hernandez

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