



April 13, 2023

Petaluma City Council
cityclerk@cityofpetaluma.org

Subject: Just Cause Eviction in Petaluma, CARA Support

Dear Petaluma City Council Members:

The California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA) is writing in support of your ordinance for Just Cause Eviction Protections. CARA, which represents seniors and persons with disabilities, over 1 million in the State of California, has found too many members and their neighbors in deep and desperate need of your help around evictions. Ellis Act loopholes have been exploited and all too often turned like lethal weapons against seniors and persons with disabilities.

With a tsunami of seniors expected in Sonoma County, eviction control offers some hope for that aging population. Recently, homelessness is a rising problem for seniors. Eviction, whether from large or small complexes of apartments, whether from market rate or subsidized housing, wrongly leaves the most vulnerable residents without options. Seniors often see their capped incomes eroding based on the out-of-control housing market. From the time they retire, they quickly reach that vulnerability when spending 2/3 of their income on rent.

We can't expect Sonoma seniors living on fixed incomes to make ends meet while paying two-thirds of their income on housing. Seniors and the disabled who rent their homes need real relief and real housing security. At this stage of life, eviction triggers desperation and an inability to adjust. One of our goals with California's new Masterplan for Aging is to assist seniors in staying in their homes. That should begin on Day 1 of any tenancy, as should your ordinance.

Two provisions of Just Cause that CARA believes should remain include attorney's fees, if the tenant prevails, and relocation assistance. Tenants, especially older and/or disabled tenants, cannot hope to contest a dispute with a landlord without financial backing. If the landlord is above board, they should not mind the attorney's fee provision, as they're expecting the tenant to lose. But, we must get landlords to face consequences so they negotiate fairly in a case. The same is true in a relocation. The financial consequences just add to the problem with housing in both the senior's case and that of a person with disabilities. Persons with disabilities, when facing discrimination, have benefited from similar provisions of financial and legal support in those cases, and the crisis of eviction should rise to that level of protection as well.

CARA is California's largest grassroots senior advocacy organization. We advocate for seniors and disabled residents, with all too many of these losing their savings and homes in this market. We urge you to give these measures a chance to rescue the rental market from the almighty profit motive. Do not be deceived. Petaluma is a strong community, and this City Council can help balance the ledger in housing with the measures we have supported. Continue being courageous.

Sincerely,

Kris Organ

Kris Organ
CARA, Delegate to North Bay Labor Council
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