



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
of the Los Altos-Mountain View Area
97 Hillview Avenue, Los Altos, CA 94022**

October 4, 2015

Mayor McAlister and Members of the City Council
City of Mountain View
500 Castro Street
Mountain View, CA 94041

Re: Agenda Item: 8.1- Fair Rental Practices Program

Dear Mayor McAlister and Members of the City Council:

The LWV supports actions that provide affordable housing for all Californians. Based on this position, we support consideration of measures that protect tenants. We support many of the programs put forth in the Fair Rental Practices Program (FRPP), but have serious reservations about the effectiveness of these policies unless they are made mandatory. In addition, we hope that should the Council adopt some of this FRPP, this would be seen as a quick and easy way to try to ameliorate some issues relating to the current housing crisis, but not a program that is really tackling the difficult issues facing the City.

If the Council is looking for quick solutions, we also suggest providing more funds to CSA for rental/emergency assistance. This is a way of quickly helping the crisis at least a little bit. Another quick step would be change the preferences for below-market-rate units and also subsidized units, putting displaced tenants as the top priority.

Regarding the specific FRRP suggestions, we understand that Fremont has had a mandatory mediation program where tenants can dispute rent increases. In the years March 2012- March 2015 the mediation succeeded in reducing the rent increases in only 2% of the cases. The cost-effectiveness of requiring mandatory mediation there clearly was poor. If tenants can require mediation regarding rent increases as well as all notices to leave and the City is notified of the outcomes of all mediations, this might provide helpful data as the City continues to grapple with the issue of rapidly rising rents, but it is not much of a solution to the crisis. Perhaps if the City is given notice of all rent increases by landlords and there is some "penalty" for landlords who either don't comply with this requirement or violate other "fair practices", such a program might be more effective.

We do not know how successful the San Rafael and Healdsburg programs cited by Councilmember Kasperzak have been. The only data included in the staff report from San Rafael showed very early results; at that time, the 37% of the landlords who joined the voluntary program appeared to be those who were willing to comply with the program. Since the Healdsburg program is brand new, we expect there are no conclusive results yet. We would expect that a voluntary mediation program would be even less successful than Fremont's mandatory mediation.

Looking specifically at other practices recommended in the FRPP, we recommend that it be **mandatory to offer** all tenants one-year leases when signing a new lease and at renewal. We believe this is what Palo Alto requires. And there should be specific reasons why tenants can be released from one-year leases, such as losing a job.

We recommend that it be mandatory that landlords give 90-day notices for rent increases and notices to terminate, allowing tenants to leave with 30 days' notice.

We think the City should require landlords to pay a rental registration fee to the City. This fee could be used to fund staff who will keep records of rent increases, to fund additional mediation staff, etc.

Under California law, if a lease is negotiated in Spanish, for example, then the lease is required to be in Spanish. We suggest a notice at the beginning of the lease/rental agreement in the language of the tenant, should the tenant not speak good English, advising the tenant that the lease will be provided in the tenant's language.

We have further suggestions, but generally think that unless many of the suggested practices are made **mandatory** rather than voluntary, very little will be accomplished. We also think that the FRPP could be a part of the discussion on Oct. 19th at the Council's Study Session, unless the Council wants to recommend action on some of these practices on Oct. 6th. We would not want to see significant City resources put into proceeding with any of these practices unless we see some of them made mandatory and also know whether these practices have been successful in other cities where they have already been tried.

Donna Yobs
Co-Chair, Housing Committee
LWV of the Los Altos-Mountain View Area

Cc: Dan Rich