

June McHuen

From: Leong, Timothy <tleong@4cd.edu>
Sent: Friday, April 21, 2023 2:48 PM
To: Clerk of the Board
Cc: Monica Nino
Subject: Letter of Support for Stand Together Contra Costa
Attachments: STCC Support Letter to County Board of Sups 04212023.pdf

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Chair of the Board of Supervisors:

On behalf of Interim Chancellor Mojdeh Mehdizadeh of the Contra Costa Community College District and our Governing Board, we are submitting the attached support letter regarding item D.2, 2023-24 Budget Hearing, Public Defender's department, scheduled for Monday, April 24, 2023.

Unfortunately we will not be able to attend this meeting in-person, so we are requesting our letter of support for "Stand Together Contra Costa" be read out loud at the April 24 Board of Supervisors meeting and entered into the public record.

Let me know if you have any questions.

Thxs.

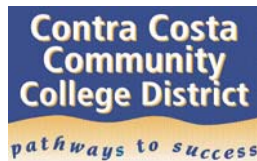
Tim Leong

Director, Communications and Community Relations

Governing Board

Fernando Sandoval
John E. Márquez
Rebecca Barrett
Andy Li
Judy E. Walters, Ph.D.

President
Vice President
Secretary



Interim Chancellor
Mojdeh Mehdizadeh

College Presidents

Kimberly R. Rogers, Ph.D. (Acting) Contra Costa College
Susan E. Lamb Diablo Valley College
Pamela Ralston, Ph.D. (Interim) Los Medanos College

April 21, 2023

Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors
1025 Escobar Street
Martinez, California 94553-1229

Supervisor John Gioia, 1st District
Supervisor Federal D. Glover, 5th District
Supervisor Candace Andersen, 2nd District
Supervisor Diane Burgis, 3rd District
Supervisor Ken Carlson, 4th District

On behalf of the Contra Costa Community College District (4CD) and the Governing Board, we want to recognize the work of Stand Together Contra Costa and urge your support of additional funding to increase the legal services and community education offered by this innovative partnership between Contra Costa County, philanthropy, and community-based organizations.

Since 1948, it has been our mission to provide affordable and high quality higher education to the Contra Costa County population seeking to fulfill their higher education goals with us. This includes hundreds of undocumented students that live in our community, who face tremendous challenges to achieve their dreams. 4CD has taken many steps to serve them by providing unique support services, passed a Governing Board resolution that advocates for a permanent path to citizenship, and joined a nationwide higher education coalition to support policies that create a welcoming environment for immigrants, undocumented and international students on our campuses.

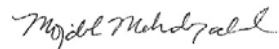
We alone cannot provide all the support needed for this underserved population, and we depend on partnerships with groups like Stand Together Contra Costa who provide critical free legal representation they need and deserve. Yet, it is sad to learn that a growing waitlist of 241 community members are waiting for legal services that could be the difference between staying in this country or being deported.

Nationally, when immigrants seek asylum protection without an attorney they only win 18 percent of cases, but when represented, they win 48 percent of the cases. However, in Contra Costa County when immigrants are represented by Stand Together Contra Costa, they win 93 percent of the time. It is successful programs like this that make us proud to call Contra Costa County our home.

4CD is grateful to continue serving affordable and high quality higher education to the Contra Costa County community including our undocumented students. This population deserves our support because deportation not only can destroy families, it also eliminates the opportunity for our country to enjoy the successes and contributions they make toward our community's quality of life.

Let us continue to be a beacon of hope for our undocumented neighbors. Please continue supporting Stand Together Contra Costa, and expand their ability to provide community education and legal services to our undocumented community.

Sincerely,



Mojdeh Mehdizadeh
Interim Chancellor

CC: Governing Board
Tim Leong

June McHuen

From: Kristi Laughlin <Kristi@workingeastbay.org>
Sent: Monday, April 24, 2023 6:56 AM
To: Supervisor Candace Andersen; Candace Andersen; John Gioia; Federal Glover; Ken Carlson; Diane Burgis
Cc: Timothy Ewell; Sonia Bustamante; Colleen Awad; Gayle Israel; David Fraser; Clerk of the Board
Subject: Raise the Roof Letter re: County's FY 2023-24 budget
Attachments: RTR Ltr to BOS Budget Request-Tenant legal serv & Rental Asst 042323 fin.pdf

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Dear Supervisors,

On behalf of the Raise the Roof Coalition, I am submitting a letter urging that you allocate \$5 million from the County's FY 2023-24 budget for integrated tenant legal services and rental assistance.

We have outlined for you the compelling need for this investment based on new eviction data and new findings from [a critical report](#) revealing the grave disparity between tenants and landlords during eviction court proceedings across Contra Costa County, disproportionately impacting Black residents and women.

We believe that you also have a genuine desire to keep people housed and to reduce homelessness. Integrated tenant legal services and rental assistance is a proven and cost-effective strategy to do just that.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Kristi Laughlin

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Kristi Laughlin
Deputy Director of Campaigns, Contra Costa
East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy
Concord office: 2140 Minert Rd, 94518
510-847-2399
Preferred pronouns: She/Her/Hers



April 23, 2023

To: John Gioia, Chair
Federal Glover, Vice Chair
Candace Andersen, Supervisor
Diane Burgis, Supervisor
Ken Carlson, Supervisor

RE: Budget Recommendation to Keep Contra Costa Families Housed

Dear Board of Supervisors,

On behalf of the Raise the Roof Coalition, I request that you **allocate \$5 million from the County's FY 2023-24 budget for integrated tenant legal services and rental assistance**. This investment of approximately \$1 million for legal assistance and \$4 million for financial assistance will protect our neighbors with the lowest incomes from falling into homelessness.

Evictions Lead to Homelessness

Between 2019 and 2022, the number of unhoused residents of Contra Costa increased by a staggering 35 percent—more than any other county in the Bay Area.¹ Members of this Board have repeatedly expressed concern about the crisis affecting families living on the streets or one step away from homelessness. Indeed, Contra Costa County was the first in the region to endorse AllHome's Regional Action Plan (RAP) in 2021.

We appreciate the sincerity of the Board's concern. Addressing our community's homelessness crisis takes a range of tools—an all-of-the-above approach. However, to date, this Board has failed to understand the central role that eviction plays in pushing

¹ Lauren Hepler and Sarah Ravani. May 16, 2021. "[Homelessness Surged 35% in One Bay Area County](#)." *San Francisco Chronicle*.

community members into the streets. According to the California Housing Partnership (CHPC), renters must earn \$41.77 per hour—2.7 times the minimum wage—in order to afford the average asking rent in Contra Costa.² It is thus no wonder that over 34,000 households (26 percent of all renters) pay more than 50 percent of their income on rent, leaving them vulnerable to financial insecurity and eviction.³ In 2022, some members of this Board implied that nonpayment of rent was a personal problem, not a governmental matter. But these numbers reveal that Contra Costa’s surging eviction numbers reflect a structural mismatch between high rents and low wages and a lack of tenant protections, rather than an individual mistake or financial mismanagement. Indeed, CHPC estimates that Contra Costa is suffering from a shortfall of 27,700 affordable homes.⁴

So, when a family experiences hard times and falls behind on rent, which often leads to eviction, the lack of affordable homes and the “scarlet letter” of an eviction judgment make it prohibitive to find a new place to live. **In 2020, 25 percent of unhoused Contra Costa residents identified cost of living or loss of a job, while another 17 percent identified eviction, as their primary reason for becoming unhoused.**⁵ The math is tragic but simple: eviction often leads to homelessness. At the same time that Contra Costa has seen the greatest increase in homelessness in the region, it has become the epicenter of evictions. According to research by the *San Jose Mercury News*, eviction filings—which only represent a fraction of the people who are forced from their homes and communities—are now [higher in Contra Costa than any other Bay Area county](#). **Per capita, renters in Contra Costa are now five times more likely to experience eviction than their neighbors in Alameda County.**⁶

The Eviction Surge Is Here

In Spring 2022, during your last budget deliberation, members of the Raise the Roof Coalition warned that—with the impending expiration of state eviction protections and rental assistance—Contra Costa was on the verge of a precipitous eviction cliff. Given the risks this posed for low-income renters, immigrants, communities of color, and the county as a whole, we urged you to renew and expand funding for tenant legal services. Our warning and recommendations went largely unheeded. At the time, Board members expressed doubt about the risk of an eviction surge, a desire for more data, and a sense that the County’s existing strategy for funding housing stabilization services—which did not include ongoing support for tenant legal services—was enough to solve the problem. Now, a year later, we hope that you will agree that the risk of an eviction surge and thus

² California Housing Partnership. May 2022. [Contra Costa County 2022 Affordable Housing Needs Report](#), p. 1.

³ Bay Area Equity Atlas. 2022. [Housing Burden: All Residents Should Have Access to Quality, Affordable Homes](#). The precise number of households is calculated using the most recent [QuickFacts for Contra Costa County](#) from the U.S. Census Bureau.

⁴ California Housing Partnership. May 2021. [Contra Costa County 2021 Affordable Housing Needs Report](#), p. 1.

⁵ Contra Costa Health Services: Health, Housing, and Homeless Services Division. August 2020. [Contra Costa County: Annual Point in Time Count Report](#), p. 21.

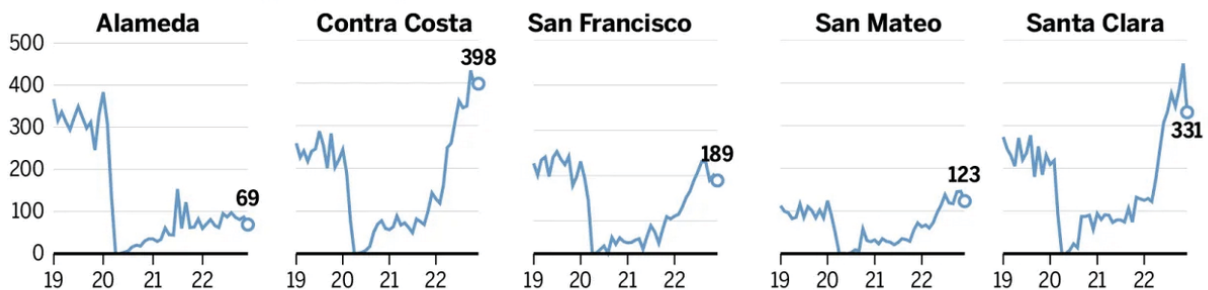
⁶ Ethan Varian. February 12, 2023. [“Evictions Eclipsed Pre-Pandemic Levels in These Bay Area Counties as Tenant Protections Expired.”](#) San Jose Mercury News.

an increase in homelessness is a settled matter. The aforementioned data from the *San Jose Mercury News* reveal that, since Spring 2022, eviction filings in Contra Costa have increased almost fourfold.⁷

BAY AREA EVICTIONS SOAR

Eviction court filings across the core Bay Area surged as state and local pandemic tenant protections expired. The exception was Alameda County, where strict local protections remained in place.

Monthly eviction filings by county



Note: Data includes eviction cases for amounts under \$25,000

Sources: Santa Clara, San Mateo, Contra Costa, Alameda, San Francisco county superior courts

BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Inadequate Services and Inequity in Eviction Court

While startling and concerning, these reports on the increase in eviction filings cannot tell us who is actually impacted by eviction and what happens to them when they appear in court. So, following last year's budget debate, several of our member organizations⁸ came together to research the inner workings of Contra Costa's three eviction courts in the post-pandemic period. Between May and mid-October 2022, participants observed 56 eviction trials across the Richmond, Martinez, and Pittsburg Courthouses and went with tenants as they sought County-funded eviction prevention services. This research resulted in a [report](#) and [webinar](#)—which was co-sponsored by AllHome, United Way Bay Area, Contra Costa Central Labor Council, and Asm. Buffy Wicks—that investigated solutions to Contra Costa's worst-in-the-region eviction crisis.

Specifically, this research found that among the 56 cases observed by Eviction Court Watch participants:

- 86% of landlords were represented by an attorney, while only 7% of tenants had legal representation.
- 41% of tenants were Black, even though only 16% of renter households in Contra Costa County are headed by Black residents.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ These organizations included Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE), East Bay Housing Organizations (EBHO), Faith Alliance for a Moral Economy (FAME), and Monument Impact.

- 57% of tenants were women.
- 50% of landlords were corporations or shell companies rather than individuals.

In addition, our research found that, rather than invest in the actual provision of tenant legal services, the County invested in *referrals* for legal services and rental assistance as well as tenant/landlord mediation. This meant that, while tenants needed immediate legal and financial assistance to avoid eviction and remain housed, the contractors who were on-site at the courthouse to assist them were **barred from providing the legal counsel that tenants clearly needed because the contractors were not licensed attorneys**. Instead, the contractors were only able to give tenants information about how to contact a legal service organization or apply for rental assistance at a later date. These “referrals to a referral,” as one tenant put it, were too little, too late. Indeed, our research revealed that it often took 3-7 weeks and repeated follow up for tenants to just receive a *response* to their rental assistance application—and many found out that they were ineligible precisely because they were facing an eviction case. But in California, the legal eviction process moves very quickly. Therefore, the County-funded services that were available to tenants were not designed to address the real and urgent needs of tenants facing eviction. As a result, **these services did not achieve their intended impact of preventing eviction or homelessness**.

This mismatch between what tenants needed and what was available to them was exacerbated by the general lack of legal services. The eviction process is legally and procedurally complex. It is not well understood by anyone other than housing attorneys, which is why such a high proportion of landlords in Contra Costa opt to pay for counsel. It is virtually impossible for low-income tenants to avoid eviction—*regardless of the merits of their case*—without representation. Indeed, our research revealed that unrepresented tenants who alleged serious abuses by their landlords—including refusal to accept rent or rental assistance payments, refusal to turn on utilities, and more—were nevertheless evicted because they were not adequately prepared to mount their own defense. (This is to say nothing of the estimated 40 percent of tenants who never get their day in court because, without an attorney to assist them, they fail to respond to their legal summons and complaint, resulting in default judgment in favor of the landlord.⁹)

There are Cost-Effective Strategies to Prevent Homelessness

While severe, this situation is not hopeless. Contra Costa County can and must prevent evictions and reduce homelessness by investing in proven housing security strategies, including an **integrated system of tenant legal aid and fast-acting rental assistance designed to prevent displacement**. Even when these services are not able to prevent eviction, research shows that they routinely lead to better move-out terms—such as more time, less debt, and eviction masking—which are critical to making a successful transition to a new home and averting homelessness. Across California, legal

⁹ Tenants Together. May 2018. [California Evictions are Fast and Frequent](#), p. 2.

representation has been found to increase the chance of securing new rental housing after eviction by 65 percent;¹⁰ nationally, tenants with an attorney are four times less likely to end up in a homeless shelter.¹¹ This is why AllHome's RAP, which has been endorsed by Contra Costa County, calls for investing four dollars in *prevention strategies*, such as tenant legal services and rental assistance, for every one dollar spent on interim shelter and every two dollars spent on permanent supportive housing. **Addressing the problem upstream is more cost-effective, and much more humane, than waiting until an individual or family has become unsheltered.**

It is important to note that our requested investment of \$1 million for tenant legal services and \$4 million for rental assistance will not be enough to fully meet the soaring need in Contra Costa County, and thus should be considered a modest down payment on the more far-reaching solution that this crisis demands. The last time that the County made a meaningful investment in tenant legal services, in 2020, it was for approximately the same amount.¹² Those contracts have since expired. Our community thus actually stands to lose the limited legal service capacity currently available at the very moment that evictions are alarmingly high. In 2022, Contra Costa allocated another \$70,000 to Centro Legal de la Raza to pilot a temporary legal clinic in Pittsburg. But in light of the findings of the Eviction Court Watch process, we believe that the County should fund permanent clinics in all three courthouses, in addition to full-scope legal representation. So, in this critical moment, we call upon the Board to *expand* legal resources, not allow them to evaporate. This budget request represents the minimum that the County must do to fulfill its adopted policies and moral obligations to combat housing insecurity and homelessness.

Sincerely,

Alex Werth
Policy and Research Advisor
East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy

Sent on behalf of the Raise the Roof Coalition:

The Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)
Contra Costa Central Labor Council
Central County Regional Group (CCRG) of First 5 Contra Costa
Centro Legal de la Raza
East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE)

¹⁰ American Civil Liberties Union. 2022. [No Eviction without Representation: Evictions' Disproportionate Harms and the Promise of Right to Counsel](#), p. 9.

¹¹ Heidi Schulteis and Caitlin Rooney. October 2, 2019. ["A Right to Counsel Is a Right to a Fighting Chance: The Importance of Legal Representation in Eviction Proceedings."](#) *American Progress*.

¹² In 2020, Contra Costa County allocated approximately \$600,000 in CARES Act CDBG-CV3 dollars to ECHO Housing and Centro Legal de la Raza. This was matched by funding from three out of the four members of the County's CDBG Consortium, adding up to almost \$1 million for tenant legal services.

East Bay Housing Organization (EBHO)

Ensuring Opportunity, the Campaign to End Poverty in Contra Costa County

The Faith Alliance for a Moral Economy (FAME)

Lift Up Contra Costa

Monument Impact