

For Immediate Release

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### **16 Families Face Exorbitant Rent Increases Amid Cockroach and Bed Bug-Infested Conditions in San Mateo**

Community holds prayer vigil in support of 16 families demanding safe and clean living conditions and the right to an affordable home.

SAN MATEO, CA - Members of the faith community, renters, and local advocates will hold a press conference and prayer vigil to stand up against the extreme rent increases and unsafe living conditions that families at a 17-unit building at 314 East Poplar Ave, are facing.

In one year alone, several families at 314 East Poplar Avenue received rent increases of close to \$1000. They received a rent increase of \$500 close 6 months ago and a similar increase in July. The families were also told that they needed to add corresponding amounts to their security deposits.

These rent increases came even while tenants have been living in horrid conditions including severe mold, dampness, and serious cockroach and bed-bug infestations. It is unconscionable that a landlord would impose steep rent hikes while simultaneously conducting insufficient maintenance in this building.

These kinds of exorbitant rent increases operate as de facto evictions for families who are already struggling with the high cost of living in San Mateo. These types of actions are leading to mass displacement of thousands of families in the Bay Area, and residents at East Poplar are advocating for concrete solutions that can provide some relief as their lives are thrown into chaos. Tenants are asking for the opportunity to stay in a healthy home in the neighborhood where they work and where their children attend school.

“It is almost impossible for us to pay these high rents for a one-bedroom apartment. I’m worried that even with this rent increase our landlord will not take action to improve the unhealthy conditions we are living in. The building is overrun with cockroaches, we have to put alcohol on our bodies to sleep at night because of the bed bug infestation, and so many children in the building are being bitten by bed bugs. I’m worried about how all of this is impacting my son’s health because he suffers from asthma and the apartment has mold,” said Jose Centeno.

This is not simply a case of one "bad apple" landlord’s actions, this is emblematic of a larger issue. The lack of rental protections creates a fertile environment for these types of landlord abuses to not only exist, but also flourish. The fact that the landlord, who is both a high profile

attorney and the former Mayor of Foster City, feels that he can openly and blatantly get away with this type of behavior, reveals just how vulnerable tenants in San Mateo really are to landlord abuse.

**What:** Press Conference and Prayer Vigil for Families living under very risky health conditions and facing extreme rent increases

**Who:** Clergy, renters, advocates, and members of the faith community

**Where:** Outside of 314 East Poplar Ave, San Mateo, CA

**When:** Thursday, August 17th at 5:30-6:30 PM

Opportunities for Visual Impact: clergy, families, signs, prayer circle

The families living under deplorable and unhealthy conditions and facing immoral rent increases are available for interviews.

“This situation exemplifies how some landlords are too eager to exploit the housing crisis at the steep cost of further destabilizing our communities here in the Bay Area,” said René Alejandro Ortega, an attorney at Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto. “Although currently it is lawful in San Mateo for landlords to impose these unconscionable rent increases on their tenants, it is illegal for landlords to retaliate against tenants who speak out against deplorable living conditions, whether such retaliation is carried out by eviction or rent increases designed as a *de facto* eviction. We stand here today to send a clear message that retaliation against tenants who seek to live in safe and healthy place for their families will not be tolerated in San Mateo County.”

“We will continue to face no-fault evictions and unhealthy conditions until tenant protections such as just cause for eviction and rent stabilization are made into law and ensure that our families can stay and ask for improvements without risk of getting evicted from our community,” said Adriana Guzman, Community Organizer with Faith In Action Bay Area.

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Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (CLSEPA) is a community-based organization that provides legal assistance to low-income individuals and families in East Palo Alto and the surrounding community. Their practice areas include housing, immigration, and economic advancement, and they provide legal assistance and advice to over 6,000 residents in need per year.

Faith in Action Bay Area is a network of faith communities committed to ensuring that the dignity of all members of our community is upheld. Through leadership development, civic engagement, and lifting up of our faith values we strive to make sure that every person receives the respect, justice, and opportunity they deserve.

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