

Leah Simon-Weisberg
Margaret DeMatteo
Ethan Silverstein
Stephano Medina
Alex Scott
Erin Joslin
Adam Morton
Christina Gonzalez



428 13th Street, 8th Floor
Oakland, California 94612

3655 S Grand Ave #250
Los Angeles, CA 90007

www.movementlegal.org

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Sebastopol City Council
Sent via email to citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov

Re: Support for Sebastopol's Just Cause Ordinance, with Urgency

Dear Mayor Zollman and Councilmembers,

On behalf of the California Center for Movement Legal Services, I urge you to adopt the proposed Just Cause Ordinance to extend essential protections to residents of deed-restricted affordable housing in Sebastopol.

Woodmark was financed using USDA Rural Development Off-Farm Labor Housing funds and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to serve farmworker families. Yet, due to the developer's failure to properly market these units to farmworker households, non-farmworker low-income families were housed instead. In September, residents were told they were no longer eligible and must leave, punished for a failure not of their making. Punished for making a new start in a fresh new home, in an amazing City.

This displacement directly contradicts the purpose of affordable housing: to provide stable, dignified housing for low-income communities. The actions of The Pacific Companies, the Central Valley Coalition for Affordable Housing, and Aperto Property Management now threaten Sebastopol residents with losing their homes at a time when affordable alternatives are scarce and waitlists span years.

Evictions ripple beyond lost housing. Families are uprooted from schools and support systems; seniors and disabled residents lose critical care networks.

Sebastopol's proposed Just Cause Ordinance closes a narrow but critical loophole. It extends existing state protections to include tenants residing in deed-restricted affordable housing, requiring relocation assistance equal to three months' rent in the rare event of a no-fault eviction. It does not affect other rental properties. Only about five large complexes in the city would be impacted.

While many affordable housing developments already limit evictions without "good cause," they do not always require relocation assistance, and do not have the more explicit just cause protections under state law. This leaves tenants vulnerable in exceptional situations like Woodmark. The ordinance would ensure that in such rare cases, displaced tenants are not left without support.

Because leases at Woodmark begin expiring as early as December 14, we strongly urge the Council to adopt the ordinance as an urgency measure so that the ordinance fixes what is intended to fix. A standard timeline would leave these families unprotected until after their displacement begins, right at the holidays.

Sebastopol has the opportunity to uphold the purpose of affordable housing: stability, dignity, and community. We urge you to act now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M DeMatteo', with a stylized, flowing script.

Margaret DeMatteo, Directing Attorney
California Center for Movement Legal Services