



Danielle Leidner-Peretz
Director, Government Affairs &
External Relations
danielle@aagla.org
213.384.4131; Ext. 309

May 16, 2019

Via Electronic Mail

Hon. Mayor D'Amico and Members of City Council
West Hollywood City Hall
8300 Santa Monica Boulevard
West Hollywood, California 90069

Re: *Right to Counsel (Agenda item 2Z)*

Dear Hon. Mayor D'Amico and Members of the West Hollywood City Council:

The purpose of this letter is to express the Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles' (AAGLA) deep concern regarding the City Council's consideration of a "Right to Counsel" ordinance given the availability of well-established, free and low-cost legal services and guidance provided by, among others, Bet Tzedek and the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES) and the already existing array of renter protections established in West Hollywood, inclusive of "just cause" eviction requirements. Additionally, because approximately 70% of evictions within Los Angeles County are due to non-payment of rent, AAGLA recommends that the City Council consider an alternative approach by directing staff to assess the viability of an emergency rental voucher / subsidy program.

AAGLA represents thousands of rental housing providers, including many that own rental housing within West Hollywood. Most of our West Hollywood members are small, "mom and pop" owners that come from many different backgrounds and income levels, including those that are retired seniors on fixed incomes, recent immigrants, teachers or first responders. So many of our members once worked or continue to work regular "9-5" jobs through which they have made a small investment in rental property only through hard work and sacrifice in order to secure and supplement their retirement. Our members are looking to provide housing and limit vacancies, eviction runs contrary to that objective. As rental housing providers, our customers are our renters and we are not in the eviction business.

Eviction is a costly and lengthy process for property owners that is typically only a last resort and approximately 70% of the cases are the result of nonpayment of rent. Evictions have



negative consequences for both rental housing providers and renters. For the rental housing providers, the time and expense of lost rental income, rehabilitation of the rental unit, and re-renting of the unit and the associated legal fees which can cost rental housing providers from \$15,000 to \$50,000 for contested eviction matters. For the renters, the need to locate a new home can become more difficult when there is a history of eviction and could lead to potential homelessness for an individual or family.

If the Council's objective is homelessness prevention through reductions in evictions, the most direct path, and one that benefits both renters and rental housing providers is the establishment of an emergency rental subsidy or voucher program with wraparound supportive services. To address the overarching societal need of homelessness prevention with its root causes ranging from sudden employment loss to lack of financial knowledge and budgeting, the City's general funds should be allocated to assist and to educate renters who are at risk of eviction due to nonpayment of rent. The assistance should be a combination of emergency rent subsidies coupled with supportive services such as financial counseling and employment resources to address both the immediate financial need and promote skills enhancement. Rental housing providers, that already operate under severe rent control regulations, should not be a source of funding for this Program – the cost of the Program must be shared by all the City's residents.

The City's staff report referenced outcomes from a 2017 Los Angeles pilot program reflecting that "tenants with representation were able to successfully settle cases almost twice as often as those without." What is important to recognize is that most settlements still result in the renter vacating the unit. If the Council's goal is to keep renters in their homes increasing case settlements will have minimal impact.

Thank you for your consideration of an emergency rent subsidy and supportive service program which will have a direct and immediate beneficial impact on both renters and rental housing providers in West Hollywood.

If you have any questions, please call me at (213) 384-4131; Ext. 309 or contact me via electronic mail at danielle@aagla.org.

Very truly yours,

Danielle Leidner-Peretz