



July 27, 2023

The Honorable Sandra Thompson
Director
Federal Housing Finance Agency
400 7th Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

RE: Strengthening Tenant Protections on Federally Backed Homes

Dear Director Thompson:

On behalf of the Latino Community Foundation (LCF), California's sole philanthropic organization focused on unleashing the civic and economic power of Latinos in the state, I welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) Request for Information on tenant protections.

LCF believes that federally backed homes with strong tenant protections is not only vital for the overall housing landscape, but also crucial for the well-being of the Latino community, which faces unique challenges in achieving safe and affordable housing.

Latinos, comprising a plurality (~40%) of the population in California, often encounter barriers to housing stability due to various factors, including language, financial constraints, and discrimination. In the renter space, more than half of Latinos in the State of California rent their homes. Among Latino renters, 46% were considered rent burdened (defined by spending more than 30% of monthly income on housing costs).

The situation is particularly challenging for renters in San Mateo County, California, where the fair market rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment was reported to be \$3,198 per month according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. To afford this level of rent without being cost-burdened, a household in San Mateo County would need to earn an hourly wage of \$61.55, assuming a 40-hour workweek, or approximately four full-time jobs at the minimum wage of \$16.50 per hour. Especially in areas like San Mateo County, it is evident that it becomes exceedingly difficult for Latinos in the state of California to afford rent, contributing to their housing instability and financial strain.

As a community foundation in California that invests, convenes, and advocates with our grassroots Latino-led nonprofits, the topic of housing and rent stabilization are chief concerns among our leaders and the communities they serve.

One exemplary organization that we support, that also demonstrates the positive impact of tenant protections, is Nuestra Casa de East Palo Alto in East Palo Alto, California. The organization works with, and trains, community health workers, otherwise known as *promotoras*, to provide outreach and education to Latino communities, assisting with housing rights, navigating the rental market, and connecting families to available resources.

They have long advocated against unjust rent increases, safer housing conditions, and are on the forefront to ensure that Latino families in the region are not unfairly evicted. They have also witnessed firsthand the

transformative effects of robust tenant protections on the lives of Latino individuals and families and are a prime example of how outreach-based organizations can educate local communities on their rights as renters. With their in-person support, backed by strong tenant policies, Latino families in the region are given a fair shot in their recoveries post COVID-19.

Examples like these are why we are advocating to bolster tenant protections on federally backed homes. The FHFA can bring about significant benefits for the Latino community in California and beyond, including but not limited to:

- 1) **Increased Housing Stability:** Stronger tenant protections will safeguard Latinos from arbitrary evictions and unfair practices, ensuring housing stability for vulnerable communities. This stability is essential for maintaining educational attainment, economic advancement, promoting civic engagement, and overall well-being.
- 2) **Reduction of Housing Disparities:** Latinos disproportionately face housing disparities, including inadequate living conditions, substandard maintenance, and discriminatory practices. Strengthened tenant protections will help rectify these disparities and promote fair and equal treatment for Latino renters.
- 3) **Preservation of Cultural and Community Networks:** Many Latino households have deep-rooted cultural and community ties that contribute to their social and economic well-being. Enhanced tenant protections will enable Latinos to maintain these connections by safeguarding their ability to stay in their communities and access culturally relevant resources.
- 4) **Strengthening of Latino-led Organizations:** Strengthened tenant protections can bolster the efforts of organizations like Nuestra Casa de East Palo Alto, helping them to continue their essential work in advocating for tenant rights, providing education, and serving as a trusted resource for the local Latino community.

In addition to strengthening tenant protections, it is crucial to recognize the significance of federal rent assistance programs like Section 8 housing in addressing the housing needs of the Latino community. Section 8 played a critical role in supporting low-income households, including many Latino families who account for roughly 13% of Project-Based Section 8 Homes, in accessing safe and affordable housing.¹ By providing rental subsidies to eligible individuals and families, Section 8 has helped alleviate the financial burden and housing disparities experienced by Latinos. It is imperative for the FHFA to work collaboratively with housing agencies and community organizations to ensure that Section 8 assistance does not become a source of income discrimination from landlords.

We urge the FHFA to take a proactive role in strengthening tenant protections on federally backed homes. By doing so, the agency will contribute to fostering equitable housing opportunities, combating housing disparities, and uplifting the Latino community in California and throughout the United States.

With deep respect,



Christian Arana
Vice President of Policy

¹ National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC). "Housing Spotlight: The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes." Accessed July 13, 2023. Available online at: <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/HousingSpotlight2-2.pdf>.