



# Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California

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January 19, 2021

## RE: Temporary Moratorium on Certain Rent Increases

Dear Councilmembers and Mayor,

Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California (FHANC) urges you to adopt the temporary moratorium on rent increases for the Canal census tracts. We thank you, your staff, the Canal Policy Working Group, Community Action Marin, and Legal Aid of Marin for the careful preparation and thoughtfulness that went into developing this ordinance.

As fair housing advocates, we know that people experiencing housing instability are disproportionately people of color. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the housing crisis for historically marginalized communities. Racial and ethnic disparities in the occurrence of the disease is striking. COVID-19 reminds us of the deep inequities in our country – lack of access to healthcare, to transportation, protections in the workplace, and housing access. Inequities hit people of color and vulnerable communities the hardest. In Marin County, Latinx residents, who are largely concentrated in the Canal, are just over 16% of the population but represent 67% of the COVID cases and 50% of the hospitalizations. Of the more than 135 Covid-related calls FHANC received since the start of the pandemic, 26 households include at least one person who has a physical or mental disability or both, 18 households include at least one person who is over 62 years old, and 32 households include at least one child. Additionally, 57% are non-White and/or Latinx. For people living in the Canal, many of whom are members of protected classes, including Latinx tenants and families living with mental and physical disabilities, the prospect of a rent increase at this time is catastrophic.

While the County has recently extended its eviction moratorium through June, this moratorium does not cover “economic evictions,” instances where a tenant leaves on their own because they cannot afford a rent increase. Since March 2020, 52% of the households that contacted FHANC about a Covid-related issue, expressed difficulty paying rent, utilities or mortgage due to loss of income related to Covid. Of the 52 tenants that were having difficulty paying their rent; 16 faced eviction and 7 wanted to or had already broken their leases because they were unable to afford the rent.

For a household paying more than half of its income in rent, a rent increase of 5% can be devastating. A recent [study by the](#) Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard found that 62% of working age renter households “don’t have enough income to meet a modest but comfortable standard of living after paying rent.” That impact is exponentially worsened for tenants with back rent due to COVID-19 related income loss. Another recent [study](#) from UCLA's Fielding School of Public Health found that evictions are tied to an increase in coronavirus cases and deaths. While the County of Marin, MCF, and others are allocating considerable funding to rental assistance, it does not seem wise to waste the taxpayers’ and donors’ dollars on unwarranted rent increases in the midst of a public health emergency.

*A local non-profit helping communities eliminate housing discrimination*

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FHANC continues to support an expansion of this rent freeze to cover other households facing distress that may not fall in the target area—there are clearly other census tracts illustrated in the staff report that evidence considerable need (1110, for example)--and for a ban on all evictions (except those related to health and safety) during this time of crisis.

Please continue to explore ways that you can help renters stay safely in their homes while providing property owners with the assistance they need to stay in business and manage their properties fairly.

Sincerely,



Julia Howard-Gibbon  
Supervising Attorney