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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HOUSING RIGHTS CENTER RECEIVES FEDERAL GRANT TO ADDRESS SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN HOUSING

[CALIFORNIA – NOVEMBER 2020] — The Department of Housing and Urban Development has awarded the Housing Rights Center (HRC) a one-year grant of \$125,000 to provide fair housing education and outreach on sexual harassment and assault, as well as other critical issues facing tenants and landlords during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ongoing pandemic has increased the urgency of outreach to combat sexual harassment and assault in housing. In one recent complaint received by the Housing Rights Center, a property owner attempted to take advantage of a tenant’s inability to pay rent due to COVID-related financial distress by demanding sexual favors in exchange for continued housing. Local tenants’ rights advocates have also informed HRC that they have observed a surge in “quid pro quo” demands targeting vulnerable tenants, primarily single mothers and female-headed households.

“In the midst of a deadly pandemic, it’s more important than ever to be able to stay safe at home. But home is not safe if there’s a risk of sexual harassment or assault by a predatory landlord who has access to the unit,” said HRC Outreach Program Manager Susan Lin. “Increasingly, tenants who cannot afford their rent during the pandemic are finding themselves forced to choose between living with intolerable and illegal abuse or losing their homes altogether. This grant will allow HRC to reach some of the most vulnerable tenants in Los Angeles and Ventura County, many of whom risk becoming homeless in their efforts to escape sexual harassment at home.”

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits sexual harassment by housing providers as a form of sex-based discrimination. Two common forms of sexual harassment include (1) “quid pro quo,” in which housing providers ask for sexual favors in exchange for a housing-related service, such as a rent reduction or repairs; and (2) creating a hostile living environment, in which a housing provider subjects a tenant to severe and unwelcome sexual conduct.

With this award, HRC will continue its work to further fair housing choice by developing a comprehensive education and outreach program, including workshops for landlords and tenants, outreach to community organizations, and dissemination of educational materials in multiple languages. In the spring, HRC will also host its annual housing rights summit to create a virtual space for agencies, organizations, and the public to connect and strategize together on how to better address the current housing situation.

Tenants who have general questions or believe they are being sexually harassed can reach out to HRC to speak to a housing counselor. To request a Housing Rights Workshop or inquire further about HRC services, please email outreach@housingrightscenter.org.

Visit HRC online at www.housingrightscenter.org or call us at 1-800-477-5977 (TTY: 213-201-0867). Follow HRC on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to stay updated on housing news.

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The Housing Rights Center is a non-profit organization established in 1968 to actively support and promote equal opportunity and freedom of residence to all persons without regard to their race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, familial status, disability, marital status, ancestry, age, source of income, or other characteristics protected by law. The Center engages in activities – including outreach/education, investigation/testing and legal advocacy – to identify barriers to fair housing in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties and to help counteract and eliminate discriminatory housing practices.

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