



HOUSING RIGHTS CENTER

WORKING FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY IN HOUSING

Housing Rights *NEWS*

WINTER 2022

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HOUSING RIGHTS HOTLINE: 1-800-477-5977

www.housingrightscenter.org

2022 REFLECTIONS FROM HRC'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CHANCELA AL-MANSOUR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear neighbors, partners and friends:

Throughout 2022, our communities have grappled with the long-term impacts of the COVID-19

pandemic on our families, our income, our housing stability, and much more. Soon, nonpayment protections for Los Angeles-area tenants will end (p. 2). On top of this, housing discrimination complaints continued to rise steadily both nationally and in the Los Angeles area. But there is hope: the Housing Rights Center (HRC) launched new programs to meet these urgent needs—and we've been busier than ever.

Through our partnership in Los Angeles County's Stay Housed LA initiative, we are preventing displacement while helping landlords make up for lost income. We've also administered over \$1.5 million in rent relief to more than 100 households throughout the City and County of Los Angeles.

Meanwhile, we continued to combat discrimination on all fronts, and to highlight specific barriers to equal housing choice. In 2022, HRC was proud to successfully advocate for tenants with disabilities by securing reasonable modifications; preventing unfair evictions; and challenging discrimination in the application process (p. 6). We also defended a tenant whose landlord unlawfully refused to accept her Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (p. 3).

In fact, our work with the Cal-

ifornia Civil Rights Department brought to light alarming rates of discrimination against Section 8 voucher holders throughout Los Angeles County. Our investigations revealed that in 2022 alone, nearly half of properties tested engaged in unlawful discrimination against voucher holders—from outright refusing to accept vouchers, to applying more stringent application criteria to voucher holders. The overwhelming response to the City of LA's Section 8 Wait List opening in October (p. 3)—which received applications representing more than 500,000 individuals—underscored the need for proactive outreach and education on the rights of these vulnerable households, which we plan to increase significantly in 2023.

Additionally, this year our second HUD-funded Education and Outreach Initiative focused on combating anti-Asian discrimination and ensuring transgender communities' access to homelessness services. To expand our outreach into Southern California's diverse communities, HRC held 30 fair housing workshops in Spanish, Korean, Mandarin, and American Sign Language to teach tenants, landlords, and community organizations about fair housing protections and housing assistance (p. 5), and distributed nearly 30,000 informational resources in Spanish, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese.

In Pasadena, in partnership with the City, HRC reopened an office serving residents to further their protections under the Tenant Protection Ordinance, and Condominium Conversion

Ordinance.

Every day at HRC, we hear from people who are struggling and fearful about the future. But every day, I also see the hard work and dedication of both our staff and our many partners—and the real difference it makes in the lives of those we are able to help. So it's no wonder that I am hopeful for the future, and I believe that the challenges awaiting us in 2023 will also yield new opportunities for advocates and communities, working together, to protect and uplift our most vulnerable.

That's why I am truly excited to announce that HRC's annual Housing Rights Summit will be back in person on April 24, 2023! At last year's event, U.S. Rep. Adam Schiff (CA-28) and Los Angeles County Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell (SD-2) joined us in honoring National Fair Housing Month, and we discussed movements to reclaim land seized from Black ownership under racist land use laws with more California cities redressing their history as former sundown towns, and innovative strategies to combat insidious forms of discrimination. Next year, we hope you'll join us again to explore even more critical housing justice issues face to face with our inspiring community of committed advocates and supporters. We can't wait to see you again soon.

Sincerely,

Chancela Al-Mansour

Executive Director
Housing Rights Center

COVID-19 TENANT PROTECTIONS

UPDATE

For more updates on local protections, join HRC's email list at www.housingrightscenter.org/email.

IMPORTANT: To be protected from eviction for delayed rental payments due to COVID-19 hardship, tenants **must notify their landlord** in writing. A notice with instructions is available in English and Spanish at www.housingrightscenter.org.

IMPORTANT: Although emergency laws are ending, **many tenants still have protections** under local rent control laws or the California Tenant Protection Act. Contact the Housing Rights Center to learn your rights where you live.

1. When do tenants with COVID-19 hardships have to start paying their full rent?

In Los Angeles County, including the City of Los Angeles, tenants will owe full rent starting February 1, 2023.

2. When does rent that was delayed because of COVID-19 hardship have to be paid?

Tenants who provided a COVID-19 hardship form are protected from eviction for the rent that was delayed. However, they can be sued for the debt if it is not repaid on time.

In the City of Los Angeles:

Rent that was owed between March 1, 2020 - September 30, 2021: Due August 1, 2023

Rent that was owed between October 1, 2021 - January 31, 2023: Due February 1, 2024

In the rest of Los Angeles County:

Rent that was owed between July 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022: Due December 31, 2023

3. When can rent increases begin for rent-controlled properties?

In the City of Los Angeles, rent increases for rent-controlled units can begin February 1, 2024.

For rent-controlled units in unincorporated Los Angeles County, rent increases up to 3% can begin January 1, 2023. For luxury units, rents can be increased up to 5%.

4. What about other reasons for evictions, such as owner move-ins or unauthorized occupants or pets?

In Los Angeles County, including the City of Los Angeles, many evictions where the tenant is not at fault (such as owner move-ins) can begin February 1, 2023.

However, in the City of Los Angeles only, evictions for unauthorized residents or pets due to pandemic circumstances cannot begin until February 1, 2024.

For more information about your housing rights, contact the Housing Rights Center at 1-800-477-5977 or info@housingrightscenter.org. ◀

HACLA HAS SELECTED HOUSEHOLDS FOR SECTION 8 HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER WAITING LIST LOTTERY

ELANA EDEN, DIRECTOR OF MEDIA, OUTREACH, AND EDUCATION

As hundreds of thousands of Angelenos began their applications for the Housing Choice Voucher (“Section 8”) waiting list in October, the Housing Rights Center (HRC) reminded tenants and landlords that **California law protects the right to pay rent with vouchers and other forms of public assistance.**

The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) accepted applications to join the waiting list to receive a Section 8 voucher starting Monday, October 17, 2022 until Sunday, October 30, 2022 at 5:00 pm.

“For many tenants, the long wait for assistance is just the beginning. Once they have a voucher in hand, it can be incredibly difficult to find housing because of widespread, discriminatory practices designed to unlawfully screen out applicants with Section 8,” said Chancela Al-Mansour, Executive Director of the Housing Rights Center.

The California Fair Employment & Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination based on tenants’ “source of income,” including Section 8 vouchers.

Most landlords are prohibited from refusing to accept vouchers or charging a higher rent to applicants who receive public subsidies. And if a landlord uses an income standard to screen for tenant eligibility (e.g. “3 times

“For many tenants, the long wait for assistance is just the beginning. Once they have a voucher in hand, it can be incredibly difficult to find housing because of widespread, discriminatory practices designed to unlawfully screen out applicants with Section 8.”

— Chancela Al-Mansour,
Executive Director,
Housing Rights Center

the rent”), it must be applied only to the tenant’s contribution to the rent. Still, HRC receives a steady stream of calls reporting source of income discrimination each month.

HACLA received more than 223,375 applications, but only

30,000 households were randomly selected to gain a spot on the waiting list to receive a voucher. Applicants were notified of their application status on December 1, 2022.

The Housing Choice Voucher program, known as “Section 8,” is a federally funded program that provides rent subsidy payments directly to private landlords on behalf of participating low-income families and individuals. Section 8 allows participants to choose any housing unit that meets the qualifications of the program and passes a mandatory inspection program, which may include their current residence.

In 2020, HRC launched a campaign to identify, educate, and hold accountable landlords and property management companies in Los Angeles County that routinely discriminate against Section 8 voucher holders. If you believe you have experienced discrimination based on your source of income, or any other characteristic protected by fair housing laws, please contact the Housing Rights Center at 1-800-477-5977 or by emailing info@housingrightscenter.org. ◀

Need help?



Housing Rights Hotline

Toll Free: 1-800-477-5977

TTY: 1-213-201-0867

Email: info@housingrightscenter.org

Learn more: www.housingrightscenter.org

HRC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR HONORED FOR WORK EXPANDING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACROSS U.S.

In November, the California Reinvestment Coalition (CRC) honored HRC Executive Director Chancela Al-Mansour with the Alan Fisher Award at their 2022 Equitable Futures Awards ceremony in Los Angeles. Chancela was recognized for her decades of



work as a civil rights champion and policy advocate for low-income women and families—and particularly her recent efforts toward a universal right to



housing vouchers to end homelessness and expand economic opportunity. This year's honorees also included the California Public Banking Alliance, the SEIU California State Council, and California Assemblymember Miguel Santiago (D-53) (pictured). ◀

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT... HRC IN THE NEWS

Los Angeles Times: California outlawed Section 8 housing discrimination. Why it still persists

(NOVEMBER 19, 2022)

"[T]he most common kind of discrimination was outright refusal to accept Section 8 vouchers, followed by properties that offered better terms, like lower rent, to people without vouchers, according to Chancela Al-Mansour, executive director of the Housing Rights Center, the nonprofit that conducted the testing for the state...

"...Al-Mansour said that while the 2022 testing showed significant discrimination, it was about 10 percentage points less than levels the Housing Rights Center found in late 2020 and early 2021."

Los Angeles Times: Op-Ed: 10 ideas for fixing Los Angeles (NOVEMBER 13, 2022)

Ahead of L.A.'s new administration, the *Times* asked HRC Executive Director Chancela Al-Mansour and nine other community leaders for guidance on "how to make L.A. government better able to solve problems."

Chancela urged L.A.'s next leaders to tackle the root causes of homelessness and warned of "the perfect storm" of "racism, gender-based exploitation and consistently low wages." She advocated greater protections for those most vulnerable to losing their homes, and cooperation to develop more truly affordable housing in the city.

KPCC: Housing Rights Center Discusses Section 8 Waitlist (OCTOBER 22, 2022)

"Chancela Al-Mansour leads the nonprofit the Housing Rights Center and says that while it's projected that only 10-15% of those that applied will be accepted to the limited wait list, it's still important to get an application in if you are eligible.

'Even if they don't necessarily think that right now, necessarily this month, they need a Section 8 voucher, they may need it in a year or two. So, if they're eligible and they think they may be in need of government assistance, they should apply.'

She says that's because it could take months or years to get pulled off the waitlist and given a Section 8 voucher."

Get the full story at www.housingrightscenter.org/in-the-news. ◀

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HRC COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS: VENTURA HOUSING FORUM, KOREATOWN OUTREACH, AND MORE

Find upcoming events at www.housingrightscenter.org/workshops.

Empowering School Communities in Alhambra and Beyond

HRC was excited to support the Alhambra Unified School District (AUSD) in a project to showcase innovative practices California schools can use to support the whole family. HRC filmed English and Spanish workshops answering common questions about the legal rights of families with children, people with disabilities, households receiving public assistance, and many more protected categories. The videos will be shown to schools and school districts across California and will both empower families to improve their housing situations, and help our schools to become true community support hubs.

Koreatown Outreach: Landlords Luncheon Learn

As part of our work to expand fair housing education to multilingual Asian communities, HRC teamed up with the Koreatown Youth + Community Center (KYCC LA), the Korean-American Federation of Los Angeles (KAFLA), and People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) to share information in Korean about financial incentives, housing programs, and landlord-tenant disputes with housing providers based in Koreatown. Nearly 20 local landlords, property managers, housing navigators, and community organizations attended to learn more about fair housing from HRC Outreach Coordinator Erica Nam (pictured).



Deaf, Blind, & Disabled Coalition of Los Angeles

HRC is a proud member of the new Deaf, Blind & Disabled Coalition convened by Peace Over Violence to coordinate accessible services for people with disabilities. In November, we provided a training with interpretation in American Sign Language (ASL) on disability protections in housing to ensure that providers across Los Angeles County can effectively advocate for their clients' needs and rights.

Ventura Westside Housing Forum: Housing Resources for All

In November, HRC joined the City of Ventura's Westside Housing Forum at the Bell Arts Factory. This community event brought together about 80 tenants and landlords who got to know their local housing resources, learned about current housing laws, and discussed the important housing issues facing the Ventura region. ◀

HOUSING RIGHTS CENTER & MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY SERVICES ASSIST DISABLED TENANT DENIED HOUSING IN LOS ANGELES

MADLINE MCCORMICK, EOI PROGRAM MANAGER

The Housing Rights Center (HRC) and Mental Health Advocacy Services (MHAS) have successfully settled a case to provide **equal access to housing opportunity for people with disabilities.**

In 2019, the owners of multiple apartment buildings in South Los Angeles denied a prospective tenant a second-floor unit after learning he had a vision disability. Although they confirmed he met all the application criteria, they later asked invasive questions about his medical background and discovered that he suffers from occasional episodes of reduced vision.

Upon discovering more information about his disability, everything changed. Despite the applicant's reassurances that stairs were not an obstacle for him, the owners claimed that renting to him would be a liability for them if he were to trip and fall. They refused to consider his application and insisted that he instead consider

first-floor units at other properties.

Under the U.S. Fair Housing Act, **it is unlawful for property owners to deny or discourage prospective tenants based on disability or other protected characteristics.** Attempting to restrict tenants to a specific section of a property, direct them to another building or neighborhood, or otherwise "steer" them away from housing they qualify for and can afford not only harms the tenant who was denied housing, but also undermines the critical effort to desegregate American cities.

In addition to paying damages to the tenant, the property owners agreed to adopt a written policy across their Los Angeles properties to ensure that people with disabilities are provided equal housing choice and the opportunity to make reasonable accommodation requests.

Additionally, staff will be trained on fair housing protections and best practices, and

inform current tenants of their rights under federal fair housing laws.

Disability has been a protected category under the Fair Housing Act since 1988. The law makes clear that housing opportunities may not be withheld from prospective or current tenants because they have mental and/or physical disabilities. Landlords may not refuse to rent to tenants because they may need a disability-related accommodation, nor may they penalize or retaliate against tenants for requesting accommodations.

If you believe you have experienced discrimination based on disability or any other protected class under federal or California law, please contact the Housing Rights Center at 1-800-477-5977 or info@housingrightscenter.org. ◀

Note: All complaints to HRC are confidential. HRC has changed the names of the complainants featured in this newsletter, as well as some details of their stories, to protect their anonymity.



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www.housingrightscenter.org



Fair Housing is your right.

Do you know your housing rights? HRC's Housing Counselors can answer your questions about topics like security deposits, evictions, repairs, rent increases, harassment, and more. Conversations with Housing Counselors are FREE, private, and confidential, and can help you find the resources you need.



To speak with a Housing Counselor for FREE, please call our Housing Rights Hotline at 1-800-477-5977 (TTY: 1-213-201-0867) or email info@housingrightscenter.org.

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APRIL 24, 2023

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