



ALAMEDA COUNTY HEALTH CARE SERVICES AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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One Frank Ogawa Plaza
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RE: City Staff Report on Improving Building Services and Code Enforcement Operations

Dear Councilmember Brunner:

The Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) supports the efforts undertaken by the City of Oakland to improve its code enforcement operations in response to the Alameda County Grand Jury recommendations on Building Services. Specifically, ACPHD expresses its support for City staff recommendations to develop a proactive, prevention-based approach and prioritize code enforcement operations to address major public health and safety problems.

In addition, ACPHD supports the Building Services Advisory Task Force recommendation to create a thorough and consistent approach for addressing mold issues, which can promote the development of asthma, allergies, and respiratory infections. Exposure to mold in homes is estimated to contribute to approximately 21% of current asthma cases in the United States, at an annual cost of \$3.5 billion. Asthma is the single largest contributor to preventable hospital admission among children.

In the National Center for Healthy Housing's 2009 study of health-related housing problems, Oakland ranked 39 out of 44 jurisdictions surveyed, with nearly 60% of housing units showing one or more health-related problems. A majority (59%) of Oakland households are renters, and the majority of the city's housing stock was built before 1960. Therefore, Oakland residents are especially vulnerable to substandard housing conditions and related health impacts. Low-income residents, who are more likely to live in rental housing, often face health-threatening conditions such as exposure to indoor dampness, mold, or lead, because they cannot afford other options and have little recourse to address or remediate habitability issues.

These issues are of particular concern in Alameda County. According to data available for 2010, Alameda County has the third highest asthma hospitalization rate among all 58 California counties. Between 2006 and 2008, African American asthma hospitalization rates were three to seven times the rates among other racial/ethnic groups.

ACPHD is working with the City of Oakland Building Services Division and partners such as the Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, Centro Legal de la Raza, Causa Justa::Just Cause, and the East Bay Community Law to address the

housing condition problems through a combination of case referral, enforcement activities, health services, and education. In addition, the Alameda County Health Officer, Dr. Muntu Davis, has recommended that City of Oakland Building Official consider the presence of mold a sign of unwanted moisture and a health hazard. ACPHD is committed to collaborating with the City to address this issue.

As a Public Health agency, we recognize that certain social and economic factors are critical in determining how long and how well people live. Improvements to the Building Services Division and code enforcement operations so they better serve Oakland residents and protect health and safety are critical steps toward reducing health inequities and the public cost burdens of preventable chronic diseases. We look forward to contributing our organizational expertise to this effort.

Sincerely,

Anita Siegel
Director
Alameda County Public Health Department