



ALAMEDA COUNTY HEALTH CARE SERVICES AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Dear EBMUD Finance Committee President Frank Mellon:

The Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) is the agency within Alameda County Health Care Services that employs a broad range of prevention strategies to protect and improve the health and safety of County residents and the neighborhoods in which they live.

Alameda County is seeing an exponential increase in foreclosures, posing an extreme threat to our residents' health. We are writing to ask you to protect the health of renters living in foreclosed buildings by implementing policies that will allow these tenants to maintain their access to water, as well as avoid displacement.

Landlords seeking unlawful eviction are using water termination to force tenants to move, the health consequences of which are twofold. Moving frequently is associated with higher rates of mental health issues and child abuse and neglect, as well as with lower educational outcomes, which in turn have a strong influence on health outcomes. Additionally, housing stability is associated with self-rated health status; as housing stability decreases, so does self-rated health status. Finally, moving away from one's community, job, and/or school can result in the loss of health protective social support systems. Fortunately, rent-paying and lease-abiding tenants in foreclosed buildings are protected by law from displacement via eviction. However, without water, tenants cannot maintain their housing.

In housing law, potable water is a fundamental component of habitability. Water is a basic necessity for human life. In addition to needing access to water to keep hydrated, people need water to cook, wash their hands and bodies, dispose of sewage and keep their environments clean. Inadequate access to water is associated with the spread of disease and can be used by Child Protective Services as cause for removing children from otherwise safe and healthy homes. Landlords cannot be permitted to force renters to choose between moving (displacement) and living in uninhabitable conditions.

We urge your municipal and national leadership in the effort to protect the health and well being of tenants living in uncertainty in foreclosed housing. Specifically, we support the policies put forth by Just Cause Oakland and ask you to act quickly to:

1. **Keep the water on.** Stop water terminations on tenants in foreclosed properties where the landlord signed a contract to pay the water bill.
2. **Hold owners responsible for their obligations.** Put pressure on owners who fail to pay their bills by contacting them directly and collecting bills from owners (not the tenants).

3. **Proactively notify tenants.** Tenants need to know their rights and of EBMUD's policy to keep the water on so that they can advocate on their own behalf.

As public agencies, we are charged with serving the public. We must all accept the weight of this responsibility and use every measure available to ensure that our services are rendered equitably and justly, as the health of the public depends on it.

Sincerely,

Anthony Iton, MD, JD, MPH
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Alameda County Public Health Department

Cc: John Coleman
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