



CITY OF OAKLAND
newsrelease
Office of the City Attorney

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Contact: Alex Katz
Office (510) 238-3148
Cell (510) 599-6874

akatz@oaklandcityattorney.org

On the Web at: <http://www.oaklandcityattorney.org/>

Neighborhood Law Corps Cleans Up Problem Properties

OAKLAND, CA – The City Attorney’s Office announced two settlements today that will improve living conditions for tenants and families in more than 80 rental units across the city.

In the first case, the City of Oakland’s Neighborhood Law Corps compelled a settlement with landlord Elizabeth Williams, who lives near Gilroy and has been known as one of the most infamous landlords in the city based on years of tenant complaints about broken windows, infestations of mice, rats and cockroaches, gas leaks, broken toilets and heaters, drug activity and other inhumane conditions.

“With the right to own property comes the legal and moral responsibility to be a good landlord,” City Attorney John Russo said. “Slum conditions are no more acceptable for families in Oakland than they are for families in Pleasanton or Walnut Creek. If a landlord in Oakland won’t abide by common decency and the law, we will chase them down.”

The Neighborhood Law Corps sued Williams in 2006 (case no. RG06291808) after numerous efforts by the City failed to persuade her to make improvements at 13 rental properties – a total of 52 units in North and West Oakland with more than 100 tenants, including children.

Williams finally agreed to negotiate a settlement just before the scheduled trial date in September of this year. The final settlement, signed last month, includes a \$20,000 fine and a permanent injunction requiring Williams to respond to tenants about repairs and maintain her properties in a livable condition. The centerpiece of the agreement is a 2-year monitoring plan that sets up regular City inspections of Williams’ properties.

The Neighborhood Law Corps, working with the City’s code enforcement unit, also reached a separate settlement last month to end long-standing problems at a rental property in East Oakland (31 units at 1725 & 1729 Seminary Avenue).

“The tenants were living with very dangerous conditions,” said Patricia Salazar, staff attorney at Centro Legal de la Raza, a nonprofit group that alerted the Neighborhood Law Corps to the case. “Roofs were falling in or damaged, there was constant leaking from the ceiling to the floor and problems with mold, debris and rodents. Some of the tenants have lived there for years, their children are enrolled in local schools, and they don’t want to leave.”

When tenants withheld rent to fix the problems, the owner filed unlawful detainer actions to evict them. In the settlement, owner Daniel Abraham agreed to dismiss those actions and completely rehabilitate the property. Abraham, who recently acquired the property, stepped up to settle before the City had to file a lawsuit, and agreed to work with the City to make the property a positive asset to the tenants and the neighborhood. The previous owner of the property was Liem Le, the notorious landlord who also owned the Amber Tree Apartments on Foothill Boulevard – a property with so many problems that the City was forced to evacuate and relocate the tenants in August.
