



CITY OF OAKLAND
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Office of the City Attorney

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City of Oakland Sues Negligent Landlord

Thirteen West and North Oakland Properties with Inhumane Living Conditions

(Oakland, CA) Today, Oakland City Attorney John Russo and Oakland City Councilmembers Nancy Nadel and Jane Brunner announced the filing of a lawsuit against Elizabeth Williams, the owner of thirteen properties in West and North Oakland (City of Oakland v. Elizabeth Ann Williams RG 06291808).

“With the right to own property comes the responsibility to be a good neighbor and provide humane living conditions to tenants,” said Oakland City Attorney John Russo. “If landlords are unwilling to abide by common decency to provide habitable units then we will try to persuade them; if we can’t persuade them, we’ll take them to court.”

The property owner received multiple tenant complaints regarding broken windows, infestations of rats, mice and cockroaches, as well as natural gas leaks, non-functioning toilets and broken heating units. The surrounding neighbors also complained regarding the blight and illegal activities which spilled out into their neighborhoods from these properties.

According to Councilmember Jane Brunner, “The negative effect of Ms. Williams’ properties on the surrounding neighborhood has been devastating. I am hopeful that legal action will provide neighbors with the relief that they deserve.” City Councilmembers Jane Brunner and Nancy Nadel have worked with neighbors to get the properties fixed, but have found that litigation is the only means left to get the problem solved.

“When landlords neglect their properties as this property owner has, not only do the existing tenants suffer but the whole community gets pulled down,” said Councilmember Nancy Nadel. “Blight attracts blight and even worse, more egregious illegal behavior. Neighbors deserve better and we are determined to help all our residents achieve a decent quality of life in all of our city’s neighborhoods.”

The lawsuit has four causes of action: violating Oakland Municipal Codes and California Health and Safety codes; maintenance of a public nuisance; violating Oakland’s rent control ordinance; and a violation of California Business and Professions Code § 17200 for unlawful business practices.

The 17200 action charges the landlord with allowing *all* of her properties to remain in substandard, dangerous, unhealthy and unsanitary conditions as well as systematically ignoring tenant's requests for necessary repairs.

The Neighborhood Law Corps in the City Attorney's Office settled a similar lawsuit in 2005 against a negligent landlord resulting in the complete rehabilitation of eighteen properties where families with children were plagued with deteriorating floors and ceilings, and infestations of mold, rats and cockroaches. The landlord paid the city \$140,000 in fines.

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