

September 24, 2021

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL

Hon. Buffy Wicks, Chair, and Members
Assembly Select Committee on Social Housing

Re: Fundamental Principles of Social Housing

Dear Chair Wicks and Members:

We are over 80 organizations, including many membership organizations of low-income tenants and union workers across California, that have worked since well before the pandemic to ensure that California lives up to its promise: that every one of our residents enjoy safe, decent, and genuinely affordable housing as a right. Achieving that promise on a scale that will meet the need will require substantial investment in social housing. That includes both the construction of new units of social housing and the preservation of existing units as social housing.

Contrary to that promise, our homes are today treated as commodities available to the highest bidder; with the global financialization of housing described by the United Nations [\[link\]](#), the highest bidder is often an investor in a distant part of the world. Not only does this scheme preclude millions of individuals from gaining access to affordable, safe and stable housing, it also exacerbates the racial inequality felt by communities of color who are statistically the most affected by gentrification, housing displacement, and housing insecurity.

In response to these devastating trends, and the growing pandemic of homelessness in California, since 2018, many of us have launched and expanded a statewide working group on social housing. We are heartened that the policy discussion about social housing has moved from magazines and newspapers to the Capitol. We applaud your leadership in creating this first-ever Select Committee on social housing, and write to share what we have learned, both in our international research on models of social housing and in organizing on the ground in our communities.

While there are various models of both ownership and rental social housing in cities and countries around the globe, they all share an important set of characteristics. Those characteristics add up to a general definition of social housing, as follows:

1. Social housing is decommodified housing, meaning it is either *publicly or cooperatively owned, or owned by a qualified community-based nonprofit* with a mission to provide social housing. It is forever protected from transfer to private, for-profit ownership.
2. It is available at affordable cost to *residents of all income levels*, from the very lowest to those of moderate incomes.
3. It is *permanently* affordable -- unlike, for instance, affordability covenants in the U.S. that often have expiration dates.
4. It provides its residents with *the right to participate democratically* in its operation and management, and protections from arbitrary eviction.

We applaud Assemblymember Lee, a member of this Select Committee, for including this definition of social housing in his pending two-year bill, AB 387.

Thank you again for making social housing an official subject of legislative interest. We look forward to participating in your first Select Committee meeting in October, where we will share our perspectives on the urgent need for social housing, and the appropriate way to define it in state law. We ask that you include one or more representatives of our group as panelists at the inaugural meeting of the Select Committee.

Sincerely,

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