



**TENANTS
TOGETHER**

California's
Statewide Organization
for Renters' Rights

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**Ridgecrest Adopts Kern County's First Just Cause for Eviction Law:
Tenants Together Urges Other Cities Throughout the State to Adopt Similar Laws**

In an extraordinary victory for tenants, the Ridgecrest City Council passed an ordinance last night to stop banks from evicting renters in foreclosed residential properties. A determined group of tenants and community allies, along with the statewide tenant rights organization Tenants Together, pushed for the swift passage of the law to address an epidemic of evictions of tenants after foreclosure.

"This is a great day for Ridgecrest tenants and for the entire community," said Bob Nostrand, a Ridgecrest renter who helped lead the effort to get the law passed. "This law will bring desperately needed relief to renters who are innocent victims of the foreclosure crisis."

The new Ridgecrest law requires that a bank have "just cause" for evicting tenants after foreclosure. The law spells out the specific circumstances where eviction is permitted, such as where the tenant fails to pay rent or where the owner wants to move into the property. Foreclosure is not a recognized reason for evicting tenants under the law. The Ridgecrest law also includes relocation provisions, so that tenants who are evicted through no fault of their own will receive monetary assistance for moving costs.

Ridgecrest joins a growing list of cities that prohibit eviction of tenants due to foreclosure. Some of these anti-eviction laws are longstanding, while others were enacted more recently to address the unfair displacement of tenants after foreclosure. In total, more than a dozen California cities now have laws against eviction of tenants due to foreclosure. The Ridgecrest law, like the law recently passed in Richmond, CA, applies only to properties after foreclosure.

"We congratulate Ridgecrest residents and their leaders for passing this essential law," commented Dean Preston, Executive Director of Tenants Together, California's statewide organization for renters' rights. "Our communities are fed up with unfair evictions by huge national banks. This kind of eviction law is a cost-free way for local governments to protect their residents from unfair displacement, prolonged vacancies and blight. Ridgecrest has set an important example for other cities to follow."

Long overlooked by the media and policymakers, tenants are innocent victims of foreclosures. In March 2009, Tenants Together issue a report titled *Hidden Impact: California Renters in the Foreclosure Crisis*, detailing the impacts of foreclosure on tenants. The report conservatively estimated that at least one third of all residential units in foreclosure in California are rentals. Tenants Together's report urged local jurisdictions to adopt "just cause for eviction" laws as an effective tool to stop these unfair evictions.

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In May, Tenants Together received numerous calls on its Tenant Foreclosure Hotline (415.495.8012) from tenants at the La Mirage complex in Ridgecrest who were facing possible displacement due to foreclosure. After some research, Tenants Together learned that Ridgecrest renters were victims of a statewide mortgage scam involving convicted felon James McConville and his real estate investment company, Diamond House Development. Most of the 300 units at La Mirage, almost all of which were renter-occupied, were at risk of going into foreclosure. "The stories were heartbreaking," said Andy Blue, an organizer with Tenants Together who worked closely with the La Mirage tenants. "These are great tenants who were about to be thrown out of their home for no good reason."

With numerous renters facing possible eviction, Tenants Together worked with local residents to make sure their voices were heard. City officials, concerned about the evictions, hosted a well-attended community forum in June which included representatives from Tenants Together, Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance and city officials. Local media provided extensive coverage of the plight of the La Mirage tenants. Large numbers of tenants attended hearings on the measure at City Hall, greatly outnumbering opponents of the ordinance. A group of realtors spoke against the law, but could not stop the momentum of the tenants who turned out in force at every hearing.

The measure was adopted by a 3-2 vote on Wednesday night. Mayor Steven Morgan, Mayor Pro Tem Ron Carter and Councilmember Jerry Taylor provided the votes necessary to pass the law over the objection of realtors. Councilmembers Thomas Wiknich and Marshall "Chip" Holloway (himself a real estate agent) voted against the measure.

Councilmember Jerry Taylor was the law's most vocal supporter on the City Council. Taylor repeatedly rebutted misinformation about the proposed law, refusing to be deterred by a last minute effort by realtors to derail the proposal. Responding to the concerns raised at one of the hearings, Taylor asserted "This argument that banks don't want to be landlords, I understand it. But they should have thought about that before they wrote an awful lot of bad loans. It's also very easy for them to pick up the phone and hire someone ... to manage those properties."

The Ridgecrest ordinance will take effect in September, 30 days after passage by the City Council. Tenants Together intends to work with city officials, and with the newly formed Ridgecrest Tenants Association, to educate Ridgecrest renters about their rights under the new ordinance.