



News from: Office of the Mayor Libby Schaaf

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MAYOR LIBBY SCHAAF ANNOUNCES SAFE HOUSING INSPECTION PROGRAM TO COMBAT HOUSING CRISIS

Oakland, CA — Today, Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf announced the launch of the Safe Housing Inspection Program, a proactive effort to address the regional affordability crisis impacting Oakland renters.

“At a time when Oakland has the second fastest rising rents in the country and our region is facing a serious affordability crisis with many residents fearful of losing their homes, it shouldn’t be a tenant’s burden to come forward to report unsafe living conditions,” said Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. “Our new Safe Housing Inspection Program takes the responsibility off tenants by having the city initiate inspections and work with landlords to make the needed repairs. This is crucial to preserving safe, affordable housing for existing Oakland residents.”

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For the first time, the Safe Housing Inspection Program leverages the combined efforts and resources of the Oakland Fire Department and the Oakland Department of Planning & Building. It will better serve and protect tenants and landlords by allowing fire officials to make referrals to the Planning & Building Department about the habitability and life safety issues they see during routine fire inspections.

“We applaud Mayor Schaaf’s proactive Safe Housing Inspection Program, which takes a huge step towards ensuring healthy and safe housing for all Oakland renters,” said Anne Tamiko Omura, Executive Director, Eviction Defense Center. “Too often we see low income and working class families with young children suffering in silence with terrible housing conditions like pervasive mold, rodents, leaking plumbing, and no heat. In a tight rental market, they fear that phoning in a complaint could render them homeless. Other tenants who are elderly, disabled, and/or have a language barrier may not only be fearful, but may also be unaware of how to voice a complaint. By spearheading this new program, Mayor Schaaf has shown great sensitivity and determination to ensure decent housing for all Oakland tenants, including Oakland’s most vulnerable populations.”

The program is also significantly expanding routine fire inspections to include individual apartments, not just common areas and building exteriors. All landlords and tenants will be notified in advance of the inspections and permission will be needed from tenants to enter individual apartments.

“This is a more robust program that will allow us to better protect residents,” said Oakland Fire Chief Teresa Deloach Reed. “By working with our city partners in the Department of Planning & Building to refer problems we can more quickly and efficiently address issues to ensure fire safety and improve the quality of life for Oakland residents.”

When the Planning & Building Department receives referrals from the fire inspector, its code enforcement inspectors will work with landlords to address and rectify problems. Landlords may not raise a tenant’s rent to cover the cost of fixing a violation. Compliant landlords who address the concerns in a timely fashion will not incur costs from follow-up inspections.

The new Safe Housing Inspection Program will improve the safety and habitability of a

specific class of privately held rental properties in Oakland's fastest changing neighborhoods by beginning with over 200 smaller buildings with six or more units and three or fewer stories in Oakland's San Antonio/East Lake neighborhood. This is a community that is home to many lower-income and monolingual families who may have faced barriers in navigating the City of Oakland's existing complaint-based system.

"Since I took office 10 months ago my office has received dozens of calls from residents who are living in sub-standard conditions and are too afraid of losing their homes to report it," said Oakland City Councilmember Abel Guillen, who represents District 2. "Many of these people are families with children paying as much as 70 percent of their incomes for rent, which is well above the recommended 30 percent. The Safe Housing Inspection Program is a way for our city to show these families that they don't have to choose between affordability and safety. They can, and should have both."

The City of Oakland is also working in concert with Alameda County to leverage available resources at the county-level to properly address housing issues that may surface during these inspections.

"We thank Mayor Schaaf and all of the city staff for taking this progressive step in maintaining healthy homes for Oakland residents and we appreciate the long and continuing partnership between the City of Oakland and the Alameda County Healthy Homes Department to ensure the health and safety of our residents," said Alameda County Healthy Homes Department Director of Operations Larry Brooks.

Recognizing the need for this type of proactive support for residents, Mayor Schaaf's 2015-2017 budget proposal approved by the Oakland City Council in June, added a staff member to the Department of Planning & Building and funding to unfreeze a fire inspector position. It also formally expanded the existing fire inspection program to allow the Safe Housing Inspection Program to be created.

Mayor Schaaf was joined at the announcement of the Safe Housing Inspection Program by City Councilmember Abel Guillen, Fire Chief Teresa Deloach Reed, Director of Planning & Building Rachel Flynn, Fire Marshall Miguel Trujillo, Fire Code Inspector Cesar Avila, Assistant City Administrator Claudia Cappio, City of Oakland Department of Planning & Building Housing Habitability Fellow Ethan Guy and Alameda County Healthy Homes Department Director of Operations Larry Brooks.

Mayor Schaaf's agenda includes a commitment to creating and supporting equitable jobs and housing. As part of that effort she has assembled a Housing Cabinet to develop strategies that will protect, convert and build housing in Oakland to meet the needs of existing and new residents.

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