

Dear Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors:

On behalf of the organizations signed on to this letter, we call on you to take the measures outlined below to limit the potential exacerbating effects of the coronavirus on Santa Cruz County's housing crisis.

Californians take care of each other. In moments of crisis, Californians know how to pull together. Whether helping our neighbors during an earthquake or opening our homes during a wildfire, we show up for one another. We know that our families and neighborhoods are stronger, safer, and healthier when we show up and represent one another in moments of illness and crisis.

No matter what we look like, where we live, or what's in our wallets, getting sick reminds us that we're all human. But today, as you know, due to the lack of preparation by the Trump administration, most of us do not have access to the testing, vaccines, and treatment we need to get and stay well.

We must stand with and for each other, against anything used to divide us, to demand the care and paid time off every one of us needs, no exceptions. Only by standing united can we rewrite the rules to ensure better health for all.

In light of this public health crisis, when it's imperative that families be stably housed, we call on you, the County of Santa Cruz, to enact the following measures for as long as all residents of Santa Cruz County, regardless of immigration status, are substantially affected by COVID-19:

**1. An Immediate Moratorium on Rent Increases and Evictions**

The need to protect residents that live paycheck to paycheck from the economic fallout of this virus includes protecting them against facing price gouging, eviction and homelessness. Rent increases, even minimal ones, during this time is tantamount to price gouging given the potential for lost wages, and would make tenants more vulnerable to evictions. Eviction would only further spread this disease and make its containment harder because people would not have a home to care for the health, safety and welfare of their families. In addition, forcing tenants to defend themselves in crowded courts at this time is directly at odds with government guidance emphasizing the critical importance of social distancing to contain the spread of the virus. The Santa Cruz County Sheriff must follow the lead of Alameda and San Francisco Counties in suspending enforcement of evictions.

**2. Immediate End to Displacing Unhoused Encampments**

We must put an end to the enforcement/displacement actions against encampments of the unhoused during this crisis.

**3. Emergency Rental or Mortgage Assistance**

We must provide support for workers who have to forgo work for no fault of their own due to the coronavirus outbreak. Government must step in by providing emergency rental or mortgage assistance to "backfill" a substantial share of any income lost to any worker during this crisis, whether or not they become sick themselves, and regardless of classification as an employee or contractor. This also encourages workers to stay home when sick rather than risking the spread of the virus by continuing to work to prevent income loss. We suggest this is done via a sliding scale so that these resources are equitably distributed. The County must also provide rental assistance to people experiencing homelessness since the only way for someone to stabilize, remain healthy, and prevent exposure is in a home.

**4. Prevent Utility Shut-Offs and Halt Fees**

Widespread loss of income will also likely cause increased numbers of people to fall behind on bills and risk having their water, gas, electricity, and other basic utility services shut-off. All public and private utilities doing business in Santa Cruz County should halt all utility shut-offs and related fees during this crisis.

**5. Immediately Deploy More Public Hand-Washing Stations and Port-a-Potties**

Hand-washing is a critical public health safety measure at all times, but especially now, during this pandemic. More public sanitation facilities will help limit the spread of the virus, especially for our vulnerable unhoused population.

As organizations representing the people of Santa Cruz County affected daily by our housing affordability and homelessness crisis, we agree with these measures and sign in support.

Supervisors, help us stop the coronavirus from exacerbating our housing crisis!

Respectfully,

ACLU of Northern California

Neighborly Santa Cruz

Santa Cruz Homeless Union

Food Not Bombs

Pajaro Valley Pride

University of California Santa Cruz NAACP