

EBHO

EAST BAY HOUSING ORGANIZATIONS

THE HOUSING BILL OF RIGHTS

Developed by EBHO's Interfaith Communities United for Affordable Housing (ICU)

Preamble:

A hallmark of a healthy community, a vibrant, just economy, and an exemplary democracy is the unlimited opportunity for full participation by all members. Severely restricted housing options for middle and lower income families have an unacceptable impact on their exercise of all of their rights. Responsibility and accountability to the highest good of the community should be shared by all stakeholders including residents, corporate and business entities, government, and all public, private, and community institutions. Public resources should be used for those with the greatest need to preserve housing opportunities for all and prevent homelessness. Affordable housing is a fundamental human right, not a privilege.

These rights derive from many of humanity's cultural resources. For example:

And God shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

But they shall sit under their vine and under their fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it.

For all people will walk every one in the name of their god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.

Micah 4: verses 3, 4, 5

The prophet Micah, in 800 BC, anticipated an ideal period in life when all persons will enjoy pleasant, peaceful, and secure shelter, "each under their own vines and fig trees." And "no one shall make them afraid." A time when all would "live and let live," each with their own gods and beliefs. Interestingly, one's own "vines" today might mean safe, secure shelter; and one's own "fig tree" certainly translates into productive jobs at livable wages.

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The need for adequate, safe, secure, accessible and affordable housing in Alameda and Contra Costa counties is critical. Less than ten percent of residents in both counties can afford to own a house. Many tenants live in deplorable, overcrowded, unaffordable housing situations. And too many are homeless.

Since the first National Housing Act of 1944, the United States Congress has set a goal that every person be housed in "decent, safe and sanitary housing". This moral commitment has been re-affirmed in every subsequent Housing Act by Congress (1954, 1968, 1974, and 1978). Because "decent, safe and sanitary housing" is the right of every person, a much greater moral and political outcry must be raised:

Whereas, housing should be available and affordable to rent or buy to households at every income level and appropriate to need, family size and circumstance;

Whereas, everyone has a right to a secure tenure, and be protected against unjust evictions and displacement;

Whereas, housing should be healthy, safe, and habitable; free from hazards, toxics, contamination, harassment, and violence – both domestic and from outside the home;

Whereas, housing should be related to living wage jobs, resources, services, transportation, stores, schools, and parks; and should be economically, racially, and ethnically integrated, and culturally diverse;

Whereas, housing is an investment in our community; housing is a tool for enhancing and building up the community and is not for unreasonable or speculative profit;

Whereas, everyone has a right to housing without discrimination and has the obligation to respect another's right to housing regardless of race, national or ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, gender, mental or physical disability, the presence of children, citizenship status, medical condition, and employment status;

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Therefore, be it resolved that housing be developed and maintained to be affordable and accessible for all, and connected to services to meet the needs of all residents in our diverse communities;

Therefore, be it also resolved that housing be developed and maintained to be healthy, safe, and environmentally and ecologically sustainable;

Therefore, be it further resolved that renters and homeowners be fully informed of their rights and responsibilities, both financial and communal, and be protected from predatory lending, undisclosed fees, displacement and other unfair practices and terms in order to keep them in their homes and to avoid foreclosure, bankruptcy, and evictions.

Therefore, be it finally resolved that we the undersigned members of Interfaith Communities United (ICU) in response to the critical housing situation in our counties will begin to raise our moral indignation against this injustice. The current crisis is an outrage! Justice demands that every voice be raised until governments from the federal, state, county and city levels begin to listen. Justice demands that economic interests and businesses begin to respond much more creatively. Justice demands that substantial remedies emerge. We call upon every congregation, every temple, every mosque and every spiritual and moral constituency to consider what we here have initiated, and add their voices to this cry for justice.

PLEASE SIGN THIS BILL OF HOUSING RIGHTS:

Organization: _____ **For Reference Only** |__|

Name: _____ **Title:** _____

Contact #: _____ **E-Mail:** _____

Please return to or contact Rev. Phil Lawson, Interfaith Program Director, at the below address and phone number or email at phil@ebho.org.

(document revised as of 4/19/07)