



How the LA City Attorney Can Protect Tenants' Rights

Introduction

Millions of Angelenos—myself included—are renters. With the cost of buying a home in Los Angeles soaring out of reach for so many, renting is not a temporary step on the way to homeownership: it's how most of us live, raise families, and build community.

We all deserve to live in safe, stable, and habitable conditions without fear of being taken advantage of by unscrupulous corporate landlords. Yet too often, tenants across Los Angeles face harassment, illegal evictions, unsafe housing conditions, unjust fees, and rent increases that push them to the brink of displacement.

While California and the City of Los Angeles have some of the strongest tenant protection laws in the country, enforcement has not kept pace. Unscrupulous corporate landlords routinely skirt the law, and many tenants feel powerless to assert their rights or hold property owners accountable.

The LA City Attorney can and should be on the front lines of the fight for tenants' rights. As City Attorney, I will build a Tenants' Rights Unit, marshalling litigation, investigative, and community engagement resources to protect renters. I will work hand in hand with tenants, housing advocates, tenants' unions and community organizations to aggressively enforce existing laws, close loopholes, and promote housing stability and affordability for all Angelenos.

LA City Attorney's Authority to Protect Tenants

The LA City Attorney has a robust and underutilized set of legal tools to hold abusive landlords accountable and stand up for tenants across the city. The City Attorney's Office can use its civil enforcement powers to recover money for renters, hold bad actors accountable, stop illegal conduct, and protect the housing stability of millions of Angelenos.

One of the most powerful enforcement tools available to the City Attorney is California's Unfair Competition Law (Business & Professions Code § 17200 et seq.). This statute allows the City Attorney to bring civil lawsuits against landlords who violate any federal, state, or local law—including laws governing tenant rights, habitability, rent control, and eviction protections. For example, the City Attorney can take action against unlawful evictions, housing code violations, illegal rent increases, deceptive or excessive housing fees, unreturned security deposits, and even price gouging during states of emergency.



The City Attorney can seek a wide range of remedies for violations:

- Civil penalties of up to \$2,500 per violation to punish and deter illegal conduct;
- Restitution—meaning money wrongfully taken from tenants, such as illegal fees, unreturned security deposits, or rent overcharges—that can be recovered and returned to tenants' pockets; and
- Injunctive relief, such as court orders forcing landlords to stop harassment or repair uninhabitable conditions.

The City Attorney can enforce the Tenant Anti-Harassment Ordinance (TAHO), which was enacted by the City of Los Angeles to crack down on predatory and coercive tactics used to drive tenants out of their homes. TAHO prohibits a wide range of abusive landlord behavior, including the refusal to make necessary repairs, illegal entry into tenants' units, verbal harassment, threats related to immigration status, misuse of buyout offers, and interference with tenant organizing efforts. Many of these tactics are aimed at pushing tenants—especially long-term, rent-controlled tenants—out of their units so that landlords can raise the rent.

The City Attorney can play a vital enforcement role when it comes to rent control laws, particularly the Los Angeles Rent Stabilization Ordinance. The Ordinance applies to most rental units built before October 1, 1978, and it limits annual rent increases, requires just-cause for evictions, mandates relocation payments in certain circumstances, and imposes strict requirements on how units are registered and managed. While the Los Angeles Housing Department oversees the day-to-day administration of the Ordinance, the City Attorney has the authority to enforce it under its state law authority.

The City Attorney has enforcement authority under California's anti-price gouging laws, which apply during declared emergencies such as wildfires, pandemics, or natural disasters. Under Penal Code § 396, it is illegal for landlords to raise rent by more than 10% during a declared state of emergency. This law applies to both residential and commercial rental units, regardless of whether they are covered under LA's rent control ordinance.

Going After Slumlords

In every corner of Los Angeles, there are corporate landlords whose entire business model is built on neglect, intimidation, and exploitation. These are the slumlords—corporate property owners and managers who allow buildings to fall into dangerous disrepair, who use threats and harassment to push tenants out, and who see the law not as a limit but as something to work around. As City Attorney, I will make it a top priority to go after slumlords who treat tenants as disposable and profit from unsafe, illegal housing.



Too many renters live in units plagued by mold, pest infestations, broken plumbing, collapsing ceilings, or faulty electrical systems. These conditions aren't just violations of the law—they're threats to health, safety, and basic dignity. In many cases, slumlords intentionally refuse to maintain buildings as a tactic to drive out long-term or rent-controlled tenants and replace them with new tenants who will pay far higher rents. This conduct isn't accidental—it's a business strategy. And I will use the full power of the law to put an end to it.

As City Attorney, I would aggressively pursue slumlords using every enforcement tool available. We will file civil lawsuits under the Unfair Competition Law to recover penalties, restitution, and court orders requiring the repair of hazardous properties. We will also prioritize slumlord cases involving unlawful evictions—including constructive evictions where tenants are forced out by harassment, neglect, or threats rather than formal legal process. When landlords unlawfully lock tenants out, cut off utilities, or issue fraudulent eviction notices, they are not just breaking the law—they are destabilizing families, disrupting communities, and fueling homelessness. These actions will be met with swift and serious legal consequences.

What's more, we will treat slumlord enforcement as a matter of racial and economic justice. We know that the worst abuses are disproportionately concentrated in working-class communities and communities of color. We will target investigations accordingly and ensure that our legal interventions deliver meaningful results for tenants who have long been underserved and overburdened.

Going after slumlords isn't just about punishing bad actors—it's about changing the incentives. When landlords see that failing to maintain their buildings and abusing tenants leads to real consequences, the cost of doing business the wrong way goes up. And when tenants see that the law is on their side—and that the City Attorney will fight for them—it builds power, stability, and hope.

Promoting Housing Affordability

Keeping housing affordable in Los Angeles isn't just about building new units—it's also about protecting renters from illegal price hikes, deceptive fees, and loopholes that drive up housing costs for working Angelenos. As City Attorney, I will use the Office's full enforcement authority to defend housing affordability and prevent unscrupulous corporate landlords from undermining tenant protections through unlawful or unfair practices.

At the foundation of affordability in LA is our Rent Stabilization Ordinance, which protects nearly 900,000 units citywide. I will take a proactive approach to rent control enforcement—going after landlords who illegally raise rents, fail to register units, or try to evict tenants under false pretenses. We will work closely with the Housing Department,



tenants' unions, and community organizations to identify violations early and respond forcefully.

Beyond rent control, we will also enforce California's anti-price gouging law, which—as discussed above—prohibits landlords from raising rent by more than 10% during states of emergency. Whether during a natural disaster, a public health crisis, or an economic shock, this law is a crucial tool for keeping tenants housed when they are most vulnerable. We will not hesitate to investigate and prosecute landlords who exploit emergencies to price tenants out of their homes.

In addition, we will crack down on “junk fees” and deceptive pricing—practices that quietly but significantly drive up the cost of renting. Whether it's inflated “processing” fees, undisclosed monthly surcharges, or improperly withheld security deposits, these tactics erode housing affordability and often violate consumer protection laws. Under the Unfair Competition Law, we can take legal action to stop these practices and recover money for tenants who've been misled or overcharged.

These enforcement efforts are not only about protecting individual renters—they're about preserving the broader affordability of housing in Los Angeles. Every illegal rent hike, every fraudulent eviction, every hidden fee chips away at a city where working people can afford to live. As City Attorney, I will treat affordability not just as an economic issue, but as a legal one.

Priorities Informed by the Community

As City Attorney, I will take a grassroots approach to addressing the complex, deeply rooted challenges facing renters in Los Angeles—and that starts with listening directly to tenants themselves. Too often, enforcement decisions are made in a vacuum, without engaging the people most affected. That will change under my leadership.

I will work to build strong, ongoing relationships with tenant advocacy organizations, community organizers, legal aid providers, and—most importantly—everyday renters across this city. From long-time residents of rent-stabilized buildings to working families in unregulated units, tenants know what's happening on the ground. They know where the laws are being violated, where the harassment is taking place, and where enforcement gaps exist. Their insight is essential.

This won't be a passive operation. Rather than waiting for complaints to come in—often from the few who already know how to navigate the system—I will take a proactive and intentional approach to tenant engagement. We will go to where tenants are: community meetings, neighborhood councils, legal clinics, senior centers, and tenant union events. This will give us a more complete and equitable picture of where violations are occurring and how they're impacting renters across demographics, housing types, and neighborhoods.



That community insight will directly inform our enforcement priorities at the LA City Attorney's Office. Whether it's a pattern of harassment by a corporate landlord or widespread illegal rent increases in a particular neighborhood, we will use what we learn to target investigations and deploy legal resources where they are most needed. And when we act, we'll do so transparently, keeping tenants informed and involved—not sidelined.

Ultimately, the goal is to build a track record that earns trust. When tenants see that the City Attorney's Office is listening, showing up, and delivering results, we can create a virtuous cycle: more renters will report abuses, more violations will come to light, and more unscrupulous corporate landlords will be held accountable. That's how we move from reactive enforcement to a proactive tenant protection strategy rooted in partnership, equity, and impact.