Emergency eviction protections in Contra Costa

BARHII Membership Meeting – April 17, 2020
What’s been happening in Contra Costa?

- 5 of 19 jurisdictions adopted eviction moratoria in past 3 weeks
  - Concord, Richmond, Pittsburg, Antioch, El Cerrito
  - San Pablo pending
  - Richmond, Antioch are revisiting to improve
- Draft ordinance comes to 4/21 BOS emergency meeting
- Huge community support
  - 65 orgs → sign-on letter to BOS
  - 98 public comments at first BOS meeting, 75+ at next one
  - 400+ calls/emails to BOS members
  - Support across sectors: residents, service providers, labor, faith, philanthropy
  - Regional support: BARHII, EBHO, ACCE
Policy components

• Moratorium on all evictions (informal and court-filed)
  • Exceptions for health/safety

• Moratorium on all rent increases

• Grace period details are key
  • Length of time
  • Definition of terms

• Doing the math: $2,400/mo average rent + 2 months back rent = $4,800 extra to pay @ 120-day grace period to repay = $3,600 (current & prorated back rent) due each of the 4 months after return to work, vs. $20/hr job = $3,600 gross income/month.
What helped us succeed?

• Rapid & opportunistic
• Broad coalition
• Under the radar
• Inside/outside strategies
• Access to content/legal expertise
What’s making it hard?

Technical challenges:
• State policies (Governor, Judicial Council) created local confusion
• Detailed and technical – and the details matter
• Lack of model ordinance
• Contra Costa County proposed ordinance is likely weaker than cities’

Political challenges:
• Risk-averse county/BOS culture
• Pushback: “What about landlords?”
• No deep history of social justice advocacy in Contra Costa
What eviction moratoria *don’t do*

• Prevent additional financial hardship post-emergency – it just kicks the can down the road
  • But without moratoria, thousands of evictions would be happening now

• Address systemic inequities caused by capitalism, racism
  • Black people, people of color, immigrants are disproportionately hurt
  • Low-wage residents tend to work in public-facing service sector and gig economy jobs that were first to be lost when stay-at-home order issued

• Address long-standing power imbalance between landlords and tenants

• Increase economic stability/opportunity for those living on margins
Thinking beyond the State of Emergency

• **Pessimistic outlook:**
  • Back to business as usual – same old inequities & power imbalances
  • Evictions multiply as soon as emergency moratoria are lifted
  • Tenants evicted → property owners default → 2008 all over again
  • Increase in corporate ownership of rentals → more tenants hurt

• **Optimistic outlook:**
  • Regional housing trusts, statewide rental registry, stronger rent control/just cause protections, other innovations to protect tenants, preserve housing
  • Increase in collective community power
  • Shift from “me” to ”we” as we realize our economic interdependence