

1. Tell us something about yourself and why you have decided to consider running for Rent Stabilization Board Commissioner.

I moved to Berkeley because I was motivated and inspired by the progressive history and reputation the City had. However, it did not take long to realize that the reality of Berkeley was quite different from my expectations. I received a crash course in Berkeley government during my time as an intern for Councilmember Kriss Worthington. There, I led the charge on redistricting to stop a malicious gerrymandering. Little did I know this would result in a two-year journey that led to myself and other progressive activists being sued because of my advocacy and participation in a democratic process. The attempts to silence me only motivated me to speak up, especially as I became more aware of the many issues our City faces.

As a Legislative Aide to Councilmember Jesse Arreguin for over a year, I have read the emails and heard the phone calls from people all across Berkeley who struggle every day to keep housing. I have worked on several policies to deal with the affordable housing crisis and to improve tenant rights, including proposals to increase the revenue of the Housing Trust Fund, a Tenant Buyout Policy, the Rental Housing Safety Program, a Tenant Protection Ordinance, and advocating to reform Costa-Hawkins among other policies. I will be a progressive voice for stronger rent control and tenant protections.

2. How much time are you able to devote to the campaign? A contested campaign can consume 20 hours a week of your time until the election. As a Commissioner, you'll be attending one lengthy evening board meeting a month and a minimum of two daytime committee meetings (plus preparation time!) Are your hours flexible? Are late meetings a problem? Can you attend daytime meetings?

I am able and willing to devote as much time to the campaign as needed to make sure our slate wins. As someone who frequently participates in late meetings, this will not be a problem. As a current commissioner on the Public Works Commission, I have never missed a regular meeting or subcommittee meeting. I can make my schedule flexible and will prioritize meetings of the Rent Board.

3. What experience have you had with Berkeley's rent control ordinance, the Rent Board's staff, or the elected board?

I have attended all the 4x4 Committee meetings over the past three years, gaining a strong understanding of various laws and proposals at both the Council and Rent Board. As a legislative aide, I have helped out constituents who face eviction and worked on rent reductions for those whose landlords have failed to properly maintain their unit. I have also worked with staff and the board on various proposals improving the rights of tenants. Additionally, as the current Secretary of the Berkeley Tenants Union, I have communicated with various organizations on housing and tenant issues, and advocated on countless proposals sent to Council and commissions.

4. Tell us about at least three issues that you consider important to tenants in Berkeley.

Housing Safety

I remember very clearly the day of June 16th, 2015, when six young people lost their lives on the same block I live on because of poor housing conditions. While we cannot change the past, we can influence

the future and prevent such tragedies from happening again. That is why I worked on proposals to improve balcony safety – proposals that are now being looked at on a statewide level. I have also worked on expanding the Rental Housing Safety Program, making tenants more aware of their rights when it comes to housing safety. Of course, we must continue our efforts to improve housing safety, as everyone should have a right to safe housing.

Displacement/Gentrification

I have worked with community activists on the Adeline Corridor Plan, addressing the wave of gentrification in South Berkeley. In 1970, African Americans made up 23.5% of Berkeley's population, but in 2010, that dropped to 10%. Much of our city's history and culture is being erased as a consequence of the housing affordability crisis, especially in South Berkeley where families who have lived there for generations are being priced out their homes. More must be done to protect our city's diversity and culture. I support expanding Measure Y protections and assistance to those facing Ellis Act evictions, along with prioritizing affordable housing for those at the lowest income levels.

Tenant Harassment

Too often, I receive phone calls from tenants who are being harassed by their landlord. In the current housing climate, landlords have large incentives to remove long term tenants. For example, some landlords acting in bad faith use tenant buyouts as a way to circumnavigate evictions, using pressure tactics and intimidation to force tenants to take the offer. I worked on the recently passed Tenant Buyout Ordinance which ensures that landlords cannot harass tenants when it comes to making these offers. I also crafted the recently proposed Tenant Protection Ordinance, which if passed, will provide tenants a series of much needed rights. It is unacceptable for someone to feel intimidated in their home, and I will strongly advocate against such harassment.

5. What is the role of the Rent Board Commissioners? What powers do they have? What changes do you think should be made in how the Rent Board operates?

The role of a Rent Board Commissioner is to interpret and follow the Rent Stabilization and Eviction for Good Cause Ordinance. The powers invested in the Board include, but are not limited to, regulating rents, preventing unjust evictions, holding hearings on landlord-tenant disputes, promoting and recommending legislation to Council, ensuring compliance of regulations, and maintaining Berkeley's diversity.

In this housing affordability crisis, more people are reaching out to the Rent Board than ever before. The staff have been doing a fantastic job, but are overwhelmed with the amount of requests. Therefore, we need to increase resources and services to ensure we can adequately advise tenants and landlords and provide outreach so tenants know their rights.

5. (a) How do you feel about affordable housing? (b) What do you think about low-income housing?

- a. When I hear the phrase "affordable housing", I ask affordable for who? We are seeing a movement towards prioritizing "affordable housing" for those earning a salary \$100,000 a year. This is not affordable for the single mother who must work multiple jobs to pay the rent and raise her children. This is not affordable for the senior who is on a fixed income. This is not affordable for the student or recent graduate who is drowning in student loan debt. I believe that housing is a human right, and while we should make sure people of all income levels have access to housing, we must prioritize housing for those at the lowest income levels.

- b. According to the 2007-14 Regional Housing Need Allocation, Berkeley is basically meeting its needs for adding market-rate housing (93%), yet only 51% of the total needed housing. This is because we are nowhere near meeting the requirements for low-income housing (21%). Compared to the County, we are surpassing neighboring cities on market-rate but far behind on low-income housing. It is a travesty that we would allow the rental market to become so unbalanced against those with the least ability to afford housing in Berkeley. I strongly support increasing revenue to the Housing Trust Fund. This includes increasing the Affordable Housing Mitigation Fee to a minimum of \$34,000 per unit, with no exemptions for discounted rates, and increasing the windfall profits tax. While recent Council votes against proposals I have worked on to increase funding for affordable housing is a frustrating setback, I will continue to advocate funding for low-income to extremely low-income housing. We must also provide incentives to expand and preserve low-income housing, including housing for those on Section 8.

6. The Berkeley Housing element says, "Ensure that below-market-rate housing is distributed as evenly as possible throughout the community." What are the pluses and minuses of building those units as parts of new projects, vs. using set-aside fees from those projects instead to build low- and mixed-income buildings around the city? We want to emphasize that this question is unsettled area and there are no right or wrong answers.

I believe that we should expand the amount of inclusionary housing provided in new developments. During my participation on the Zoning Adjustments Board, I led the charge to provide on-site low-income housing units at the 2211 Harold Way Project. After the developer laughed off that proposal, I voted against the luxury skyscraper, knowing that this would only exacerbate the housing crisis and gentrification in Berkeley. In the end, the project only contributed \$10.5 million to affordable housing for projects that may not be built for another decade, if at all. According to the 2015 Nexus Study on Affordable Housing, it cost \$429,400 to build an affordable unit. If just 10% of the units at Harold Way were reserved for low-income, that would be a value of nearly \$13 million.

In this housing affordability crisis, we need affordable housing now, which is why we must have inclusionary units. This is the fastest way to gain guaranteed affordable units. Additionally, I believe we should expand the percentage of inclusionary units, prioritizing for those at 50% Area Median Income (AMI) or less. Of course, this is not mutually exclusive, as we should also be financing affordable housing projects on top of that. This is because there are plenty of other ways to fund affordable housing rather than just the Affordable Housing Mitigation Fee, and we must look into expanding funding through raising the windfall profits tax as one example.

7. Is a pro-tenant Rent Board capable of treating both large and small landlords fairly? Explain.

A pro-tenant Rent Board is and has been capable of treating large and small landlords fairly. In dealing with disputes between landlords and tenants, the Board must apply the rules and regulations as written. Historically, in many cases this means the Board has sided with landlords. We must continue to expand outreach to both tenants and landlords, as this will help them better understand and navigate Rent Control.

8. How do you think that rent and eviction controls are related to homelessness? Can the Rent Board have any effect on the homeless situation?

A recent survey by the City revealed that people consider the two most important issues to be affordable housing and homelessness. These two issues complement each other, and I believe that the rise in homelessness over the past few years is correlated to the rise in rents. The reality is homelessness would be significantly higher if it was not for Rent Control. I have helped out people who have lived in their homes for decades, are on a fixed income, and have been harassed by their landlord who has threatened eviction. They would have nowhere to live if they were forced out of their homes. We need to protect those who are on the verge of homelessness and help find permanent housing for those who are homeless.

As a member of the Berkeley Homeless Task Force, I was a contributor to Task Force Report published in June 2015. It concluded that the biggest priority to address the homeless crisis is “to adopt a Housing First goal, and work towards expanding the supply of housing and housing subsidies available to rapidly house homeless people, stabilize them, provide supportive services to help them escape the cycle of homelessness”. I also served on the Homeless Commission during a discussion regarding the Berkeley Way Project and helped move it a step closer to being realized.

The Rent Board does have an effect on the homeless situation. By strengthening eviction regulations and ensuring rents are not raised too significantly, we can help stem the rise of homelessness in our community.

9. What do you consider to be your constituency or base of support? What organizations are you affiliated with? What qualities would you bring to the slate?

Having interacted with many organizations in Berkeley on a multitude of issues, I have a far-reaching base of support. As a recent graduate of UC Berkeley, I have strong support in the student community, which I still regularly interact with. As the former Vice President of Membership of Cal Dems and member of the Student Labor Committee, and current member of the ASUC Housing Commission, I have established networks within various student groups. As the current Secretary of the East Bay Young Democrats, I have made connections with young professionals throughout Berkeley and the region.

I also gather support from labor activists and unions. I have been heavily involved with Berkeley for Working Families, which is leading the charge on placing on the ballot a proposal to raise the minimum wage and expand sick leave in Berkeley. I have worked closely with SEIU 1021, AFSCME 3299, and other unions in fighting for fair labor standards.

On the housing front, as a Steering Committee member and current Secretary of the Berkeley Tenants Union, I have led efforts on housing issues and advocacy of policies. For the past couple years, I have been involved with the Berkeley Homeless Task Force, working on issues such as Tiny Homes. More recently, I have attended meetings with Friends of Adeline and the Berkeley Progressive Alliance, connecting with community activists.

As a former intern of Councilmember Worthington and current staffer to Councilmember Arreguin, I have cooperated with various organizations on various issues. Examples include working with the NAACP and ACLU on police accountability, Sierra Club on environmental issues, League of Women Voters and Common Cause on government transparency, just to name a few.

Having traversed the Berkeley political system, I provide knowledge and experience on how to navigate both the campaign and policy making. I will deliver the highest level of commitment and enthusiasm, bringing fresh perspectives and a strong voice to advocate for our policies.

10. Please check out on our website (berkeleytenantconvention.net) two potential ballot measures affecting tenants that will be on the ballot in November: (a) Windfall Profits Tax, and (b) Amending Measure Y to increase relocation payments and prevent family evictions during the school year. Explain your position on both.

- a. Having attended planning meetings for the Windfall Profits Tax, I strongly support an increase in the Business License Tax on residential units to 2.8%. When searching for an apartment in 2012, I looked at a two-bedroom apartment going for \$2400. I did not move there, but if I did, I would have been squeezed in with several other people into small rooms. Today, that very apartment now costs \$3830, about a 60% increase in less than four years. That apartment is Library Gardens. The point is, with rents skyrocketing, owners are reaping major profits at the expense of tenants. I oppose tax exemptions for new developments, as these places (such as Library Gardens) are where the largest windfall profits are being made and are having some of the biggest impacts on rents throughout our communities. I support tax exemptions for Section 8 housing and for small landlords who own less than 5 units.
- b. I have also been in attendance of meetings where this item has been discussed. We absolutely need to prevent family evictions during the school year. While not because of eviction, as a child I moved between schools during the school year, and I know how difficult that transition can be. We must also adjust the relocation payment amount in light of the changes in rent prices since the payments were last amended 16 years ago. I believe we should tie the increases to the rate of inflation, so we don't deal with a similar undervalue of the payment in future years.

11. The Convention asks all candidates to sign a pledge to not run against or endorse against the slate the Convention selects. Will you sign it? Do you think that the pledge is important? Do you think it's fair?

The candidates endorsed at the Tenant Convention represent the voice of a progressive coalition. To run against the decision of our communities would be a slap in the face of our democratic process. We already are likely to experience competition from candidates who do not represent pro-tenant values, and running against a progressive slate as a progressive is a foolish action that jeopardizes everything we work for. I will unequivocally sign a pledge not to run against or endorse against the Convention slate and I will do everything I can to get the slate elected, regardless if I am on it or not.

12. If you are nominated by the convention, will you agree, in concert with other slate members, to hire a coordinator with full authority to make campaign decisions in consultation with the slate? The slate will retain the power to determine an overall budget and replace the coordinator.

We need to approach decision making as a team. I believe that a campaign coordinator will be an integral part of running an effective and efficient campaign. But in order for this to work, there must be consensus from the slate as to what campaign decisions are made.