

Answers to Rent Board Convention Questions 2016
by Leah Simon-Weisberg

1. Why I would like to run for the Rent Stabilization Board Commissioner.

I am the Legal Director of Tenants Together. I have devoted my legal career to tenants and advocating for their right to have stability and safety when it comes to housing. I have practiced in a majority of the jurisdictions in California that have rent control. I am presently helping several more jurisdictions pass rent control in the Bay Area. I drafted the ballot measures for Richmond and Alameda, the models upon which Burlingame and Mountain View ballot measures are based.

I want to be a commissioner on the Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board because I feel strongly that an elected board is very important for the success of an effective program. When I have recommended to jurisdictions that they include an elected board to their rent control ordinances, they worry that they will have trouble recruiting qualified and committed people to run. This encouraged me to put my time where my mouth was and run for the rent board in my community.

2. Time for Campaign and being on the board.

I have the opportunity to work four days a week and so will have time to work on the campaign as well as participate actively once elected.

3. Experience with Berkeley's Rent Control ordinance, the rent board staff or the elected board.

I am a tenant in Berkeley. I am familiar with Berkeley's rent control ordinance because I have studied it in the process of drafting ballot measures for Richmond and Alameda. I have consulted Rent Board staff on many matters when assisting tenants and looking for best practices. I have presented to the elected rent board on a few legislative issues and know many of the board members through my tenant rights work in the Bay Area.

4. Three issues important to tenants in Berkeley.

- a. New construction in Berkeley is failing to address the needs of families.
- b. Lack of Affordability of Housing in Berkeley is leading to displacement of long term residents.
- c. Strong enforcement of the present rent and eviction control program.

5. Affordable housing and low-income housing. Housing should be safe and affordable. Low-income housing is an important component of ensuring that housing be safe and affordable for everyone. Berkeley needs more affordable

housing to be built while continuing to keep the presently control units secure.

6. **Ensure that below-market- rate housing is distributed as evenly as possible through out the community.** Berkeley needs to continue to work to become and remain integrated. Everyone has the right to live in highly resourced neighborhoods. This means that low-income and racially diverse people must have the opportunity to live in all parts of Berkeley. All new construction must include units that are affordable for all economic sectors. Development projects should not be allowed to pay fees so as not to have “inclusionary units.” There are just not enough resources to allow any projects to be all “market” or “luxury” because the need for affordable housing is so enormous. Each market unit is preventing the availability of what is needed. The set-aside money just does not provide enough money to make up for the units that are not being built. In addition, research has shown that economically integrated housing creates stronger economies.
7. **Is a pro-tenant Rent Board capable of treating both large and small landlords fairly?** The purpose of the rent board is to ensure that rental housing is effectively and justly regulated in order to protect tenants. All landlords, regardless of how many units they own, must be held to the same standard—in the same way that whether you are a big or a small restaurant you must answer to the same health and safety code. The individual hearing process allows for each landlord to raise unique situations that might require a unique response. It is through that process that a pro-tenant rent board may ensure that all landlords enjoy fair treatment.
8. **How do you think that rent and eviction controls are related to homelessness? Can the rent board have any effect on homelessness?** Rent and eviction controls are a very important part of preventing homelessness. Most people that are homeless were evicted just before they became homeless. Without rent and eviction controls even more people would be homeless. The rent board must continue to make sure that there is effective counseling and enforcement to reduce the number of tenants that become homeless because they lose their rent controlled apartments.
9. **What do you consider to be our constituency or base of support? What organizations are affiliated with? What qualities will you bring to the slate?** I will bring extensive experience to the board. As a housing attorney for over 13 years, I will have very little learning curve. I will have a useful perspective having practiced in many rent control and non-rent control jurisdictions as well as having written several rent control and just cause for eviction ordinances. I am well known in the tenant community and will bring that strength to the campaign. I am on the PTA of Malcolm X and feel that I will be able to bring that base to the campaign as well. I live on the Southside

of Berkeley; which will be an important constituency for the November 2016 election.

10. Ballot measures

I strongly support both of these ballot measures:

- a. **Safe and affordable Homes Tax.** I think this is an excellent start to creating more resources available for the construction of new affordable housing.
- b. **Amending Measure Y to increase relocation payments and prevent family evictions during the school year.** I believe that the relocation amounts in Berkeley are too low and do not cover the costs that a tenant would experience if they are evicted for a no cause eviction. Eviction is a very traumatic experience for children. Success at school can be greatly impacted when children are forced to move in the middle of the year. San Francisco has passed a similar law and it has been very helpful. They are also looking at passing one that prevents the eviction of teachers as well.

11. I will sign the pledge and thank it is fair.

12. I will agree to hire coordinator.