**2018 Rent Stabilization Board Candidate Questionnaire**

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

My name is Soli Alpert. I am a Junior at UC Berkeley majoring in Political Science and Minoring in Public Policy. I currently work as a Legislative Assistant for Councilmember Kate Harrison and serve as the Political Director of the Cal Berkeley Democrats, Executive Vice President of the UC Berkeley Progressive Student Association, and Secretary-Controller of the California Young Democrats Progressive Caucus. I was born and raised in San Francisco.

I am running for Rent Board because students, already a large portion of Berkeley’s population, make up a disproportionate number of Berkeley renters. Students are particularly vulnerable to abuse. They are often first time renters, they move frequently, and they often are unaware of their rights. I believe students deserve a voice on the Rent Board who will advocate for their needs and highlight their experiences. As a student, I am also uniquely positioned to reach student communities to make sure they do know their rights, and know where to turn if they need assistance.

1. How much time are you able to devote as a Commissioner? Are your hours flexible? Can you attend meetings until as late as 11:00 pm? Can you attend a two‑hour twice‑a‑month daytime meeting?

I will be taking the upcoming semester off for the campaign and the beginning of the Rent Board term. I will be able to craft the following semesters schedule to accommodate both my work on the Council and my role as a Legislative Assistant. I have been an increasingly active participant in all levels of politics for the past three years as a student, and I am confident I can balance being a student and a Rent Board Commissioner, as students have in the past.

1. What experience have you had with Berkeley’s Rent Stabilization Ordinance, the Rent Board’s staff and the elected Board?

Last election I was a volunteer on the successful campaign to elect the Pro Tenant CALI slate to the Rent Board. I have been to multiple meetings of the Rent Board. I frequently refer students to Rent Board staff when they come to me with issues around their leases. I have begun to read Berkeley’s Rent Stabilization Ordinance. As a Legislative Assistant, I have significant experience with reading, writing, and analyzing local laws.

1. Tell us about at least three issues that you consider important to tenants in Berkeley.
	1. Failure of management to properly maintain apartments. I have heard frequently from my fellow students that their apartment managers don’t maintain their apartments to the standards of their lease and City law. While Berkeley law provides for rent reductions for tenants whose apartments are not properly maintained, many tenants, especially students, are not aware of their rights and don’t know where to turn to receive assistance. I would like to help coordinate between the Rent Board, the University, and the Student Government to help ensure that students know about the protections they have and the resources that are available to them.
	2. Tenant Harassment. I am happy that the City passed the landmark Tenant Protection Ordinance (BMC 13.79), but simply enshrining these protections in law does not mean that harassment has ended. Just as many tenants don’t know about their rights and resources in regards to upkeep, far too many don’t know about their right to be free from harassment. Berkeley’s Rent Control and Just Cause protections are threatened when landlords force people to evict themselves through persistent and illegal harassment. The Rent Board must work to ensure that these new protections are communicated throughout the Berkeley community, and partnership with the campus community will be critical in that effort.
	3. Lack of vacancy control due to Costa Hawkins. Students in particular are adversely impacted by Costa Hawkins prohibition on Vacancy Control. Because students move much more frequently than other Berkeley residents, they are not able to as fully enjoy the benefits of Rent Control. While the Rent Board cannot override state law, it can and has aggressively advocated for the repeal of Costa Hawkins. I believe that as a Rent Board Commissioner, I will be able to help more fully engage the Berkeley student community in the effort to repeal Costa Hawkins at the ballot in November, both through advocacy and being on the ballot as a student candidate along with the measure.
2. What is the role of Rent Board Commissioners? What powers do they have? What changes do you think should be made in how the Rent Board operates?

One of the primary roles of the Rent Board is to serve as the first venue to hear complaints and legal cases stemming from Berkeley’s Rent Stabilization Act and other tenant protections like the Tenant Protection Ordinance. The Board can order rent reductions in the case of impropriety on the part of landlords. The Board determines the annual allowable increase in rents. They also have the power to set policy to interpret and carry out the Rent Stabilization Act and other acts related to rental housing. They can also make recommendations to the Berkeley City Council on legislative issues. They are thus a semi-judicial, semi-legislative body.

I have not identified any major changes that need to be made to the way the Rent Board operates. I think that there is a need for more staff within the department to help implement and enforce Berkeley’s laws, and I think that there should be more outreach and partnership with the Berkeley community, but I have been generally satisfied with the operations of the Elected Rent Board. I want to work in partnership with the current elected members and continue on the improvements they have been making.

1. What experience do you have organizing tenants? Please describe and include any thoughts you have on how to better engage Berkeley tenants.
2. Market developers argue that building more market rate multifamily units is the only way to lower the price of housing. What is your position on this theory? Please discuss your thoughts on how Berkeley can increase the housing available and affordable to tenants living on very limited income such as those living on government benefits, retirement pensions, and others with very limited resources.

I do believe that there is a housing shortage in the Bay Area, and I do believe that building more units is a key, but not the only, solution to that crisis. Market rate units, however, are far less effective at lowering housing prices than affordable units are. While building only market rate units may in the long run lower rents, that process will occur over decades. In the meanwhile, the most vulnerable Berkeley residents, poor residents and residents of color, will be driven out of the City by unaffordable housing. Intentionally building below market rate units is far more effective at lowering the price of housing.

The ultimate solution to the housing crisis is to massively reinvest state and federal resources in creating socioeconomically integrated public housing. So long as that is unattainable, we must act at the local level. Some solutions include:

* A vacancy tax to ensure that landlord actually rent their units, increasing availability
* A central City registry of all rental units, including low income, senior, and other special units, so that residents are better able to find housing and landlords can more easily be held accountable
* Easing zoning, design, and other restrictions on constructions that include high levels of affordable housing. The Recently passed SB 35 gives by-right approval to projects with at least 50% affordable housing in Berkeley (though it has also had unintended consequences). We can complement this law by giving smaller rewards, such as expedited review, to projects that have more than 20% but less than 50% affordable housing.
* Work with the City to identify and purchase vacant, decrepit, or otherwise available property to convert to affordable housing.
1. Is a pro‑tenant Rent Board capable of treating tenants, small, and corporate landlords fairly.

Yes. I have seen the current Board rule in favor of a landlord after he insulted them and called for less rent control, because his case was clearly valid under Berkeley’s laws. Having a pro-tenant, pro-rent control board means that tenants are treated fairly and progressive policies are introduced, not that landlords are victimized.

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

The majority of the homeless residents of the Bay Area were housed in the Bay Area before they were either evicted or could no longer afford to pay the lease. The rise in the homeless population is a direct result of the rapid rise of housing costs. Rent and evictions controls play a key role in protecting Berkeley residents from becoming homeless. The Rent Board cannot solve the homelessness crisis, but it can work to address it. Continuing to strengthen tenant protections, like through the further implementation of the Tenant Protections Act, helps to ensure that residents do not become homeless. The Rent Board can also help to ensure that if a tenant is being lawfully evicted that they receive all the benefits and compensations to which they are entitled to help them relocate.

1. 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.

My base of support is the Berkeley student community. I am on the board of the Cal Berkeley Democrats, the UC Berkeley Progressive Student Association, and the California Young Democrats Progressive Caucus. I serve as the Cal Berkeley Democrats club representative on the Alameda Democratic Central Committee. I was a proxy delegate to the California Democratic Party’s Convention this year. I am a member of the Berkeley Progressive Alliance, Berkeley Citizens Action, East Bay Democratic Socialists of America, the Wellstone Democratic Club, Our Revolution East Bay, the East Bay Young Democrats, East Bay Stonewall Democrats, and the Sierra Club. I am closely affiliated with the Richmond Progressive Alliance and the San Francisco Berniecrats.

I would be able to mobilize significant resources to the slate through my connections with the student community of Berkeley and the progressive Democratic organizations of the East Bay. I would be able to help obtain high profile endorsements for the slate thought my work on multiple statewide campaigns for progressive Democrats.

1. Do you support the repeal of the Costa‑Hawkins Housing Act? If it were repealed, what changes do you believe Berkeley should make to its Rent Stabilization Ordinance?

Absolutely. The repeal of Costa Hawkins should be the first legislative priority of every tenant activist. If it is repealed, hopefully this November along with the success of this slate, the Rent Stabilization Ordinance should be amended as follows:

* Include ALL FORMS of rental housing, including single family homes, duplexes, and in-law units
* Re-enact Vacancy Control
* Bring all current rental housing under rent control
* At a minimum reduce new constructions exemption from rent control to 5-10 years
1. The Convention asks all candidates to sign a pledge NOT to 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 is fair?

Yes. No one individual is more important than the slate, and the protection of Berkeley’s vital tenant protections. The prospective progressive candidates for rent control make their case before the Berkeley Community. If they are not selected, then I believe it is their duty to ensure the success of those who are.

Should I not be successful at the convention, I will still work to ensure the success of the slate. I will also work with the Rent Board to advocate for students and make sure they know about their rights and resources.

1. 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 may replace the coordinator by a democratic process.

Yes.