


NEWS: HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

# OC Activists Went to Sacramento to Push for Rent Control; Cops Were Called Instead

BY **BRANDON PHO** AND **SPENCER CUSTODIO**

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More than 100 Spanish-speaking activists drove hours from Orange County and brought their fight for rent control to Sacramento in recent days, where they hoped to speak with one local Democratic state senator about strengthening an existing rent control law.

But instead of direct conversation with Sen. Dave Min (D-Irvine), a handful who went to lobby his office on Monday were met by one of his staffers.

And later, Capitol police.

Min, who's running for Congress in the 47th District as Rep. Katie Porter runs for a U.S. Senate seat, described what happened as bullying and intimidation from activists.

"I don't know who needs to hear this, but the tactics of trying to intimidate or bully my staff to try to lobby me on a particular bill are VERY counterproductive," Min [said in a Monday Tweet](#).

Activists who attended that Monday meeting dispute the characterization, saying children were present and that they were simply questioning whether Min's office was taking them seriously.

Namely, activists in attendance – like Spanish-speaking community health workers with Promotoras de Salud – asked a staff member for Min who met them why she failed to take notes during the meeting, a portion of which was [filmed and posted to](#) various social media accounts.

After activists challenged the staff member, Capitol police — known as [Senate sergeants](#) — showed up and, after activists refused to leave, Min came out to tell them that the meeting was off, said a Huntington Beach organizer in attendance, Victor Valladares, in a Tuesday phone interview.

He and the promotoras also filmed that encounter, and shared the video with Voice of OC.

"Everything was super peaceful. People traveled fourteen hours from OC – buses broke down," he said. "Some of these Promotoras, these ladies were at the State Capitol for the first time, and we saw government officers surrounding us and telling everybody to vacate the office."

Reached for comment over the phone on Tuesday, Kelly Jones – a spokesperson for Min's office – said a statement on the Monday meeting with activists was forthcoming, but didn't provide one until Wednesday morning.

In the written statement, Jones said an unnamed person with the activist group became "confrontational" with Senator Min's staffer, and that the activist was larger than the staffer, whose size and decision to film the encounter "collectively had the effect of being very intimidating."

While activists insisted on meeting with Min, refusing to leave his office, Jones said Min "was busy taking other, previously scheduled meetings."

Jones said Min then called the Senate Sergeants for assistance.

In a written statement to reporters, the statewide activist coalition known as Housing Now has since accused Min of spreading “false and negative information about our lobbying efforts ... This is simply not true. We were there to share our stories and express our concerns about the critical need for renter protections in our community.”

OC organizations like Chispa and Orange County Communities for Responsible Development also focused on state Senator Tom Umberg (D-Santa Ana) in their rent control lobbying efforts.

Both Umberg and Min avoided taking a stance on the law proposal in the days leading up to Tuesday.

When it came time for the initial vote on the tenant protections bill at a committee hearing that afternoon, both of Orange County’s state senators on the panel left their seats.

The senators’ votes went unrecorded right after lines of speakers voiced their support and opposition for Senate Bill 567.

Umberg came back late Tuesday evening to vote yes, but the bill still sat at the committee.

And about half an hour before midnight, Min voted yes. Now the bill is headed to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

More than 1,000 rent control activists coalesced around Sacramento to urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to approve the bill, which would’ve strengthened statewide rent caps, lowering them from 10% under existing law to 5% annually.

## **Legislators Gut Rent Caps, Keep Eviction Protections**

Calls for stricter rent control measures have been hitting city halls throughout Orange County in recent months as the Golden State’s housing unaffordability crisis worsens.

Right before they considered legislation on Tuesday on rent control, legislators removed a key provision that would have limited increases to 5% annually.

The 5% cap is being pushed as the state’s homelessness rate increases despite an existing 10% rent increase cap, and as a record number of people are [dying on Orange County’s streets](#).

Meanwhile, landlord interests, both in interviews and during the Tuesday committee hearing, voiced concerns from the opposite end, calling the lower rent cap proposal a “breach” of the “historic” compromise between landlord and tenant interests in 2019.

That compromise came in the form of Assembly Bill 1482, the 10% statewide rent control cap.

In the end, the compromise held.

“For right now, we’ll remove the (5%) rent cap in the bill. The bill then will move to appropriations,” said Umberg, who chairs the Senate Judicial Committee.

Sen. Maria Elena Durazo (D-Los Angeles) authored the bill but she proposed removing the rent cap at the beginning of the discussion, moving to keep only a few areas of her original legislative proposal.

“The most important language that remains right now are the (sections targeting) landlord loopholes,” Durazo said before the vote.

Namely, those sections aim to crack down on the fraudulent use of acceptable eviction reasons – like renovations and owner family move-ins – to remove current tenants in order to raise rent.

“Current law just does not have the teeth it takes,” Durazo said of Assembly Bill 1482.

During public committee testimony, Debra Carlton of the California Apartment Association said Durazo’s bill “is not backed by data and breaches the agreement we made in good faith on the historic (2019) law.”

Umberg voiced support for at least some iteration of Durazo’s bill, and said certain time frames, like pulling a unit off the market for 36 months so a family member can move in, are “way too long.”

Durazo’s office did not provide an answer on Tuesday on why she removed the rent cap section of the bill that she originally publicized as going further than the 2019 law.

## **Rent Control Debate Heats Up**

Tuesday’s committee hearing comes as Buena Park City Council members are gearing up to consider a citywide rent control ordinance.

At a March meeting, a majority of Buena Park council members expressed support for some kind of rent control – with one councilman proposing a 3% cap on rent increases.

[**[Read: Rent Control Could Come to Buena Park](#)**]

Rent control critics say the measures prevent fair returns for property owners and that amending state law to make stricter rent caps will constrict housing supply, pointing to a 2019 [Stanford University study](#).

“AB 1482 (existing rent control law) was a carefully negotiated bill between all effected [sic] parties with a 10-year lifespan. The continued chipping away at it makes it harder for property owners to effectively manage their properties,” said Southern California Rental Housing Association in an opposition letter, according to the [bill analysis](#).

Proponents, on the other hand, point to 2018 studies from [USC](#) and [UC Berkeley](#) showing that rent control doesn’t limit new housing construction and that this type of regulation is a critical step to prevent people from falling into homelessness.

“We cannot let families lose their homes. It destabilizes their lives, kid’s education, their safety net, and affects the community as a whole. Instead of only reacting, let us be proactive. Let’s help people stay in their homes, that everyone has a place to live,” said Durazo in the bill analysis.

Tuesday’s committee vote also comes as local activist groups, community health workers and residents have been calling on city officials throughout Orange County to enact citywide rent control ordinances.

Locally, Santa Ana was the first Orange County city to enact a citywide rent control and is currently facing a lawsuit over the ordinance from the Apartment Association of Orange County.

[**[Read: OC Landlord Group Moves to Sue Santa Ana to Overturn Rent Control](#)**]

The association argues Santa Ana officials excluded them in the process and aren’t offering them fair representation on a rental registry board. They also say the rent caps prevent property owners from getting fair returns on their investments.

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