

Tenants at “dozens of buildings” receive eviction notices ahead of state’s new rent law

The eviction notices have been sent out in the last two weeks, leading the City Council to call for a moratorium

TRD LOS ANGELES /

Oct. October 11, 2019 01:21 PM

By [Georgia Kromrei](#) and [Dennis Lynch](#)



Residential Los Angeles (Credit: iStock)

Landlords across Los Angeles have sent out scores of eviction notices in recent weeks, trying to get ahead of the “just cause” provision of California’s new rent control bill, which kicks in Jan. 1.

“We’re dealing with dozens of buildings calling our hotline,” said Trinidad Ruiz, an organizer with the Los Angeles Tenant Union. And Katie McKeon, an attorney with the pro bono law firm Public Counsel, said it was “a massive uptick in no-fault evictions” over the past two weeks.

ADVERTISING

In response, two L.A. City Councilmembers on Friday introduced an emergency motion seeking a moratorium on evictions. The measure could also seek to invalidate the most recent notices that have already been sent. The full Council could vote on the measure next week.

The timing coincides with the sweeping rent reform measure Gov. Gavin Newsom [signed into law](#) on Tuesday, which imposes rent hike caps and stricter limits on evictions.

Last week, more than 40 tenants in one apartment building in Westlake at 143 South Burlington Avenue received eviction notices, according to Ruiz, stating they will have to be out before the end of the year.

Another building in Canoga Park, a 23-unit complex at 20954 Vanowen Street, also received a dozen eviction notices last week, according to a tenant who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution from the owner.

“We got the eviction notice when I was at work,” the tenant said on Friday. “My grandfather who has cancer was at home, relaxing. People are already moving out. It’s a mess. It’s an absolute mess.” A representative for building owner KLS Financial declined to make someone available for comment.

The evictions at 143 South Burlington are retaliatory, according to tenants and tenant advocates. The complex was among three in the Westlake neighborhood at the epicenter of a tenant demonstration last year.

Organized by Burlington Unidos and the Los Angeles Tenant Union, tenants in those buildings refused to pay rent after the landlord, FML Management, raised prices on every unit by \$250 a month. The rent strike ended in November without an agreement, and the building was [sold last week](#) to Chicago-based 29th Street Capital. Now, tenants say, the new landlord is targeting just one building with eviction notices in an attempt to “divide and conquer.”

29th Street Capital did not return requests for comment.

An attorney who specializes in affordable housing and land use issues said investors who may be rushing to evict their tenants before the rent law deadline may be doing so for one reason.

“If you’re an investor, you want to have certainty,” said Jon Goetz, principal at the law firm of Meyers Nave. He added, “you could get certainty by doing [evictions and renovations] now before Jan. 1, or by doing a more substantial rehab where there’s less of a question of what side you’re on.”

Under existing law, landlords do not have to give a reason to evict a tenant, as long as 60 days notice is provided.

The new statewide rent control law is intended to address the growing housing affordability crisis and to protect tenants from evictions without “just cause.” Landlords have generally chosen to evict a tenant with an expiring lease in order to deregulate units subject to rent control and raise rents to market rate.

But landlords are now racing the clock, given the two-month advance notice requirement. That means landlords have until Nov. 2 to send those notices if they want to fast-track the deregulation of the units under existing law. That would also allow them to raise rents more than the maximum 5 percent a year plus consumer price index under the new law.

Starting in 2020, landlords will not be able to evict tenants except in certain cases unless the landlord or immediate family member will occupy the unit. In that case, the landlord will have to pay relocation costs for the tenant. Landlords still may evict a tenant for non-payment of rent, breach of lease or criminal or nuisance activity on the property.