



Law offices of

SENIOR LEGAL SERVICES

Protecting Rights and Empowering Lives

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Protecting Seniors' Housing Rights Prevents Homelessness and Saves Money

Santa Cruz, April 27, 2026. Ranked as the most expensive county in the United States with homelessness among seniors on the rise, Santa Cruz is in crisis.

On Tuesday, April 28, 2026, the Santa Cruz City Council will be discussing the city's Annual Action Plan for HUD programs in 2027.

Senior Legal Services weighs in to highlight the critical importance of legal aid for seniors and other vulnerable people who are struggling to stay in their homes.

"Legal assistance ensures that the rights of our most vulnerable neighbors are protected and that they have a fair advocate when their housing is at stake," said Rebecca Steckler, Executive Director of Senior Legal Services.

Senior Legal Services urges the City Council to recognize that for many older residents access to legal help can be lever that helps them stay housed as opposed to being out on the streets. In 2025, housing issues constituted 44% of Senior Legal Services' total caseload. The data show that when a housing problem escalates to the level of an legal eviction or a serious habitability dispute, legal representation is the most effective tool to prevent homelessness and help the parties find mutually agreeable solutions.

In 2025, Senior Legal Services dedicated over 3,200 hours to housing cases, serving 350 neighbors, from families to seniors as old as 96 years old. The organization provides critical support to residents who need defense from unlawful evictions, protection for specialized communities such as mobile home or nursing home residents, support

Main Office

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combatting unfair landlord practices, and help negotiating soft landings when leaving their home is the only option.

When it comes to legal matters, most landlords have legal representation, yet very few residents do. Senior Legal Services provides tenants with professional representation to ensure that the rights of our most vulnerable neighbors are protected and that they have a fair advocate when their housing is at stake.

Senior Legal Services calls upon the City Council to prioritize and fund legal services for housing.

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To: City of Santa Cruz Community Development Department
From: Rebecca Steckler
Executive Director
Senior Legal Services
Date: April 15, 2026
Subject: Public Comment on the FY 2027 Annual Action Plan
(HUD Program Year 2026)

To the Community Development Department and the City of Santa Cruz,

Senior Legal Services appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed Annual Action Plan. While we support the City's investment in housing assistance and security deposits, we urge the City to recognize that for many residents, housing stability requires more than financial subsidies—it requires **access to justice and legal recourse**.

In 2025, housing issues constituted **44% of our total caseload**. Our data shows that when a housing problem escalates to the level of an Unlawful Detainer or a serious habitability dispute, legal representation is the most effective tool to prevent homelessness and help the parties find mutually agreeable solutions.

Senior Legal Services provides a specific and essential legal intervention for residents who have reached a critical point of need, including:

- **Eviction Defense:** We represent tenants facing the loss of their homes, ensuring they are not displaced through illegal or procedurally flawed processes.
- **Protection for Specialized Communities:** We provide specialized legal assistance to residents in **Mobile Home communities** and **Residential Care or Nursing Home facilities**, where state laws and patient rights are often complex and poorly enforced.

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- **Combatting Unfair Landlord Practices:** We hold landlords accountable for illegal practices and unsanitary conditions, ensuring that "affordable" housing remains habitable and safe.
- **Negotiated "Soft Landings":** When a tenant cannot remain in their home, we play a vital role in negotiating move-out agreements. These agreements prevent the long-term trauma of a court-ordered eviction on a credit report, allowing seniors to find alternative housing rather than falling into homelessness.

In 2025, we dedicated over **3,200 hours** to housing cases, serving **350 neighbors**, from families to seniors as old as **96 years old**.

It is far more cost effective to address housing issues before they result in individuals and families becoming homeless.

As the City of Santa Cruz finalizes its 2027 Action Plan, we request that you continue to prioritize and fund **legal services for housing**. Financial aid programs like security deposit assistance are critical, but they must be paired with legal recourse to ensure that the rights of our most vulnerable neighbors are protected and that they have a fair advocate when their housing is at stake.

Thank you for your consideration.

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