

Rent Stabilization Board  
Office of the Executive Director

DATE: September 23, 2021

TO: Honorable Members of the Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board

FROM: Matt Brown, Acting Executive Director   
Leah Simon-Weisberg, Chair  
Soli Alpert, Vice-Chair

SUBJECT: Proposal to allow Housing Counselors to work remotely through the end of the year

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At its July 15, 2021 meeting, the Board approved a proposal to limit the hours that our office is open to the public for walk-in clients. As articulated in that plan, the agency had recently lost a housing counselor. Since that date, the Public Information Unit (PIU) Supervisor resigned, so housing counselors and staff from the Legal and Admin/Policy Units have been taking on even more additional responsibilities to support the unit. We have two new housing counselors that are still in training, but they will not be fully trained for many months, so PIU will be considerably short-staffed for quite some time. Moreover, one of the new counselors will be on maternity leave for nine months starting in October.

The original adopted proposal made clear that the public will be able to call and speak to a housing counselor between 9:00 a.m. – 4:45 p.m. on days we are serving the public. If a community member is unable to reach an employee, there are protocols in place to ensure that staff reach out to clients as soon as they are able. This continues for this new proposal.

PIU staff approached me on September 1, 2021 with a proposal to transition to fully remote counseling services through the end of the calendar year. They made the case that, particularly without a full-time supervisor, they simply do not have sufficient staff to maintain an office presence at this time. Several other factors are important to consider:

1. Since we have been open to the public for in-person housing counseling services, very few community members have come into our office (an average of around two people per day).

2. There is increasing concern among housing counselors that they are not able to sufficiently comply with COVID-related social distancing requirements particularly when they are training new counselors – it is difficult to maintain six feet of distance between staff members when they are occupying the same area during a counter visit. This poses problems for training someone remotely if a housing counselor is called to the counter. During a time when COVID-19 cases continue to surge, there is considerable concern associated with any arrangement that does not strictly adhere to City-mandated distancing requirements.
3. In the event that someone calls in sick or has some other paid leave scheduled, it is very difficult to have sufficient counselors to adequately staff the counter. I had to close the counter to in-person counseling services for two days several weeks ago due to unanticipated sick leave.
4. The expectation that housing counseling services will be delivered only remotely at least through the end of the year creates a consistent message that we are able to deliver to the community and key stakeholders. Moreover, we are able to continue to meet community needs while operating remotely. We have developed an appointment request sheet that has been well-received by the public thus far. We have developed an infographic with a QR code to our appointment form – this is on our webpage and on a large laminate sign on our front door. We are also increasing Zoom capacity for counselors in the event a community member would prefer face-to-face contact.
5. We will also have a housing counselor onsite during days the office is open to deal with truly urgent situations or times when a community member is unable to access our services remotely.

I and several housing counselors met with Chair Simon-Weisberg, Vice-Chair Alpert, Commissioner Johnson, and Commissioner Laverde on September 2, 2021, to propose that we take emergency action to grant this proposal to transition to fully remote counseling services. The Chair and Vice-Chair agreed to support this proposal and allow staff to enact it prior to the Board meeting. Since then, we have developed the necessary materials and distributed a clear message through our Constant Contact portal and our website. I have attached those documents to this report. On September 13, 2021, we have been operating housing counseling services fully remotely.

If the Board approves of this proposal, staff will maintain constant contact with community members who request our service. Housing counselors will remain available to speak with the public from 9:00 a.m. – 4:45 p.m. on days we are open to the public. If a community member is unable to reach an employee, there are protocols in place to ensure that staff reach out to clients as soon as they are able.

Board staff have been able to maintain the high level of customer service the community expects from us, and this proposal will do nothing to change our commitment to responding to calls as soon as we are able. This proposal simply allows us to operate more fluidly with fewer staff available who are dedicated to direct services. Board staff have been seeing the public in the office in some limited capacity since the end of May and more expansively since July 6<sup>th</sup>. There have been very few walk-in clients as many from the community continue to contact us by phone and email. Moreover, we will continue to evaluate this plan and adapt it to client demand as necessary.

#### Attachments

1. Infographic
2. Corrected Constant Contact Email Blast
3. Letter to Community Partners re: service model
4. Online appointment request form
5. Customer Comment Form

BERKELEY RENT STABILIZATION BOARD

# HOUSING COUNSELOR SERVICES

**HOUSING COUNSELORS WILL ONLY BE PROVIDING  
REMOTE SERVICES - THERE WILL BE NO IN-PERSON  
COUNSELING UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.**



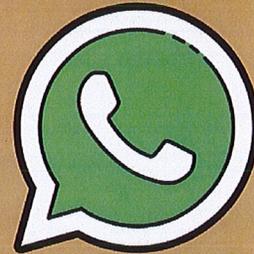
## EMAIL A COUNSELOR

Please send an email with your name and address you are inquiring about to [rent@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:rent@cityofberkeley.info)

## CALL A COUNSELOR

Please call

**(510) 981-7368 Ext. 1**



MAKE AN ONLINE  
APPOINTMENT AT

[TINYURL.COM/CONTACTRSB](https://www.tinyurl.com/contactrsb)

## FREE WEBINARS

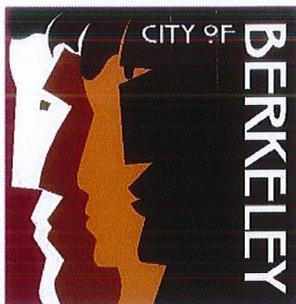
FOR LANDLORDS, TENANTS, &  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Register on our website under events  
at [www.cityofberkeley.info/rent/](http://www.cityofberkeley.info/rent/)



## REGISTRATION UNIT

Open for in-person services from 9:00 a.m. to  
2:00 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and  
Fridays.



## An Update on Berkeley Rent Board Services

Due to the ongoing public health crisis and limited staffing, the Berkeley Rent Board will be updating our service model beginning Monday, September 13th.

### HOUSING COUNSELING

Housing counselors will be providing exclusively remote services – there will be no more in-person counseling services until further notice.

- Call a counselor at 510-981-7368 Ext. 1
- Email a housing counselor at [rent@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:rent@cityofberkeley.info)
- Schedule an appointment with a Housing Counselor using our [appointment request form](#)

Counselors are available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Fridays from 9 am - 4:45 pm

Attend an Upcoming Webinar

### REGISTRATION

The Registration Unit will be open for in-person services from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays.

You can also reach the Registration Unit by phone at (510) 981-7368 Ext. 2 during our [office hours](#), or by email at [rent@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:rent@cityofberkeley.info).

## COVID-19 Updates

### COVID-19 Related Eviction Protections

There is a state law, the COVID-19 Tenant Relief Act, and a local law, Berkeley's Eviction Moratorium, that give Berkeley tenants eviction protections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The resources on our website advise Berkeley landlords and tenants on their rights and responsibilities under these laws.

[COVID-19 Tenant & Landlord Resources](#)



Berkeley Rent Board | [Email](#) 510-981-7368 | [Website](#)

See what's happening on our Facebook



Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board | 2125 Milvia Street, Berkeley, CA 94704

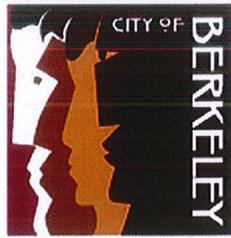
[Unsubscribe lbursell@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:lbursell@cityofberkeley.info)

[Update Profile](#) | [About Constant Contact](#)

Sent by [byrent@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:byrent@cityofberkeley.info) in collaboration  
with



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Rent Stabilization Board

## Dear Community Organizations and City Departments:

Due to the ongoing public health crisis and limited staffing, Housing Counselors at the City of Berkeley's Rent Board will only be providing remote services to the public, and there will be no in-person counseling until further notice. Our Registration Unit is available 9 a.m.-2 p.m. in the office at 2125 Milvia Street.

**If you have a referral for an emergency associated with an eviction, please contact the Eviction Defense Center at 510-452-4541.**

Rent Board Housing Counselors remain available four days a week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday) from 9 a.m. – 4:45 p.m. by phone, email, and Zoom appointments. The office is closed to the public on Wednesdays.

Online Zoom appointments can be scheduled with a Housing Counselor here: <https://forms.gle/JABq48WRbtQwH1L98>. Housing Counselors can be reached via email at [rent@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:rent@cityofberkeley.info), or by phone at 510-981-7368, Extension 1.

All inquiries to our office will be fully responded to no later than five (5) business days. The initial inquiry will be confirmed as received within one business day. *[A Housing Counselor will be available from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. each workday but Wednesdays (Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays) to provide referrals for emergency inquiries regarding evictions and assist members of the public who have no access to phone, email, or who have no other means to contact the Rent Board remotely.]*

Thank you for your patience and understanding as we continue to provide quality service during a pandemic and with limited staff.



# City of Berkeley-Rent Stabilization Board: Housing Counselor Appointment Request

Due to the ongoing public health crisis and limited staffing, Housing Counselors will only be providing remote services, and there will be no in-person counseling until further notice. Please schedule an appointment with a Housing Counselor here. This form allows you to connect with one of our counselors. Counselors are available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9:00 am -4:45 pm.

An appointment request will be responded to within twenty-four hours and/or the next business day. We thank you for your understanding and patience.

manreetg@gmail.com [Switch account](#)



\* Required

Email \*

Your email

Name \*

Your answer



Email Address \*

Your answer

Phone Number \*

Your answer

Property Address in Question \*

Your answer

Identify Yourself: \*

- Tenant
- Landlord
- Property Manager
- Realtor
- Master Tenant
- Subtenant

Preferred Language:

Your answer



### Property Type

- Single Family Home
- Condominium
- Duplex
- Property with more than two units
- Bedroom in shared house
- New construction (property was constructed after June 30, 1980)

### Topic Area of Your Question

- Rent ceiling or overcharges
- Setting a new rent level
- Habitability/property maintenance
- Evictions in general
- Eviction notice received
- Owner move-in or Ellis Act eviction
- Security deposit
- Property registration
- Property status
- Dispute between neighboring tenants
- Petition-initiated hearings process



Other:

Description of Issue(s) (Please inform us of the problem you are experiencing. It is important to note that some questions might be outside our department's jurisdiction. However, we will be sure to review your question and refer you to the appropriate resource.) \*

Your answer

Counseling Session Type (Please note that in-person is only for those who have special accommodations, such as disabilities and no technology to communicate remotely.)

Preference

Counseling by phone

Counseling virtually

Counseling by email correspondence



Preferred Availability (Please note we are closed Wednesdays to the Public.)

Please select what days and hours work best for you.

Mondays between the hours of 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Mondays between the hours of 1:00 pm - 4:45 pm

Tuesdays between the hours of 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Tuesdays between the hours of 1:00 pm - 4:45 pm

Thursdays between the hours of 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Thursdays between the hours of 1:00 pm - 4:45 pm

Friday between the hours of 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Friday between the hours of 1:00 pm - 4:45 pm

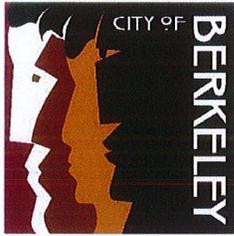
Send me a copy of my responses.

Submit

Clear form



! Never submit passwords through Google Forms.



Rent Stabilization Program

# Customer Comment Form

*We want to hear from you!*

In an effort to provide you with improved service, we would appreciate your comments regarding your experience with the **City of Berkeley's Rent Stabilization Program**.

**Brief nature of issue / reason for contacting us:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Counselor or staff person who assisted you:** \_\_\_\_\_

Customer Service Rating	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Courtesy of Staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clarity and Completeness of Information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Timeliness of Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments & Suggestions:

*This form goes to our Executive Director. Providing your name and contact information is optional.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your comments! Please save your answers to this Comment Form and email it to [rent@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:rent@cityofberkeley.info). You can also fax, mail, or drop the form in our Comment Box at the address below:**

**City of Berkeley Rent Stabilization Program  
2125 Milvia Street, Berkeley, California 94704**

TEL: (510) 981-7368 (981-RENT) • TDD: (510) 981-6903 • FAX: (510) 981-4910  
E-MAIL: [rent@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:rent@cityofberkeley.info) • INTERNET: [www.cityofberkeley.info/rent](http://www.cityofberkeley.info/rent)