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## **Community Group Sues City of Inglewood for Prioritizing NBA Arena Over Affordable Housing**

*Suit alleges violation of California housing laws that govern usage of  
publicly owned land*

**INGLEWOOD, CA, June 19, 2018** – Uplift Inglewood Coalition, an affiliation of community empowerment organizations, today filed a lawsuit against the City of Inglewood, charging that the City violated state housing and civil rights laws by entering into an Exclusive Negotiation Agreement (ENA) with the L.A. Clippers for use of public land to build a NBA basketball arena. The suit seeks to vindicate the rights of Inglewood residents during a time of rapid community change and skyrocketing housing costs that have already displaced many long-term residents.

“At a time when low-income Inglewood residents are facing a devastating and growing housing crisis, we allege that the City of Inglewood has failed to comply with multiple state laws that are intended to produce much-needed affordable housing,” said Antonio Hicks, a senior staff attorney with Public Counsel. “As documented in this lawsuit, by entering into an ENA with the Clippers, the City violated California’s Surplus Land Act, which mandates that surplus public land is first offered for sale or lease for the purpose of affordable housing.”

California’s Surplus Land Act is a longstanding state law designed to promote the development of affordable housing, and requires that government agencies prioritize the use of publicly owned land for affordable housing – or for parks and recreational purposes – before the land is offered to developers for other purposes. The suit further alleges that the City’s failure to comply with the Surplus Land Act results in civil rights violations – by discriminating against the development of housing intended for low-income households, and disproportionately against members of certain racial and ethnic groups and individuals with disabilities.

The City of Inglewood and Clippers owner, Steve Ballmer, recently held a press conference to announce proposed state legislation to provide shortcuts for the stadium project by exempting it from certain environmental challenges. At the press conference, Ballmer made the following remarks: “I want to build a house in Inglewood ... We’d like to have our own house, right here, on this site.”

“The City of Inglewood is choosing to use publicly owned land to help a billionaire build a home for his sports team, at a time when longtime residents are struggling to stay in their own homes,” said Woodrow Curry, III, a member of the Uplift Inglewood Coalition. “It’s morally bankrupt and a mismanagement of our public resources. We’re calling on the city’s leadership to do the right thing and to prioritize the creation of affordable homes before arenas.”

Inglewood's own analysis indicates that over eighty (80) percent of Inglewood residents qualify for some sort of subsidized housing. And the City's data shows that rents in the City of Inglewood have risen by almost twenty-five (25) percent in the last five years alone, and almost fifty (50) percent of Inglewood residents are low-income and severely rent-burdened, which means they are paying more than fifty (50) percent of their income towards housing.

Many Inglewood residents point to the construction of a \$4 billion NFL stadium – slated as the future home of the L.A. Rams and L.A. Chargers – as a catalyst for driving up housing costs and turning Inglewood into a hot area for property speculation. Stories abound of landlords that are looking to cash-in, and with no rent-control protections in place, long-time residents of Inglewood claim they are being driven out of their homes.

“I'm an Inglewood renter, and now I'm on the verge of losing my home,” said Sara Santos, a resident who supports the lawsuit. “My landlord just raised my rent by \$300, and it breaks my heart that I may have to leave my community. For so many years, Inglewood was an affordable place to call home. But now it seems like city leaders have been seduced by outside billionaires, and have forgotten about the everyday folks who are the true champions of Inglewood.”

The suit also alleges violation of additional California law that requires cities to take steps to plan and zone for adequate affordable housing and shelter for homeless residents – as well as the charges that Inglewood has failed to develop 112 affordable housing replacement units it was obligated to produce several years ago.

“When cities ignore laws like the Surplus Land Act, it creates a ripple effect throughout the region, resulting in less affordable housing units and ultimately more homelessness,” said Tom Casparian, an attorney with Cozen O'Connor. “All this lawsuit seeks to do is get the City of Inglewood to follow the law.”

Public Counsel, the Public Interest Law Project (PILP), and the law firm of Cozen O'Connor filed an action in Los Angeles Superior Court today asking the Court to order Inglewood to follow the requirements of the Surplus Land Act and meet its obligations to adequately plan and zone for affordable housing and shelter in the city – as required of every city in the State.

#### **About us:**

**Public Counsel** is the nation's largest not-for-profit law firm of its kind – handling impact litigation, pursuing legislative change, and providing direct legal services that reach more than 30,000 people every year in California and across the nation.

**The Public Interest Law Project (PILP)** is a non-profit law center providing litigation and advocacy support on affordable housing and public benefits to local legal services and public interest law programs throughout California.

**Cozen O'Connor** is among the top 100 law firms in the country, with more than 700 lawyers in 26 cities across two continents. It is a full-service law firm, with nationally recognized experience in litigation, business law, and government relations. The firm's attorneys thrive on results, defining themselves by their clients' success.

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