



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 18, 2021

Contact: Leslie Wolf Branscomb at
lawolf@sandiego.gov or (619) 533-5896

L.A. Slumlords Prosecuted in Substandard Housing Case

Decrepit, roach-infested motel illegally converted to apartments, businesses

City Attorney Mara W. Elliott has filed a civil enforcement action against a pair of Los Angeles-based landlords to shut down a dilapidated storefront and a squalid apartment complex in San Ysidro. The complaint alleges the property, which is in violation of numerous provisions of the City's Municipal Code and the California Health & Safety Code, is a public nuisance.

The property at 319-323 San Ysidro Boulevard initially held only a two-story home constructed in 1947. In the 1960s, a two-story commercial building was added, then a 14-unit motel called El Palacio. Over the years, motel rooms were illegally converted to businesses without the required permits, inspections, or approvals. Later, it was discovered that offices and motel rooms on the property were being rented as apartments, and there was no heating in any of the dwelling units.

Tenants reported infestations of roaches and rats, mold in the walls, unsafe stairwells with nails protruding from the handrail, and electrical wires hanging from the walls. Those who complained to the property manager were reportedly told to move out.

The City Attorney's Office has relocated most of the 20 adults and four children who were living in unsanitary and unsafe conditions in the 12 dwelling units.

“Families, including young children, were subject to deplorable and dangerous conditions, so my Office stepped in to find them safe places to live,” City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **“We will hold these absentee landlords accountable for subjecting their tenants to unimaginable living conditions and for relocation costs.”**

The civil enforcement action, filed on August 13, 2021, was the culmination of the City's years-long efforts to get the owners to take responsibility for bringing the property into compliance and making it safe for habitation.

In 2016, the City's Code Enforcement Division began investigating complaints from tenants about unsanitary living conditions, but inspectors were repeatedly prevented from gaining access to the buildings. The City eventually conducted 10 site inspections and provided numerous notices to the

Recent City Attorney media releases can be accessed on the San Diego City Attorney's home page located on the Internet at <https://www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney>

1200 Third Avenue, Suite 1620, San Diego, California 92101-4188 (619) 236-6220

property manager and owners demanding that the residents be relocated at the owners' expense and the property rehabilitated. The City's demands were ignored.

According to the complaint, both property owners reside in Los Angeles County, but at least one of them is believed to be living abroad.

A City Attorney's Victim Services Coordinator worked with the residents to relocate them to clean and safe housing. Three tenants have declined to leave. The City will seek reimbursement from the property owners for the \$28,200 spent on relocations.

The City is seeking an injunction prohibiting the defendants from using or maintaining a substandard property which is a public nuisance and a threat to the health, safety, and welfare of the public and its occupants. The City is also asking that the property owners be made to pay civil penalties of no less than \$1 million, and other costs.

This case is being handled for the People of the State of California and the City of San Diego by Deputy City Attorney David Miller. The City Attorney's Nuisance Abatement Unit was established in 1984 to address nuisance properties and blight throughout San Diego. This unit works in partnership with the Code Enforcement Division of the City Development Services Department, the San Diego Police Department, other local agencies, and the community to identify and aggressively address problem properties.

Community members may report code, health and safety, and environmental violations to the City's Code Enforcement Division at 619-236-5500 or the City Attorney's Nuisance Abatement Unit at 619-533-5655; CityAttorney@sandiego.gov.

###