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**An Open Letter to the 22 College Professors Re: Support Letter on Senate Bill 827  
Released by State Senator Scott Wiener on March 21, 2018**

Dear Professors:

Today, State Senator Scott Wiener released your letter expressing support for Senate Bill 827 ("SB 827"), a bill firmly opposed by every housing justice organization that has spoken on it, even with the proposed amendments.

It is essential to recognize that there are several points of struggle among the diverse coalition of housing justice organizations/leaders on the ground in the low-income communities of color most impacted by the current housing affordability and houselessness crises, who oppose SB 827. Some are completely opposed to market-rate housing development in low-income communities, and some believe there are broad benefits from a large inclusionary zoning program. Some operate in coalition with affordable housing developers, and some claim that "affordable housing is a scam" given the modern-day affordable housing building requirements. Some intently dedicate their organizational focus at working towards incremental change within the halls of government, and some are more primarily focused on mobilizing the masses towards a revolutionary change. Some are foundation funded, and some don't accept donations from foundations and are all-volunteer run.

**Despite diversity in tactics, leadership, membership criteria, and even strategy, every single housing justice group that has weighed in on State Senator Scott Wiener's SB 827 has expressed strong opposition to the bill.** It is a bill that you have expressed support for, joining the chief financial beneficiaries of the crisis that most impacts the working class throughout the state, namely the California Apartment Association, California Association of Realtors and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.

This circumstance, and the conditions it publicly illustrates, is the heart of my inquiry. The problem is much larger than this bill or the text of your letter. It calls for question how you 22 professors specifically, and academia generally, view and use the power to influence the spaces and conditions in which marginalized people live. Specifically:

- 1) *When a coalition of housing justice groups, especially one as diverse as this, finds a point of agreement, possibly on a policy that you have an alternative view, what process do and should you engage in? For example, do you reach out to the organizations to better understand the basis of their position and/or the conditions on-the-ground?***
- 2) *And more fundamentally, what role and responsibility do you feel academics do and should have to such organizations in such discussions given the privileges provided to you, especially given the enormous structural barriers these organizations and the people they represent are faced with daily?***

It is no secret that I, and many other leaders of color, take great exception to the focus and amplification of voices of the traditionally privileged in public policy discussions that the traditionally marginalized are most impacted. This major short-coming is even more pronounced in the field of urban planning.

My experience working in government and walking the halls of elite schools has informed my understanding of the limits and powers both institutions have to address the needs of members of the Black low-income community of South Central that I grew up in, have lived as a renter for the past 25 years, and that my family has helped build for over 100 years. I sincerely believe it would help all of us to better understand how you view your power and responsibility as an academic to the people and organizations on-the-ground when a unified alternative view to your own is clearly expressed.

It is the theories that you study and contribute to as academics, that can lead to the policies that in practice negatively impact the people I work with daily and am fortunate to represent. I recognize we may have different positions, informed by different perspectives. But as one tenured professor who has spoken on this bill and did not sign your letter said to me last year, "If an academic's theory and models don't align with what people are experiencing on-the-ground, they should question their models, not the experiences of the people." I wonder: do you agree?

**It is my hope that at the least your decision to publicly state support for SB 827 in the face of clear united opposition among the housing justice movement will lead to a better relationship and greater understanding between academia and the people most impacted by housing policy. Perhaps then the influential positions and voices of academia can better equip us in the difficult battles that we wage for racial, economic and social justice, and towards a vision and agenda crafted by and for marginalized peoples.**

Sincerely,  
Damien Goodmon  
Crenshaw Subway Coalition  
Executive Director

CC: Chancellor/Presidents of the Universities & Chairs of the Applicable Planning/Public Policy Departments of: University of California-Los Angeles, University of California-Berkeley, University of Southern California, University of California-Irvine, Santa Clara University, University of California-Davis, Pepperdine University, & Cal Poly Pomona