

April 11, 2018

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African American Cultural Center (Us)

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UNITE HERE

Senator Toni Atkins
Senate President Pro Temp
State Capitol, Room 205
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator Jim Beall
Chair, Transportation & Housing
State Capitol, Room 2082
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator Scott Wiener
Senate District 11
State Capitol, 5100
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 827 OPPOSITION & Sen. Scott Wiener's Refusal to Meet with South L.A. Black Community

Dear Honorable Senators:

On this day in which we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Fair Housing Act, a triumph of the civil rights movement that was achieved through the ultimate sacrifice of our leaders, we write to express our justifiable concern that State Senator Scott Wiener (San Francisco) declined to accept our invitation to attend a forum in South Los Angeles sponsored by our Black alliance to hear directly from the Black people who would be most harmed by his draconian housing bill, SB 827. The bill has been called "Urban Renewal 2.0" and we share that assessment. Our united Black front is firmly and unequivocally opposed to SB 827, and maintain that Sen. Wiener's declining to meet with us in the Black community who would be most impacted is both morally untenable and politically shortsighted.

Since Sen. Wiener has been in Los Angeles multiple times since SB 827 was announced, this clearly is not a matter of scheduling. In fact, on the same day we offered to host Sen. Wiener at a town hall that we have been planning with a broad coalition of civil rights organizations, Black community based organizations, and housing justice allies, he instead attended a panel discussion on this very subject that was stacked with panelists in favor of the bill before an audience that was overwhelmingly white.

<https://www.crenshawsubway.org/scott-wiener-refuses-to-discuss-sb-827-with-south-la-community>

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Sen. Wiener's refusal to meet with our Black alliance and impacted South L.A. community members is a particular affront since he frequently asserts that SB 827 is a remedy to racially discriminatory housing policy. **If one truly believes that, then why would he not seek to meet our Black alliance to solicit our support and hear from our Black community members?** Members of our Steering Committee were on the front lines of the civil rights movement and continue to hold the line today. **Members of our Steering Committee literally put their lives on the line facing down racist cops, crazed mobs, dogs, firebombs and water hoses as we struggled in the Jim Crow South to desegregate public spaces and communities.** Others may talk about this history, some may even write books about it, but we actually lived it.

Senator Wiener and advocates for SB 827 have sought to conveniently narrow the discussion of housing discrimination on the history of zoning, specifically for single family homes. This tactic completely ignores that Black, Brown, Asian and low-income communities use zoning laws to resist gentrification, displacement, environmental racism and economic exploitation. This tactic completely ignores the primary role played by powerful financial interests of creating and profiting from our housing affordability crisis. These are the very forces and special interests that unsurprisingly support SB 827, and call for draconian changes in zoning laws, like the bill, and the weakening of environmental protections, like CEQA.

Despite the corporate media's inexcusable failure to report it, **the fact is the chief sponsors of the morally bankrupt bill, SB 827, are the leading perpetrators of the racist policies and agenda of displacement and gentrification.** Despite the well-documented discriminatory practices of banks, developers, real estate speculators, realtor associations, and apartment owner associations, which continues to this day, without blushing Sen. Wiener asserts that unleashing these forces on urban communities of color throughout the state through SB 827 is a step towards racial progress. We do not for a second believe that our long-time oppressors are now our liberators. It is an insult to your own intelligence and to our history of struggle to suggest that the powerful financial interests that every day evict us, engage in predatory lending, and rob us of our limited wealth is suddenly in favor policies to break up their lucrative system that profits from our continued oppression and exploitation.

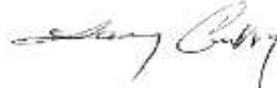
Private interests and practices intended to reclaim urban space to profit a global investor class and real estate speculators is a direct threat to our right to the homes and communities that we built in the face of their oppression. Unfortunately, public policies like SB 827, are not a defense, but rather an aid for these oppressive and discriminatory policies and interests. And there is nothing courageous, new or innovative about advancing land grabs and economic exploitation. For America, it is a long road that began in 1492 and sped up in 1619.

Unfortunately, the sad truth is that Sen. Wiener is not the first to misappropriate the history of Black suffering to push an agenda specifically intended to harm Black people. Every January around the time in which we honor the birthday of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., almost like clockwork, those who spend every waking moment pushing policies to directly harm Black people, assert that "Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Republican" or falsely claim that he would oppose affirmative action. Proponents of SB 827 should find no comfort in replicating this detestable tactic.

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Accordingly, we call on Senator Wiener, Senate President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins, and Senate Transportation and Housing Committee Chair Jim Beall to **withhold any hearings on this matter until Senator Wiener attends a forum hosted by the Black Community Clergy and Labor Alliance and the broad coalition of groups in South Los Angeles we've been working with to speak directly to the residents bearing the great burden of the housing affordability crisis, who would be most adversely impacted by his bill SB 827.** If he seeks to determine local land use policy in South Los Angeles, Sen. Wiener should be required to provide a reasonable explanation for his positions and hear from us in South Los Angeles whose lives and future hang in the balance.

Sincerely,



Larry Aubry
Co-Chair
The Steering Committee
Black Community, Clergy and Labor Alliance