Californians for Homeownership

**[Our Mission](https://www.caforhomes.org/mission%22%20%5Ct%20%22_self)**

**Californians for Homeownership keeps local anti-housing policies-in-check-through**[**investigation**](https://www.caforhomes.org/work)**,**[**litigation**](https://www.caforhomes.org/work)**, and**[**education**](https://www.caforhomes.org/work)**.**

**Investigation**

**​**

**The decisions that drive housing access and affordability in California take place in over 500 city halls and county halls of administration across the state. In many cities, a simple zoning-compliant housing development project might face assessment by city staff, an architectural review board, the planning commission, and the city council. At each stage, there is a risk that the city will unlawfully reject the project or impose conditions that reduce the size or affordability of the project. Many violations of housing law go unnoticed because these local decisions are made without sufficient oversight. We are working to put a spotlight on these local decisions and ensure that California's cities are working to solve the housing crisis, not exacerbate it.**

**​**

**We use a number of methods for monitoring local compliance with housing law:**

**​**

* **We review public hearing notices, permit application databases, and similar sources of information available to the general public.**

**​**

* **We make targeted requests under the California Public Records Act.**

**​**

* **We maintain relationships with homeowners and others who are interested in developing or providing housing.**

**​**

* **We work with other pro-housing nonprofits and local organizations to share information about unlawful conduct by local governments.**

**​**

* **We monitor efforts by anti-housing groups to persuade local government bodies to unlawfully obstruct efforts to build or provide access to housing.**

**​**

**When we learn that a city is not complying with the law or is at risk of making a decision that would violate the law, we tell them. If they don't listen, we sue them.**

**Focus on: Accessory Dwelling Units**

**​**

**Since 2017, California cities have been required to allow the owners of most single-family homes to add accessory dwelling units (ADUs) or 'in-law units' to their properties. Cities have been slow to comply with this rule, despite universal support for ADUs from neighborhood groups, affordable housing organizations, and residents testifying at public meetings.**

**We are conducting a statewide review of compliance with these rules, reaching out to non-compliant cities and filing lawsuits against the worst offenders.**

**Focus on: Housing Accountability Act**

**​**

**The Housing Accountability Act requires cities to use *specific*, *objective* criteria when they assess applications to build zoning-compliant housing development projects. For affordable housing projects, even stricter rules apply. The Legislature recently gave organizations like Californians for Homeownership an automatic right to sue to obtain approval of a project, without any participation by the applicant.**

​

**We monitor local planning bodies to identify projects at risk of being denied based on arbitrary or subjective factors, and we remind the relevant decision-makers of the legal limits on their authority. If necessary, we sue.**

**​**

**Litigation**

**​**

**Sometimes cities and counties refuse to comply with laws that increase housing access and affordability, even when given information about their legal obligations and an opportunity to correct their conduct. When persuasion fails, the next step is litigation.**

**​**

**California law provides a robust system for public interest litigation by non-profit organizations like Californians for Homeownership. In some cases, like when a project is rejected in violation of the Housing Accountability Act, the law grants pro-housing organizations an automatic right to sue. In other cases, non-profits are permitted to sue to represent important public interests, like the interests of those in need of access to more affordable housing. And when others parties are engaged in litigation that could affect those interests, the law allows us to represent them through intervention or by acting as *amicus curiae* ("friend of the court").**

**​**

**Through litigation, we can obtain:**

**​**

* **The court-ordered approval of a housing development project.**

**​**

* **A court order requiring the city to comply with the law in the future or to approve future applications to build housing.**

**​**

* **Ongoing court supervision of the city's compliance with the law.**

**​**

* **Stiff penalties designed to discourage non-compliance. For example, the Housing Accountability Act ​provides for fines in excess of $10,000 per improperly denied housing unit, to be paid into an affordable housing fund.**

**​**

**We are equipped to litigate efficiently and cost-effectively because we employ full-time litigation counsel rather than relying on expensive outside law firms for our day-to-day litigation work.**

**​**

**Education**

**​**

**In addition to our investigation and litigation work, we are committed to providing information about laws designed to address the housing crisis to local elected officials, members of the public, and those who are interested in developing or providing access to housing. By increasing knowledge about the legal limits on local policies and decision-making, we hope to prevent future violations of the law before they require our intervention.**

**​**

**To learn more about the laws governing local housing policies, check out**[**our Education page**](https://www.caforhomes.org/education)**.  In addition to the information available on our website, we are working on a variety of educational resources, including sample documents and language that homeowners and small developers might find useful as they navigate the local land use decision-making process.**

​

**If you have suggestions for issues we should address in future educational materials,**[**let us know**](https://www.caforhomes.org/contact)**.**