



Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County

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Dear Mayor Nicola and Members of the Bridgeport Borough Council

On Sunday December 3, 2006 the Fair Housing Council of Montgomery Council and ACLAMO Family Center sponsored a community forum with Public Interest Law Center to educate the public about the three ordinances recently adopted by Bridgeport Borough Council - the Illegal Alien Immigration Relief Act, the Official English Ordinance and the Rental Registration Ordinance. The following are some of the questions and concerns that were raised at the forum:

When does Bridgeport expect to have available the forms for landlords and tenants required under the Rental Registration Ordinance and where will they be available? What measures are in place for those here legally but who do not have the required documentation? U.S. citizens and legal residents will be hurt by the requirements outlined in the Rental Registration Ordinance that require all tenants to pay a \$10.00 fee and obtain a permit to rent in Bridgeport every time they move. There are several groups who may be unable to provide the required documentation to obtain a "renter's permit". Victims of domestic violence, people leaving institutions and prisons, and the homeless will be negatively impacted by this requirement. Victims of domestic violence oftentimes flee dangerous situation without taking personal identification. Similarly, people who are homeless, in transitional housing, or people with disabilities leaving institutions may lack the documentation that will be required by the Borough to obtain a renters permit. What about victims of theft or fire who are waiting for replacement identification documents? Does Bridgeport plan to allow any exceptions?

How will Bridgeport protect both tenants and landlords since several provisions of the Rental Registration and the Illegal Immigrant Relief Act contradict Pennsylvania Landlord Tenant Law. For example, if a tenant is in a yearly lease and can not obtain a renters permit - will the landlord be forced to break the lease and violate the provisions of Pennsylvania State Law in order to comply with the ordinance? How will the Borough ensure that landlords will not find themselves in a situation where in order to comply with the new Borough ordinances, they violate state law?

Why isn't the Borough educating it's residents about the impact of the ordinances? The majority of the people in the audience at the Community Forum were confused and unaware of many of the provisions of all three ordinances. In fact, we are not aware of any efforts made by the Borough of Bridgeport to educate its citizens on the provisions and impact of the ordinances. Copies of the ordinances and their requirements have not been available to the public. In fact, we were unable to get copies of the adopted ordinances at Borough Hall and had to get copies from the Solicitor's office.

What will happen if the Courts decide that the ordinances are unconstitutional and illegal? How will Bridgeport ensure landlords that they will not be liable for discriminatory actions that they undertook in complying with the ordinance? How will Bridgeport ensure its residents that they will not be financing a costly legal response to the potential lawsuits that will arise once the ordinances are implemented?

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Based upon the imminent implementation of the Ordinances and our fears about the negative impact upon the groups of people identified, we, the undersigned, are requesting that Bridgeport Borough Council respond immediately to our concerns regarding the adoption of the Illegal Alien Immigration Relief Act, the Official English Ordinance and the Rental Registration Ordinance.

Elizabeth Albert, Executive Director
The Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County

Eddie Cruz, Executive Director
ACLAMO Family Center

Brian Akamine, Vice President
Norristown Ministerium

Jim Williams
Assets MONTCO

Mr. and Ms. Olvera, residents of Bridgeport
Mr. Nacemento, resident of Bridgeport
Mr. Utrerd, resident of Bridgeport
Mr. Luna, resident of Bridgeport
Mr. Martinez, resident of Bridgeport
Mr. Veladez, resident of Bridgeport
Mr. Arcnas, resident of Bridgeport
Mr. Martinez, resident of Bridgeport
Ms. Vazquez, resident of Bridgeport
Ms. Herrera, resident of Bridgeport