

Press Conference Introduction Statement

By Rosa Pergams

My name is Rosa — I am a renter here in Oakland and I work as a web developer. I was arrested for protesting to demand an immediate end to the Oakland City Government's terror campaign against those in our community who have been forced out of their homes — and onto the streets — to make way for the wealthy. We demand an immediate end to the destruction of our unsheltered neighbors' property — an end to the demolition of self-built homes — and an end to the harassment, criminalization and incarceration of our communities.

As we peacefully demonstrated at Oscar Grant Plaza, protestors — as well as bystanders — were arrested and jailed with the outrageous bail of five-thousand-dollars per person — to discourage us from continuing. However, we will not be discouraged from continuing our struggle to demand housing and dignity for all.

While the Oakland City Government terrorizes our unsheltered neighbors, developers and landlords profit from a housing market that pushes people onto the streets through high rents and private property rights backed by police terror. People — especially Black people — are forced out of their homes to make way for those who can afford to pay more for housing. Homelessness is a symptom of an exploitative system that puts profits before people — the system that enshrines developers' and landlords' right to profit in the first place — off of stolen indigenous land.

Homelessness in Oakland has increased by forty-seven percent since two-thousand-seventeen. While there are more empty residences in Oakland than there are people without housing, and unprecedented millions have been spent to solve homelessness in Oakland, Mayor Libby Schaaf has claimed that the primary cause of homelessness in the city is a shortage of housing.

In reality, Schaaf's job as mayor is not to house the unhoused but to oil the machine that necessarily creates homelessness in the first place — the exploitative system that produces and distributes housing to further enrich the already rich instead of to fulfill human needs. Our city governments are instruments for the exploitation of the oppressed class — maximizing profits for developers and landlords at the expense of the rest of us.

Because I see that our neighbors are terrorized for being homeless by the very forces that have taken their homes, I understand that the struggle of the housed and of the unhoused is the same struggle. Those of us paying rent we cannot really afford, those of us a paycheck away from being unsheltered, and those of us who can no longer find a way to afford to pay rent, clearly share the same struggle. We see that the housed and the unhoused have a common enemy — in those becoming richer while the rest of us become poorer.

This is why we unite as people of many backgrounds to take a stand against the continued terror of unsheltered people by the Oakland City Government. We will continue our struggle so that we can begin to make possible a world where we are not criminalized for existing — where Black and indigenous people may determine our own destiny — and where a home is guaranteed to every person. Thank you.

***Rosa Pergams** is a member of the Party for Socialism and Liberation, Black queer feminist and web developer based in the Bay Area. They have moved about six times in the past year largely due to laws that ultimately protect landlords and capital over renters. They are an organizer in the struggle against gentrification and police terror.*