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## **Rent control law mindful of victims**

Changes to ordinance help Katrina evacuees who've settled in Oakland  
By Heather MacDonald, Inside Bay Area, Wednesday, October 5, 2005

OAKLAND — In an effort to help the hundreds of families displaced by Hurricane Katrina who have relocated to Oakland, the City Council on Tuesday modified the city rent control ordinance to allow landlords to offer discounted rents.

In addition, the council agreed to spend \$250,000 to help evacuees find apartments in Oakland, where the rent is much higher than in New Orleans or along the Gulf Coast.

The changes to the rent control ordinance, which went into effect immediately and are retroactive, allow landlords to offer Katrina victims free or at least half-off rent for at least six months. At the end of the lease, landlords would be allowed to raise the rent to market rates.

Council President Ignacio De La Fuente (Glenview-Fruitvale) cast the only vote against the change, saying he did not think it was wise to "fool around" with the rent control ordinance.

The council limited the ordinance's scope to Katrina victims, but several members suggested they would be interested in expanding it to victims of all declared disasters if it proves successful.

Although the Rental Housing Association of Northern Alameda County initially proposed the change, group spokesman Bob Hines told the council the ordinance was mired in a sea of red tape and would expose landlords to financial risk.

On Wednesday, Hines said the association would recommend landlords, especially those who rent only a few apartments, consult with an attorney before offering hurricane victims free or reduced rent. Otherwise, they should donate to a disaster relief group, he said.

Hines said the group was concerned landlords might inadvertently violate the ordinance's many conditions, including a requirement that the renter be explicitly notified of the length of the agreement for reduced rent.

The Oakland Red Cross is helping 270 families, composed of 551 people, city officials say.

City funds will be used to cover the gap between vouchers from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and victims' meager incomes and Oakland's high rents, said Anne Campbell Washington, assistant to City Administrator Deborah Edgerly.

The Oakland Housing Authority has already identified 45 families in need of assistance, Campbell Washington said.

The council agreed to use \$250,000 in unanticipated revenue from a loan program designed to help Oakland residents rehabilitate their homes. Councilmember Nancy Nadel (Downtown-West Oakland) and Vice Mayor Jane Brunner (North Oakland) abstained from the vote.

"I don't want to take money from one group of low-income people and give it to another group of low-income people," Nadel said. "The funds available are already inadequate."

A final vote to reallocate the funds is scheduled for Oct. 18.

A fund established for city employees to aid Katrina victims has collected more than \$10,000, Campbell Washington said. The money will be donated to the Red Cross.