

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES  
ATTORNEY  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA  
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney  
Robert S. Brewer Jr.***

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***For Immediate Release***

## **U.S. Attorney Issues Warning to Landlords: Don't Demand Sexual Favors from Financially-Strapped Tenants during Pandemic - or Ever**

### **NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – May 4, 2020**

SAN DIEGO – U.S. Attorney Robert Brewer is warning landlords that it is against the law to demand sexual favors from cash-strapped tenants who can't pay rent due to Covid-19, and he has deployed all available enforcement tools against anyone who tries to use the pandemic to sexually harass people in need of housing.

As the country adopts drastic measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, many Americans have lost their jobs and many more have seen their wages curtailed. These losses have forced many to seek abatements or suspensions of their rent, with reports that nearly one third of Americans were unable to pay their April rent at the beginning of the month.

Many landlords responded to these circumstances with understanding and care, trying to work with their tenants to weather the current crisis. There have been reports, however, of other landlords who have responded to requests to defer rent payments with demands for sexual favors and other acts of unwelcome sexual conduct.

"Taking advantage of tenants in this way is not only despicable - it is illegal," Brewer said. "Such

behavior is not tolerated in normal times, and certainly will not be tolerated now. Criminal conduct, such as the exchange of sexual favors for housing benefits, will result in an indictment.”

U.S. Attorney Brewer appointed Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher Tenorio as COVID-19 Civil Rights Coordinator to lead investigations into possible hate crimes and civil rights violations related to the nation's ongoing public health emergency. Tenorio is also Chairperson of the San Diego Regional Hate Crimes Coalition.

The Justice Department’s [Sexual Harassment in Housing Initiative](#) is an effort to combat sexual harassment in housing led by the Civil Rights Division, in coordination with U.S. Attorney’s Offices across the country. The goal of the Initiative is to address sexual harassment by landlords, property managers, maintenance workers, loan officers or other people who have control over housing.

Launched in 2017, the Initiative has filed lawsuits across the country alleging a pattern or practice of sexual harassment in housing and recovered millions of dollars in damages for harassment victims. The Justice Department’s investigations frequently uncover sexual harassment that has been ongoing for years. Many individuals do not know that being sexually harassed by a housing provider can violate federal law or that the Department of Justice may be able to help.

The Department of Justice, through the Civil Rights Division and the U.S. Attorney’s Offices, enforces the Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin, and disability. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by the Act.

The Department encourages anyone who has experienced sexual harassment in housing, or knows someone who has, to contact the Civil Rights Division by calling **(844) 380-6178** or emailing [fairhousing@usdoj.gov](mailto:fairhousing@usdoj.gov).

Individuals may also file a complaint alleging harassment or discrimination in housing with the Department of Housing and Urban Development through [HUD’s website](#) or by calling (800) 669-9777.