



A Sacramento property owned by Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon's wife.

Lawmakers and landlords

More than one-fourth of legislators are both

BY MATT LEVIN AND ELIZABETH CASTILLO / CALMatters

In a quiet neighborhood on the outskirts of South Sacramento, the property looks like any other on the block: a single-story house that could use a new paint job, a large front yard that could use a little tidying, a chain-link fence around the lot.

The tenants inside have no complaints. They have a good relationship with the property manager, and broken things get fixed on time. But like millions of renters in this increasingly costly state, they say that if their landlord raised the rent, they couldn't afford to stay.

State law doesn't do much to protect against such a scenario. Because they rent a single-family home, they wouldn't benefit from rent control even if Sacramento votes to adopt it next year. They could be evicted without being given a specific reason why.

The tenants—who declined to be identified for this story—were unaware their monthly rent checks were going to the wife of a man with significant sway over whether those state laws will change this year: state Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon. A Democrat from Los Angeles, Rendon and his wife collect rental income from four properties: three single-family homes in Sacramento and a condominium in downtown L.A.

Rendon declined to be interviewed for this story. A spokesman wrote via email that Rendon "is aware of the cost pressure that many tenants face and has voted for a host of tenants' protection bills that have been before him in the Assembly." He emphasized that the speaker's wife owned three of the rental properties well before marrying Rendon.

He's not the only lawmaker to double as a landlord. A CALmatters analysis of state-required financial disclosure documents reveals that at least 30 lawmakers—more than 25% of the Legislature—own one or more properties that generate income from tenants. Six sit on one of the Legislature's housing committees. Many are renting out multiple homes, receiving at a minimum tens of thousands of dollars a year in rent checks.

Over the past three years, bills to expand rent control, require "just cause" evictions and provide other tenant protections have failed to make it out of the Capitol. Tenant advocacy groups say that while the influence of the landlord and developer lobby is their biggest obstacle in persuading lawmakers to support their legislation, the fact that so many lawmakers are landlords themselves probably doesn't help.

"In a very real sense, they'd be taking money out of their own pockets," said Elliot Stevenson of the Sacramento Tenants Union, an advocacy group for Sacramento renters.

Debra Carlton, a spokeswoman for the California Apartment Association, a prominent landlord interest group, said legislators who are also landlords aren't necessarily biased against tenant legislation.

"I don't know if it's anything different than a legislator who has a tax benefit from owning a home," said Carlton. "I think they just better understand what the issues are."

Carlton's group opposes pro-tenant legislation bills that a group of progressive lawmakers say will help California renters struggling to afford to stay in their homes.

Tenant advocates say that lawmakers who are also small landlords may be more easily swayed by the opponents' narrative.

"The opposition is spinning this narrative to make it look like tenant protections would go after the poor, small mom-and-pop owner just trying to get by," said Shanti Singh of Tenants Together, a statewide coalition of tenant advocates. "And I think when those legislators are small mom-and-pop landlords themselves, that probably resonates with them."

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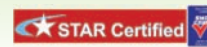
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