

Oct 12, 2026

The Honorable Phillip Peters

Re: Request for California Reform of Laws Governing Squatters and Unauthorized Occupants

Dear Elected Officials and Public Safety Leaders:

The Lake Isabella Bodfish Property Owners Association is asking the California Legislature to take another look at the laws and procedures dealing with people who move into or stay in a home without the owner's permission.

We are talking about situations where there is no lease, no rental agreement, no rent being paid, and no legitimate claim of ownership or right to be there.

Our Association represents property owners and residents in the Lake Isabella and Bodfish communities. This issue matters to our members because it affects their property, finances, safety and peace of mind.

We support due-process protections for legitimate tenants. Someone who entered into a rental agreement, was given permission by the owner to live at the property, or has a legitimate unresolved claim to possession should have the protections provided under California law.

Our concern is with people who are not tenants at all.

When someone enters or stays in a property without the owner's permission, has no lease, has never paid rent and has no legitimate claim to the property, that situation should be treated differently from a normal landlord-tenant dispute.

Right now, however, it can be difficult for an owner to prove that difference. In many cases, the owner may have to go through a lengthy and expensive civil process before getting the property back.

For property owners in our area, this can lead to:

- Court and attorney costs;
- Unpaid water, electric, gas, trash and other bills;
- Damage, vandalism, theft or unauthorized changes to the property;
- Lost rent or the inability to sell, rent or use the home;
- Insurance, liability and security problems;
- Vacant properties falling into worse condition;
- Problems and added concerns for nearby residents; and
- More work for local law enforcement and the courts.

BY ORDER OF THE BD/SUPV
Referred To _____

Copies Furnished each supervisor
CAO, county counsel

Date 10-19-26
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
By Michelle Grayson, Deputy

This is especially important in rural communities like Lake Isabella and Bodfish. Many homes here are second homes, vacation homes, rentals or investment properties. Some owners live outside the area or may be away for extended periods, which can make it harder to discover a problem quickly.

Our Primary Request

We ask the California Legislature to create a clear and faster process for removing a verified unauthorized occupant from a residential property when that person has no legitimate tenancy, ownership interest or other legal right to be there.

We believe this can be done without taking away protections from legitimate tenants.

For example, an owner could be required to provide proof of ownership and sign a declaration stating that the occupant:

1. Does not have a lease or rental agreement with the owner;
2. Was not given permission by the owner or an authorized representative to live at the property;
3. Is not a current tenant;
4. Is not a former tenant with an unresolved right to remain;
5. Has no legitimate ownership interest or other legal right to possession; and
6. Has been given a reasonable chance to provide evidence that they have a lawful right to occupy the property.

Law enforcement could then check available ownership and tenancy information before taking action.

This would still provide due process while recognizing a basic difference:

A legitimate tenant dispute is not the same as someone who was never a tenant in the first place.

California law should provide a reasonable process for both situations.

We Are Not Asking for Tenant Protections to Be Eliminated

We understand why California has tenant protections, and we are not asking for those protections to be removed. An owner should not be able to avoid the normal eviction process simply by calling a lawful tenant a "squatter."

That is why the law should use clear, objective standards to tell the difference.

Someone with a real lease, rental history, permission from the owner or a legitimate claim to possession should receive the protections already provided by law.

But when the records show that a person has **no tenancy, no permission from the owner, no rental relationship and no legitimate claim to the property**, the owner should not have to wait months while the property is damaged or bills continue to build up.

The goal should be a fair process that protects both sides.

California Has Already Considered Similar Reform

California lawmakers have already recognized that unauthorized occupants and legitimate tenants are not always the same thing.

Recent proposals, including **SB 448 and AB 897**, tried to address unauthorized residential occupants while making a distinction between squatters and people with legitimate tenancy or ownership claims.

Those proposals did not create the statewide solution that is still needed, but they show that this is a real policy issue affecting communities across California.

We ask our representatives to revisit the issue and speak with property owners, tenant advocates, law enforcement, prosecutors, courts and local governments before developing a new proposal.

If allowing law enforcement to remove someone directly creates constitutional or practical problems, other options should be considered. These could include an **expedited unlawful-detainer process for verified non-tenants**, a standard statewide form and documentation process, or a pilot program that could be tested before being expanded statewide.

A Community Issue, Not Merely a Property-Owner Issue

This problem does not affect only the individual owner.

When a property is occupied without permission or badly damaged, nearby residents may also deal with noise, safety concerns, trash, code violations and declining neighborhood conditions. Vacant homes can become more difficult to maintain, especially when the owner is not nearby.

Law-enforcement officers and courts also need clearer guidance. They should not be forced to sort out complicated possession disputes without a clear process to follow.

A practical law could help everyone by explaining what owners and occupants must provide, what law enforcement can verify, and when the courts need to become involved.

The Lake Isabella Bodfish Property Owners Association respectfully asks you to support legislation that:

Protects legitimate tenants, protects property owners, and gives law enforcement a clear and timely way to address verified unauthorized occupants who have no legitimate right to be there.

We would appreciate a written response outlining your position on this issue, whether you would support legislation creating a Verified Unauthorized Occupant Removal Process, and what steps you believe can be taken to move this issue forward. Our Association would also welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you or your staff.

We are also willing to work with tenant advocates, law enforcement, local governments and others to help develop legislation that is fair, constitutional and workable in real situations.

Thank you for your service to our community and for taking the time to consider this request. We respectfully ask that you help make reform of California's squatter and unauthorized-occupant laws a legislative priority.

Respectfully,

Lake Isabella Bodfish Property Owners Association

By: 

Rebecca Star-Harris

President / Authorized Representative

PO BOX 1251

Lake Isabella, California

On behalf of the members and property owners of the Lake Isabella Bodfish Property Owners Association

LAKE ISABELLA/BODFISH PROPERTY OWNER IMPACT STATEMENT

The Local Impact of Unauthorized Occupancy

Lake Isabella Bodfish Property Owners Association (LIBPOA)

Lake Isabella and Bodfish are small, rural communities where property ownership often represents a lifetime of hard work and savings. Many homes belong to retirees, working families, and people who have inherited property. Others are vacation homes or properties owned by people who live outside the area.

When someone occupies a home without permission, the consequences can be financially devastating. Property owners may face legal fees, property damage, unpaid utilities, lost rental income, and months of uncertainty while trying to regain possession. Meanwhile, they remain responsible for property taxes, insurance, and other expenses on a home they cannot use, rent, or sell.

The impact doesn't stop at the property line. Unauthorized occupancy can lead to neglected properties, neighborhood safety concerns, and additional demands on law enforcement and code enforcement. In communities already struggling with fire hazards, rising insurance costs, and limited public resources, these problems place another burden on residents.

We are not asking to take protections away from legitimate tenants. Anyone with a lawful rental agreement or a genuine legal claim to occupy a property deserves due process.

However, there must be a clear distinction between a legitimate tenant and someone who entered a property without permission and has no lawful right to remain. When that distinction cannot be resolved promptly, property owners can be forced into lengthy and expensive legal proceedings.

Our Request: Create a Verified Unauthorized Occupant Removal Process

We ask California lawmakers to establish a straightforward process that allows ownership and an occupant's right to remain to be verified promptly, with safeguards against wrongful removal.

Property owners should not have to spend months and thousands of dollars trying to recover a home from someone who was never authorized to live there.

We respectfully request a written response outlining your position on this issue, whether you would support legislation establishing a Verified Unauthorized Occupant Removal Process, and what steps you are willing to take to help address this problem.

Our communities need a process that protects legitimate tenants while giving property owners a fair, timely, and practical way to regain possession of their property.

Rebecca Starr-Harris

President, Lake Isabella Bodfish Property Owners Association
Lake Isabella, California