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La Luz is a 501(c)3
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November 22, 2021

The Honorable Susan Gorin
Supervisor, First District
Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
575 Administration Drive
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Ref: Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan

Dear Supervisor Gorin,

The rebirth of the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) is a rare opportunity to address the pressing issue of affordable housing in our community, an issue that greatly impacts the families La Luz Center serves.

Because of the everyday lived experience of our clients in the Sonoma Valley community, the number of services we provide to them, and the trends we observe, La Luz Center urges the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors to maximize the number of affordable housing units in the SDC Specific Plan and, by doing so, significantly reduce the lack of affordable housing in Sonoma Valley and set the aspiration of the community we want to be.

The constant battle that people in Sonoma Valley face every day with housing affordability is illustrated by the words of one of La Luz's clients:

"Throughout the year we struggle because we have to make sure we have enough money to pay the rent at the end of the month. This means that we have to also do with less [money] for food, clothing, medicines and paying other bills. Paying rent is where our wages go, and every year we get rent increases for a tiny rundown house in Boyes Hot Springs."

La Luz Center strives to be a source of light and hope for our most vulnerable community members- from ensuring everyone has access to the most basic needs to building access to skills and providing our community with a sense of belonging.

In the last seven years, one issue stands out among the others –**the lack of affordable housing**. This comes to light through our community advocates' work in providing renters with eviction information, the continued partnership with Legal Aid of Sonoma County, which connects our families to a housing attorney, and our rental assistance program. These efforts are all a response to the root problem.

According to Generation Housing's 2021 report on Sonoma County housing needs, there is a shortfall of roughly 38,000 homes in our County. Almost 30,000 of these homes are needed in the neighborhoods of individuals and families earning below the median income. If we consider that Sonoma Valley's population is approximately 9% of the County's population, a quick extrapolation points to the possible deficit of thousands of affordable housing units in Sonoma Valley.

In their day-to-day work La Luz's advocates see multiple families crowded into single units and facing high rents, absentee or unresponsive landlords, and substandard structures while being charged market-rate prices. In 2021 alone, we have provided housing-related services to 399 people, from emergency rental assistance to tenant advocacy and housing searches. La Luz has recently experienced a rise in the demand for these services as the statewide eviction moratorium ended.

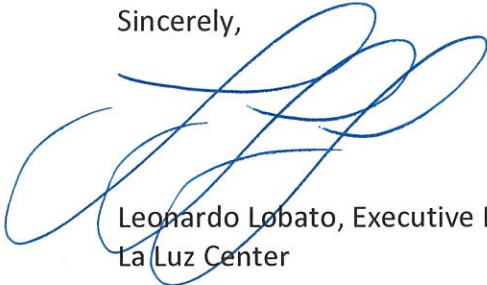
Another manifestation of the affordable housing issue, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is the 605 applications that individuals and families from Sonoma Valley have submitted since April to obtain rental relief funds from Sonoma County's Emergency Rental Assistance Program, ERAP. La Luz is the only participating organization in the Sonoma Valley that offers this vital program to the community.

Our local housing crisis is not only large in magnitude but also pressing. The lack of affordable housing and the high cost of living in Sonoma Valley are driving families and individuals away from the Valley. A somber illustration of this trend is found in the 2020 Census preliminary results, which shows that the Latino population in the Boyes Hot Springs census tract has declined by 17% in 10 years, before the pandemic and at an accelerating rate.

The social, economic, and cultural impact in our community is transformational, and not in a positive way. Sonoma Valley is losing vibrant, entrepreneurial, hardworking, and culturally diverse members of its community. This has a cascading effect with dire consequences for all in the Valley.

The Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) is a unique opportunity to significantly reduce the affordable housing need in Sonoma Valley and set the aspiration of the community we want to be: A community that offers every resident access to affordable and decent housing. La Luz Center urges the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors to maximize the number of affordable housing units in the SDC Specific Plan.

Sincerely,



Leonardo Lobato, Executive Director
La Luz Center

Cc: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors