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California Homeowners Mount a Growing Protest Movement Against Foreclosures

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Rose Gudiel is on the front lines of a growing protest movement to stop banks from foreclosing on families victimized by the economic crisis and abusive banking practices.

The 35-year old Gudiel, who juggles two jobs and lives with her parents and brother in La Puente, a working class suburb of Los Angeles, has become the public face of a burgeoning crusade to defend homeowners from unfair evictions. Gudiel, her family, neighbors and other supporters have pledged to risk arrest when the Los Angeles County Sheriff tries to evict them this week from Gudiel's home after Fannie Mae issue a foreclosure notice.

Gudiel is part of a broad coalition of California unions and community groups that have been fighting bank foreclosures for over a year. This week, the coalition -- which is called Refund California and includes the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the California Nurses Association, the California Community Reinvestment Coalition, the California Teachers Association, PICO (a faith-based community group) and POWER (a Los Angeles community organization) -- began a multi-week series of protests and public events to call on banks to fix the housing mess, pay their fair share of taxes, and help rebuild hard-hit neighborhoods. They want Wall Street banks to pay for destroying jobs and neighborhoods with their greedy, irresponsible and predatory business practices.

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These events are also part of a 10-city campaign aligned with The New Bottom Line, a nationwide coalition of 1,000 faith-based and community organizations that seeks to hold Wall Street accountable.

On Tuesday this week, the activists organized a protest outside a meeting of the Bay Area Council, a powerful business lobby group, held in the VIP section of AT&T park, home of the San Francisco Giants. From only a few feet away, they confronted executives from Bank of America and Wells Fargo, both members of the business group, with banners and leaflets, demanding that the banks keep families "Safe at Home."

On Wednesday, members of ACCE and other groups collected trash from a foreclosed Oakland home and delivered the waste to Citibank, which issued the foreclosure. On Thursday, the coalition will mount a mass protest rally in San Francisco's Financial District.

Similar actions are scheduled next week in the LA area. Monday's action will be a "teach in" including a march by teachers and students to a downtown bank. The next day, activists will protest at an Orange County institution. On Wednesday, they will bring trash to a bank office on Wednesday. Wednesday night the protestors will show up at the home of a top bank executive. The next day, over 1,000 homeowners will march through LA streets into the offices of a major bank and demand that "Wall Street Banks Pay."

Gudiel, who will be participating in the protest actions in the LA area, has never been politically involved before, but her recent experiences changed her views.

"My parents instilled in me the idea that if you work hard and study you could live your American Dream," Gudiel recently told a [local paper](#). "I was the first person in my family to graduate from college, and I worked hard so that I can own a home. And now these banks are taking my dream away."

Gudiel, an SEIU member, works for the California Employment Development Department and also as an in-home care worker. She, her father (a warehouse worker), and her brother live with and care for Rose's elderly disabled mother.

Gudiel and her parents had lived in the house since 2005 and made steady mortgage payments until 2009, when one of her brothers died unexpectedly and the family lost his income. The family missed a few mortgage payments. When another brother moved in with them, adding to their household income, they were able to resume making payments.

But OneWest, which is headquartered in Pasadena, refused to accept her payment. Instead the bank started foreclosure proceedings. With ACCE's help, Gudiel tried to get OneWest to modify her mortgage loan, which requires her to pay \$2,456 a month for her 3-bedroom house. She applied for a modification but the bank refused.

While OneWest is aggressively foreclosing on hardworking families like the Gudiels, it is also making hefty profits. Last year, OneWest made over \$1.5 billion in profits. Unlike

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all major banks and many smaller banks, OneWest [does not participate](#) in Keep Your Home California, a state program that uses federal funds to assist homeowners facing foreclosure.

Eventually, Fannie Mae, the quasi-government housing finance agency, took over the OneWest mortgage and continued the foreclosure process. It offered Gudiel \$4,000 to give up her fight and leave voluntarily. She refused. Fannie Mae took her to court to evict her.

On September 6, a judge in El Monte Superior Court ruled that the family is illegally occupying their home and ordered them to leave within two weeks. The family expects the county Sheriff to show up at their door any day now and try to evict them.

Gudiel, her neighbors, coworkers, and supporters from ACCE and SEIU are prepared for a stand-off with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's office. They are on alert, waiting to hear when the Sheriff's officers show up. They will hold a 24-hour-day vigil at the house to prevent the sheriff from evicting the Guidels, while Rose and her supporters fight with Fannie Mae and OneWest to rescind their foreclosure action and renegotiate the loan. They intend to link arms in front of the doorway to stop the sheriff from evicting the family, risking arrest. As they approach the house, the law enforcement officials will see a banner hanging on the house that reads: "One West and Fannie Mae: You're Not Going to Take Our Home." Their neighbors have posted signs of support on their homes.

"I'm not leaving," said Gudiel. "I'm willing to go to jail."

"There's a growing movement of neighborhood residents saying 'enough is enough,'" explained Amy Schur, ACCE's state director. "We're not going to let the banks take away our homes and destroy our communities. We're organizing to defend our neighbors, stop evictions, and help families move back in."

ACCE and other groups have been mobilizing homeowners for over a year, organizing meetings with bank officials and, when necessary, resorting to protest and civil disobedience to draw public attention to the banks' abusive practices and failures to deal with homeowners in good faith.

Earlier this year, for example, Wells Fargo foreclosed on the home of Tanya Dennis, 63, former vice principal of Castlemont High School in Oakland. Dennis joined the ACCE's Home Defenders League, which organized a campaign against the bank. Dennis hired a locksmith and broke into her East Berkeley house, which Wells Fargo had padlocked. In August, Wells Fargo rescinded the foreclosure and negotiated a fair loan modification with Dennis, who is now back in her home.

Gudiel and Dennis are two of many families who have faced foreclosure due to circumstances beyond their control.

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More than four years into the economic crisis caused by Wall Street banks, the epidemic of foreclosures is ravaging neighborhoods across California. In response, Refund California, has orchestrated the multi-city campaign to draw attention to the bank's abusive practices and to demand that banks contribute to fixing the problem. Their protests are only the most visible tactic in their arsenal. They are also lobbying the state legislature to enact new laws to hold banks accountable.

The coalition organizers understand that the goal is not simply to help a handful of homeowners stay in their houses, but to create a mounting sense of crisis and urgency, so that banks change their routine practices and politicians change government policy.

Earlier this year the coalition filed a bill in the state legislature to make banks pay a \$10,000 fee per foreclosure for the damage. According to conservative estimates, foreclosures have reduced property values in California by \$650 billion dollars, resulting in a loss of more than \$4 billion in property taxes. Meanwhile, cities pay an estimated \$17 billion to deal with the costs of foreclosures -- an average of \$20,000 per foreclosed property.

ACCE, SEIU and other activist groups are putting the heat on banks, demanding that banks reduce foreclosures by reducing the mortgage principal for struggling underwater homeowners. Many economists say that this strategy is an effective way to revitalize the housing sector and help achieve a strong economic recovery. Californians overpay banks \$20 billion every year on underwater mortgages that could instead be pumped into the state's economy to create 300,000 jobs. The activists want the California legislature to establish a mandatory foreclosure mediation program to ensure that struggling homeowners received due process and a fair chance at negotiating a loan modification to save their homes.

More information about the coalition's activities is available from ACCE leader Peggy Mears (pmears@calorganize.org and 909-641-1843) or at the following website: www.MakeBanksPayCalifornia.com