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TENANTS, LOCAL HEALTH LEADERS SPEAK OUT ABOUT HOUSING CONDITIONS' IMPACT ON ASTHMA

Asthma Coalition of Los Angeles County, South Los Angeles Tenants host "Asthma Trigger Tours"

LOS ANGELES – The Asthma Coalition of Los Angeles County – which includes St. John's Well Child and Family Center (SJWCFC), Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), Esperanza Community Housing Corporation, and Los Angeles County Department of Public Health – today recognized Asthma Awareness Month at "Home Is Where the Asthma Is," an event highlighting the impact of housing's effect on tenants' health.

More than 60 people attended the event, including representatives of local non-profit agencies, LA City and County entities, and neighborhood residents. The event featured SJWCFC President and CEO Jim Mangia and Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Area Health Officer Dr. Jan King who discussed the disproportionate impact of asthma on low-income communities and the effects of substandard housing on health.

"As a network of community health centers, we see thousands of patients with housing-related health conditions every year, including asthma," said Mangia. "We can't simply treat or prescribe our way out of this when our patients' homes are what is making them sick."

Tenants in the building near Central Avenue and East Adams Boulevard in South Los Angeles offered attendees tours of their homes, pointing out the asthma triggers and sharing the stories of the impact on their health. Both of Brieda Patricio's children have developed asthma since moving into their apartment. During the tour of her unit, Patricio pointed mold on the ceiling of almost every room in her home and cockroaches and rats coming into the apartment through holes in the floor.

"When he was five months old, my son Jason spent six days in the hospital with pneumonia and bacterial bronchitis," said Valeria Rendon, a tenant living in the building. "It's really stressful; we constantly worry if our children are going to get better and how our home is going to impact their long-term health."

Maria Mateos, who has been a tenant in the building for more than a decade also provided a tour of the conditions in her home. The building, originally constructed in 1916, is suffering from decades of neglect on the part of the property owner. It now has a severe infestation of roaches and rats as well as problems with mold and humidity, which all contribute to chronic respiratory problems and allergies.

During the tour of her home, Mateos talked about the on-going water leakage in her bathroom. "We used to have to use an umbrella when going to the bathroom. The ceiling was repaired after we complained to the landlord multiple times but you can see where it is starting to leak again."

After Patricio and Mateos wrote a letter to the landlord requesting repairs, the landlord responded by threatening the tenants. "She called us pigs, threatened to evict us, and never fixed any of the problems," said Patricio. The tenants recently filed complaints with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and the City of Los Angeles Housing Department. A building inspection by the Housing Department is scheduled for May 22.

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About the Asthma Coalition of Los Angeles County: The Coalition is a broad-based comprehensive group of experts from community-based organization, advocacy groups, universities, government entities, school districts, environmental groups, health plans, hospitals, and clinics in Los Angeles County. Our mission is to be a collective, powerful voice for policy and systems change to prevent, minimize, and manage the burden of asthma.