



January 19, 2023

The Honorable Scott Wiener  
California State Senate  
1021 O Street, Suite 6630  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Senate Bill 4 - Affordable Housing on Faith Lands Act - Support**

Dear Senator Wiener,

On behalf of San Francisco Foundation, I am writing in support of Senate Bill (SB) 4, the Affordable Housing on Faith Lands Act. This measure would make building affordable housing easier, faster, and cheaper on land owned by faith-based institutions and nonprofit colleges.

With more than \$1.5 billion in assets, the San Francisco Foundation is one of the largest community foundations in the country. Together with its donors, the Foundation distributed \$154 million to nonprofit organizations last fiscal year. The San Francisco Foundation serves Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, and San Mateo counties.

The faith community has historically been at the forefront of advocating for racial and economic equity, and it remains a crucial voice today. In 1993, The San Francisco Foundation created FAITHS (Foundation Alliance with Interfaith to Heal Society) — now a nationally recognized program — to enhance the work of faith-based organizations and congregations to organize and advocate for equitable policies and improve services and outcomes in their neighborhoods and the region. We cannot make meaningful progress toward inclusive prosperity in the Bay Area without addressing the housing crisis. In support of these values, I write in support of SB 4.

Across California, faith-based organizations and non-profit colleges are seeking to partner with affordable housing developers to build critically needed affordable homes on their own land. These faith-based organizations are long-standing community anchors and are driven by their values to support those most in need and help address our homelessness crisis.

Per a study by the UC Berkeley Turner Center, there are approximately 38,800 acres of land—roughly the size of the city of Stockton—used for religious purposes and are potentially developable. A significant share of that acreage (45 percent) is located in the state’s “high” or “highest” resource opportunity areas, signaling an opportunity for building housing in neighborhoods with lower poverty rates and greater economic, educational, and environmental amenities.

Unfortunately, the land that these organizations hold can often be locked into complicated and cost-prohibitive local zoning rules and regulations. These can range from standards which allow only a few units to be built on large parcels to others which limit any housing construction at all.

The variety of red tape and obstacles in the way make development financially infeasible and discourage institutions from moving forward with projects that would benefit their low-income and unhoused neighbors.

A 2022 report from the California Department of Housing and Community Development found that we need to build 1.2 million affordable homes over the next decade to meet our housing goals. Over the last few years, California has added an average of 19,000 affordable units a year. At this pace we will not reach our state goals without increased streamlining for affordable housing production.

SB 4 will streamline the building process and offer new tools for neighborhood leaders to build safe, stable, affordable homes for local residents and families. This bill will allow places of worship to build 100% affordable housing projects, creating a valuable option in the midst of the state's housing and homelessness crises. It also provides significant untapped benefits for faith-based organizations, from supporting an organization's charitable mission to providing revenue that can stabilize the organization's finances.

This is a common-sense opportunity for us to partner with trusted community leaders. The catastrophic tragedies we see on the street every day call for urgent and bold action and this bill will help us move forward. Thank you for your leadership on these critical housing and homelessness issues and for all these reasons, we support this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Fred Blackwell', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Fred Blackwell, CEO  
San Francisco Foundation