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Longtime Lincoln Heights Tenants Are Fighting 'Cash For Keys' Intimidation

by [Oren Peleg](#) in [News](#) on Feb 11, 2017 2:56 pm



Photo via [Chinatown Community for Equitable Development/Twitter](#)

If Silver Lake was once the hub of gentrification in Los Angeles, the wave has since moved into neighborhoods far beyond. In Lincoln Heights, [one of Los Angeles's first suburban neighborhoods](#), an outcropping of artist studios and third-wave coffee shops is also paired with creeping rents and the displacement of long-standing tenants.

As developers descend upon the neighborhood, the practice known as "[cash for keys](#)" has become a divisive flashpoint at the intersection of tenants rights, cultural identity, affordable housing, and a Los Angeles quickly reinventing itself.

Cash for keys sees developers offering tenants in rent-controlled buildings money in exchange for a buyout of their lease. The cash offered, however, is usually a low figure that quickly runs out while tenants wake up to the

reality that they have been priced out of the rental market.

“Landlords and their representatives will lie to you and tell you that you have to accept the voluntary vacate or cash for keys,” a member of the L.A. Tenants Union at a September protest said, notes the Los Angeles Times. “You have rights.... Don’t sign, don’t move and don’t take the money.”

Now, tenants in Lincoln Heights are standing up.

On Saturday, a rally organized by the Chinatown Community for Equitable Development group took place outside a building along North Broadway near Griffin Ave. "...75% of the residents have been driven out [of the building] by unlawful 'cash for keys' evictions," notes [a press release](#) by the group.

Annie Shaw, a member of CCED, told LAist, only five units remain occupied at the 2919 N. Broadway. The rally protested the harassment the occupants receive from NBK Realty Management, which was hired by the build's new owners to evict all tenants of the building.

"They come to you and say, 'Hey, I really like you, so I'm going to get the new owners to pay you \$1,500 to leave, but you have to sign this right now'," Kenwood Jung, a member of CCED, told LAist. "But if they don't, it starts getting really ugly and they start escalating things." Jung describes electricity and water utilities turned off in the building, tenants being locked out, and other intimidation tactics, like threats to call the sheriff and belongs thrown on the street. All these tactics are illegal, Jung adds.

As of publication, NBK has not responded to LAist's request for comment.

"Long-time residents of Lincoln Heights are being threatened with forced removal from their homes," the CCED press release continues. "Senior residents have been physically intimidated and purposefully neglected, despite their disability and health status. In addition to these stressful events, residents are faced with age discrimination while finding new housing."

"If they don't let us stay, we don't have a solution." [a tenant of nearby 1907 Johnston Street](#), also fighting intimidation tactics, said of an eviction notice received last year. "We're not leaving."



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