

## ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER LEGAL OUTREACH

November 7, 2020

Honorable Aaron Peskin  
Member  
SF Board of Supervisors  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: Ordinance to Save our Small Businesses in San Francisco

Dear Supervisor Peskin:

Congratulations on your re-election to the SF Board of Supervisors. We are very fortunate to have you as one of our City leaders to protect, preserve and defend our interests on the Board.

This letter is to specifically thank you for all of your leadership to save our small businesses, particularly those renting space from the Japan Center Malls in Japantown.

As you are aware, the two landlords who own the Japan Center Malls have not been willing to illustrate any good faith effort to negotiate a reasonable rent repayment plan with their tenants. Instead, they have either ignored any correspondence sent to them or have sent monthly invoices highlighting the monies owed and the interest due. Needless to say, this has added an enormous level of additional stress and created an environment of constant pessimism and worry with the tenants.

Over the past few months, the tenants have shared their stories with me as to what they are doing to keep their businesses alive. Many of them have tapped into whatever savings they have, and a constant stream of tears flow when they talk about the dramatic drop in daily sales. It is not an exaggeration to say that many tenants they have lost over 70-80% in sales with some making as little as \$60/day. I realize that this dire state of affairs is not limited to Japantown. However, because of the built structure of our commercial corridor, **if we lose these tenants, we will lose almost the entire business district within our community.**

There has been a Japantown in San Francisco since the late 1800's. The community was a 40 block self-contained, self-sufficient business and residential district until World War II. Then, the US Government used its powers to order all persons of Japanese ancestry to immediately vacate the Western United States and placed them, (over 120,000 individuals), into concentration camps located in the most desolate parts of the country. Their "crime" for their incarceration was solely based on them being of Japanese ancestry.

When they returned home to San Francisco, they were not welcomed or treated as citizens with equal rights under the law. Yet, they re-established their businesses, schools, temples, churches and organizations once again only to be faced with another government action a few years later known as Redevelopment.

The result of Redevelopment took away just as much as the incarceration. Instead of physically removing residents, their plan removed and demolished the homes and businesses of Japanese Americans without offering any type of realistic compensation or alternative affordable housing.

Today, Japantown is being threatened by two privately owned corporations. It is clear from their actions and inactions that they have no desire or interest to see that their tenants have any chance of surviving during and after this major pandemic nor appreciate or understand the larger implications of what their unwillingness will do to the Japanese American community.

You and your office understand what will happen if no reasonable negotiations take place. You have therefore utilized your authority as a representative of the City and County of San Francisco to intervene on behalf of your constituents who need a voice to support and protect their interests.

This is one of the few occasions in our history as a community in San Francisco that we see leadership in government working on our behalf rather than advocating for the voice of wealthy developers, powerful special interests and corporate and absent landlords. To that, **we are extremely grateful for your clear understanding and appreciation that our community is and will remain an important and vital district within our City.**

As a fourth generation Japanese American who was born and raised in this City and now reside in Japantown, it is personally important for me to see that this community, my community, be able to share the story, culture, traditions and history of Japanese Americans residing in this City for generations to come. That can only happen with essential social service organizations and businesses to provide that historical and cultural context.

Thank you for your leadership. Thank you for your respect of our community.  
Thank you for being willing to serve as OUR LEADER in this fight.

Sincerely,

Diane Matsuda  
Staff Attorney  
Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach