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California Sues Huntington Beach for Snubbing Affordable Housing.

- **Governor alleges Huntington Beach isn't following state law**
- **Former GOP stronghold opposed immigrant sanctuary policy**

California's leaders sued the seaside city of Huntington Beach over claims that it worsened the state's housing shortage by refusing to cooperate with a plan for more affordable units.

The unusual legal action by the most populous U.S. state against one of its own municipalities — a historically red-voting place dubbed Surf City, USA, for the breaking waves along its 9.5-mile (15.3-kilometer) stretch of sandy Pacific Ocean beach — was brought Friday by Attorney General Xavier Becerra at the behest of new Governor Gavin Newsom.

The case is being touted as the first test of a law that allows California officials to revoke a city's housing plan that's out of compliance with state standards. The suit was filed in Orange County Superior Court but couldn't immediately be verified in electronic records.

"Cities and counties are important partners in addressing this housing crisis, and many cities are making herculean efforts to meet this crisis head on," Newsom said in an emailed statement. "But some cities are refusing to do their part to address this crisis and willfully stand in violation of California law. Those cities will be held to account."

No other state faces a housing shortage as deep and wide as California. Fees, regulations and delays have pushed building costs to among the highest in the nation, and the state adds far fewer new units than it needs each year to meet demand. As a result, median home prices have about doubled since the end of the Great Recession, to \$558,000. Two in five households in the state are considered "cost-burdened," paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Homelessness has reached crisis proportions.

Huntington Beach is in Orange County, once a Republican stronghold that has seen its edge slip after the 2018 elections. The Republican congressman representing the city, Dana Rohrabacher, lost to a Democrat. Becerra and Newsom are Democrats.

In Friday's complaint, the state's housing agency said the Huntington Beach city council voted unanimously in March 2016 to defeat a proposal that would have committed the city to more affordable housing. When the state told the city in November 2018 that it still wasn't in compliance, city officials said they wanted to first resolve a 2015 lawsuit brought by affordable housing advocates.

"The time for empty promises has come to an end," according to the complaint. "The city should not be allowed to avoid its statutory obligations any longer."

Huntington Beach officials didn't immediately respond to a request for comment on the suit.

This isn't Becerra's first court showdown with Huntington Beach. The city sued the attorney general and Newsom's predecessor, Jerry Brown, last April over a 2017 law that bars local police from telling federal officials when immigrants subject to deportation are about to be released from custody.

Huntington Beach supported a legal challenge by then-U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions to California's immigrant sanctuary laws that was largely rejected by a federal judge in Sacramento.

The case is California Department of Housing and Community Development v. City of Huntington Beach, California Superior Court, Orange County.

Bloomberg Politics

By Peter Blumberg and Romy Varghese

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