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CAMBRIDGE MA.

17 May 1995

Dear City Council,

On Saturday, May 13, several long-term, all low-to-moderate income, residents at 333-333a Harvard St. received eviction notices, without cause, from their landlord, which is the Weston School of Theology (WST). The Weston Jesuit Community has acquired, for its students, seminarians, priests and other affiliates, at least 13 other buildings in Cambridge since about 1970. 333-333a Harvard St. is a 21-unit apartment building, long under rent control, that the Weston School took over in 1984, and began immediately filling with its students and affiliates.

Resident Bernice Schneider, now subject to eviction, has lived at 333-333a Harvard St. for 25 years. The other threatened evictees are Hatch Sterrett, who has lived in the building for 24 years, Melanie Lowe who has lived there for 5 years, and another, who remains anonymous for reasons of being a counselor who sees clients, has lived in the building for 20 years.

This is terrifying. We think they are doing this because rent control was repealed and because we are not students. It is very wrong. We need to do the best we can to let people know that we are committed community residents, whose homes the Weston Theology School wants to take, literally, so that an *increased* number of students, passing through Cambridge, can take our places. We would be the ones to lose our homes, despite the full set of life's connections, commitments, and roots which we've developed over our lives here in the building and neighborhood. Whether it were after two months or after two years that we were told to get out, the terrible wrong is the same - they want to take our homes.

This looks to us like what we're going to get without genuine rent control in Cambridge. Even the vacancy decontrol would have allowed us the fullest assurance we could to continue to live in our homes for the duration of our natural tenancies. That not even this might be assured in our cases, or in the case of any responsible low and moderate income tenants, especially those with so many Cambridge connections, commitments and roots, seems to lack a basic sense of what is decent.

Since Weston Theology School planted the notice at our doors, or handed them to us, the experience we've been having, and which will just go on and on until we win relief, has been devastation, depression and nausea. This is gruesome, the way it feels -- daily.

An ultimatum to leave, whether after a 30-day notice, or in some deadline year, is a fearsome extreme to impose on any of us, or on any responsible person in the community. We who are being

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threatened this way all have many work, service and social commitments in the city, neighborhood and building, all of which the Weston School wants to upend.

Without an effective response, the entire community of low and moderate income residents in Cambridge is facing outright displacement or else truly onerous tradeoffs in order to stay on, after the loss of genuine rent control. Community residents who happen also to be low and moderate income tenants have been browbeaten by huge real estate industry money fronted by intense and unhealthy property-owning ideologues so overwhelmingly attached to their properties (well beyond their actual homes) that they are insensate to the suffering thousands of responsible tenants face, and to the community's need for landlord-tenant balance. Institutions like Harvard, MIT and now Weston can come right in on remove buildings from the tax rolls, as soon as they've put everybody else out who is not affiliated. Meanwhile, the balance between institutional needs and community needs is destroyed.

In the aftermath of these balances being overwhelmingly upset by the passage of Question 9 and the imposition of the real estate industry's Ch. 282, we are reaching out to the whole community, and asking the City Council to avoid both policy tokenism and political defeatism, and, working together with the diverse low and moderate income elements of our community, while they are STILL HERE, to contribute their leadership, and that means sustained advocacy for what is really needed, to begin to express and enact -- overtly -- a sense of community justice, community wholeness, and community caring for each other. If Cambridge is advertising itself, at the St. Patrick's Day march, as being inclusive not exclusive, why would it remotely HESITATE to fight for whatever is NEEDED, like genuine rent control, which we barely and only deceptively lost, for the continued inclusion of the one third of its entire population being subject to removal and /or hardship by the real estate industry !!

Thus, the very stability of many people's lives, thousands actually, and almost entirely those of low and moderate income, has become quickly a major issue in the community. The basic rules of fairness, overwhelmingly favored by our own Cambridge residents, concerning rents, the reasons for eviction, the removal of affordable apartments from the market, institutional expansion, and in effect, community home rule itself, were all at once torn away in the aftermath of a very harsh, deceptive, unevenly funded and undemocratic, and yet close, ballot campaign and, through Governor Weld, the state legislature's undemocratic imposition, at the midnight deadline, of a real estate industry-crafted repeal law.

It is apparent to me that what is happening to us and to so many others we are hearing about, indicates that we need to restore the honesty of rent control.

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Harold Starnett
333A HARVARD ST. #1A

S-188

Consent Communication #8

Comm. received from Hatch Sterrett
regarding evictions at 333-333a
Harvard Street.

In City Council May 22, 1995

*Referred to the City
manager & City
Solicitor*

*Copy sent to City mgr
5/24/95 ED*