

# San Mateo County

## Eviction Report 2016



Funded by the San Francisco Foundation

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### Introduction

An unprecedented housing crisis is gripping the Bay Area, and the effects of this crisis have been felt particularly acutely in San Mateo County. As housing prices soar, many families and other long-time residents have struggled to remain in their communities near their schools, their places of worship, and their neighbors. Heartbreaking stories of displacement have become all too common in City Council meetings and in the news. These individual stories have the power to convey the deeply personal nature of displacement, bringing uncertainty and instability into the lives of residents by threatening the security of the one place we most want to feel safe – our homes. As these stories have become more widespread, policymakers, researchers, and residents have struggled to understand the true scope the problem. Who is being evicted in the current market, and why? On what scale? How has eviction activity in San Mateo County evolved over recent years? This report – the first of its kind in San Mateo County – employs a rigorous data-driven approach to begin to paint a bigger picture of the eviction crisis in San Mateo County. The need for such a report has never been more critical. Currently, there is no comprehensive database to quantify the number of families forced out of their homes in San Mateo County, nor is there any publicly available information to understand who is being evicted and why. This lack of information has hindered public dialogue and at times functioned as an impediment in the evaluation of current housing policies.

The Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County (“Legal Aid”) and Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (“CLSEPA”) are nonprofit law firms that provide free legal assistance to hundreds of renters in San Mateo County each year. In partnership with the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, our agencies offer this report to begin to respond to the unanswered questions about evictions by leveraging our unique position as social safety net providers to renters in crisis.

### Our Data

This report is based on an analysis of 3,145 eviction cases handled by Legal Aid and CLSEPA over a three-year period. The data is a compilation of case records maintained by both of our agencies, controlling for duplicates as much as possible and aggregated to protect the confidentiality of our clients. The data is grouped by fiscal year beginning on July 1, 2012 and running through June 30, 2015 – thus, for example, reference to data from 2014-15 refers to the fiscal year starting July 1, 2014 and ending June 30, 2015. The report places a particular emphasis on the most recent data from fiscal year 2014-15.

Importantly, the data used for this report represent a drastic undercount of the total volume of eviction activity that has actually occurred. First, the data reflect only the small subset of tenants who sought assistance from our agencies – the majority of renters who receive eviction notices do not contact our offices at all. Second, our nonprofit agencies typically serve lower-income clients who meet our income eligibility guidelines, and thus our data underrepresents evictions of higher-income earners who may be able to afford a private attorney. Third, commercial evictions are excluded from the data as Legal Aid and CLSEPA only represent renters in residential evictions. Nonetheless, our combined case data is a significant sample of evictions in San Mateo County that we believe is representative of the overall eviction landscape in the county. Even with its limitations, our data provides the first attempt to evaluate the contours of eviction activity in San Mateo County on a wide scale. We hope that the analysis of this data will contribute to a better understanding of the hidden epidemic of displacement in our county, and its potential to change the lives of our residents as well as the character of our communities.

### On the Cover

Pictured on the cover of this report is a partially disassembled mobile home at the Pacific Skies Estates mobile home park in Pacifica, California. Between July 2015 and June 2016, seventy-seven tenant households were evicted from the homes in Pacific Skies Estates to make way for replacement of the mobile homes and upgrades to the park. Due to issues with permits, work on the park has halted and these formerly occupied homes sit empty.

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Created in collaboration with the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County, Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (CLSEPA) and the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2016. Photographs by Brandon Chaves.

**Funded by the San Francisco Foundation.**

*The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the San Francisco Foundation*





## The Eviction Process

### [1] NOTICE


Most evictions start with a notice. There are two types of notices:

#### For Cause Some examples ::

- + Non-payment
- + Breach of lease
- + Nuisance

#### No Fault Some examples ::

- + 30- or 60- Day Notice without a cause
- + Notice for reasons not based on tenant's fault



Some tenants who get a notice to pay or to cure a breach are able to comply and maintain the tenancy

There are many more eviction notices than Unlawful Detainers, because most tenants either comply with the notice or move.




Many tenants move out within the notice period

### [2] UNLAWFUL DETAINER (UD)

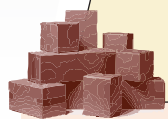
The unlawful detainer complaint is the lawsuit a landlord files after the notice period has expired. In the lawsuit, the landlord seeks a Court order that will allow the landlord to remove the tenant from the home.

At least **90%** of contested UD cases get resolved by agreement before the Court makes any decisions

In 2015, **34%** of UDs were uncontested because the tenant did not respond and lost by default



About **14%** of cases that settle permit the tenant to stay



About **86%** of cases that settle require the tenant to move out

### [3] EVICTION : LOCKOUT BY THE SHERIFF

If the tenant loses the lawsuit, then the landlord may send the County Sheriff to enforce the Court's order and remove the tenant from the home.



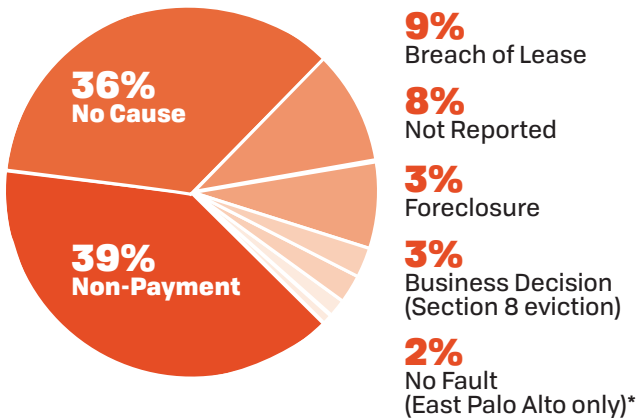
# San Mateo County

## Eviction Notices and Unlawful Detainers 2014-15

**1,100**

Eviction Notices and Unlawful Detainers (UDs) were reported in 2014-15

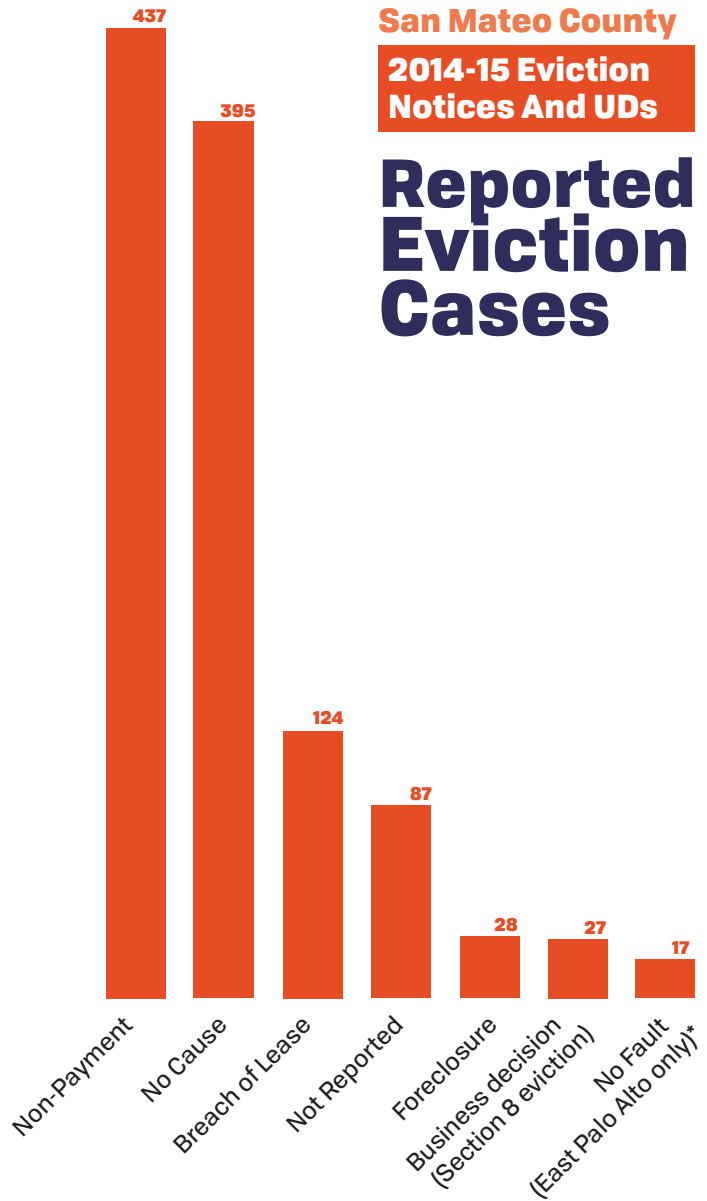
**75%** of reported eviction activity in 2014-15 was either based on No-Cause evictions or because tenants could not afford the rent



\* East Palo Alto is currently the only city in San Mateo County with just cause for eviction protections. Under East Palo Alto law, landlords are permitted to evict tenants for specific "no fault" reasons, such as owner move in, substantial renovations, and demolition.

### San Mateo County 2014-15 Eviction Notices And UD's

## Reported Eviction Cases





## From San Mateo County Health System: Health Impacts of Eviction

Eviction is increasingly a reality for many San Mateo County families and has deep and long lasting health consequences that continue to affect families' health long after they are evicted.<sup>1</sup> Eviction leads to a range of serious consequences, from physical and mental health impacts to economic challenges that have lasting effects on those evicted as well as the community at large.<sup>2</sup>

When families experience eviction, they report worse health for themselves and their children.<sup>3</sup> After eviction, families often experience homelessness, putting them at risk for violence, stress, communicable disease, malnutrition and harmful weather exposure, and making it difficult to treat common conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and asthma.<sup>4</sup> A survey of San Mateo County tenants who defended evictions in court proceedings in 2014 found that 17.6% percent of these households were homeless at the time of the survey in spring 2015.<sup>5</sup>

In other cases, families desperate to secure housing often accept unsafe or unhealthy housing conditions such as overcrowding, increased noise, and mold or pest exposure, increasing the chances of contracting communicable diseases, asthma, and respiratory illness, and increasing mental distress.<sup>6,7</sup> The stress and uncertainty associated with eviction can lead to debilitating mental health impacts for years following the event.<sup>8</sup> Tragically, rising rates of eviction have also been correlated with an increased rate of suicide.<sup>9</sup>

As San Mateo County's Health Officer Scott Morrow describes, eviction also makes it far more difficult to provide appropriate medical care and keep residents healthy:

I regularly see patients who have just been evicted or fear being evicted, and the instability that goes along with that makes it much harder for them to manage their medical conditions and get the care they need. They have difficulty taking their medication consistently, or coming to appointments, and the housing conditions they live in along with the stress of not knowing where they'll live is a real barrier to their health.<sup>10</sup>

— Dr. Scott Morrow, San Mateo County Health Officer, MD, MPH, MBA, FACPM


Eviction is often disastrous for household finances, deepening the cycle of poverty and increasing future health risks.<sup>11</sup> For example, an unemployed person who is evicted may look for a new home before looking for a job, or stress from eviction may lead to missed work days and job loss.<sup>12</sup> The likelihood of being fired or laid off is 11 to 15 percentage points higher for workers who experienced an eviction.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, when residents are financially stretched by housing costs, they have less to spend on healthcare, healthy food, and other expenditures that promote health.<sup>14,15</sup> These economic challenges leave a big impact on health and household finances; even two years after eviction residents continue to have significantly higher rates of material hardship than otherwise identical peers, suggesting that "eviction may itself be a cause, not simply a condition, of poverty."<sup>16</sup>

While its health impacts are worst for those who experience it, eviction compromises the health of all San Mateo County residents. Currently more than 60 percent of workers travel to the county for work,<sup>17</sup> leading to sedentary commutes, high stress, congestion, increased risk of collisions, injury and fatalities, and air pollution.<sup>18</sup> These negative impacts will continue to increase as long as significant numbers of those who work in the county cannot afford to live in the county.

— The San Mateo County Health System helps county residents and workers live longer and better lives by providing excellent healthcare service, and by building communities that prevent diseases and ensure everyone has equitable opportunities to live a long and healthy life.

Footnotes listed on back page


**17.6%**  
of San Mateo County  
tenants who defended  
evictions in court in 2014  
were homeless in Spring  
of 2015



The likelihood of being  
fired or laid off is  
**11-15%**  
higher for workers who  
experience eviction



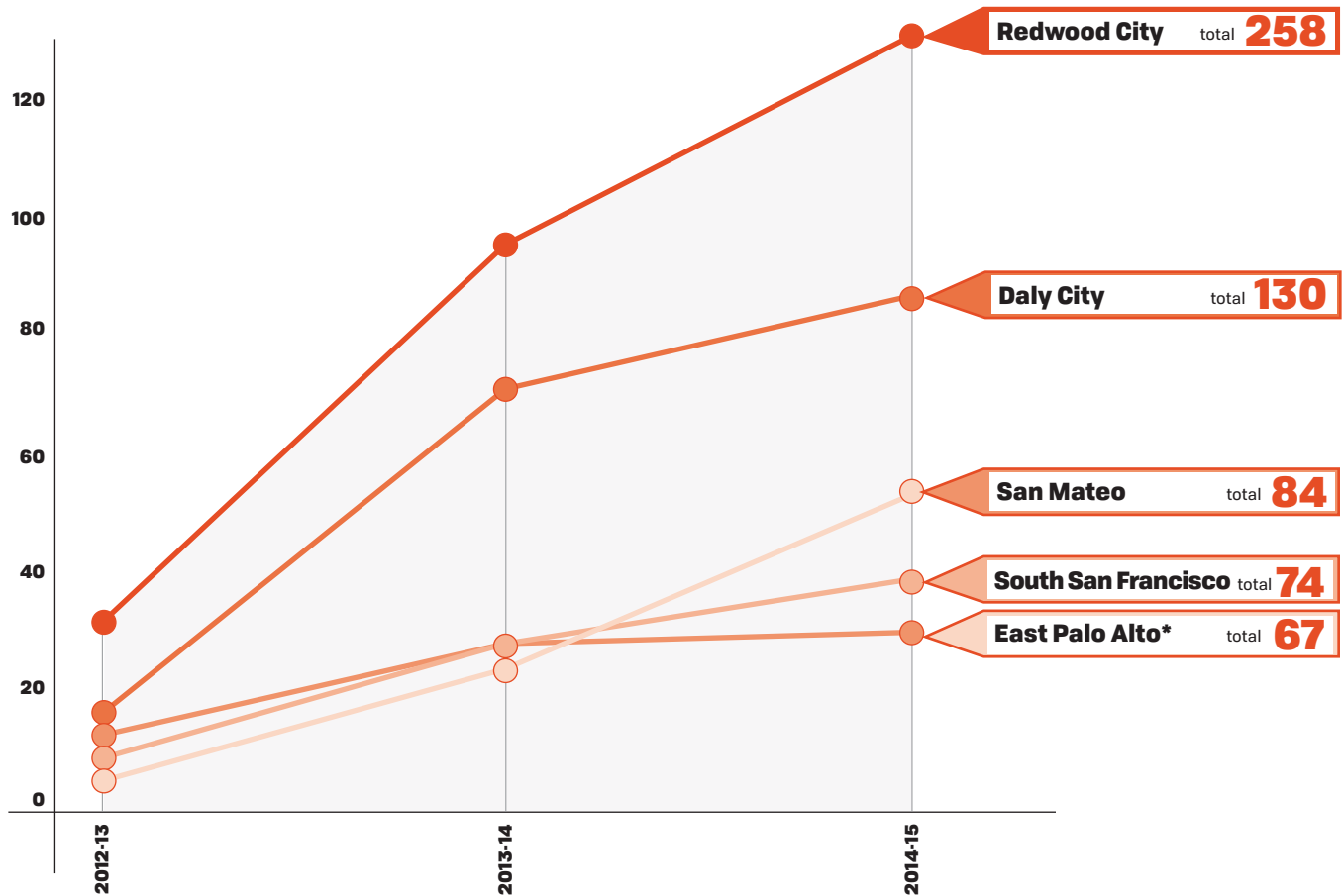
Over **60%**  
of workers travel to  
San Mateo County for  
work, which increases  
air pollution and risk of  
traffic collisions



# San Mateo County

## Geographic Displacement

### 2012-15 No-Cause Eviction Notices - by Top Five Cities



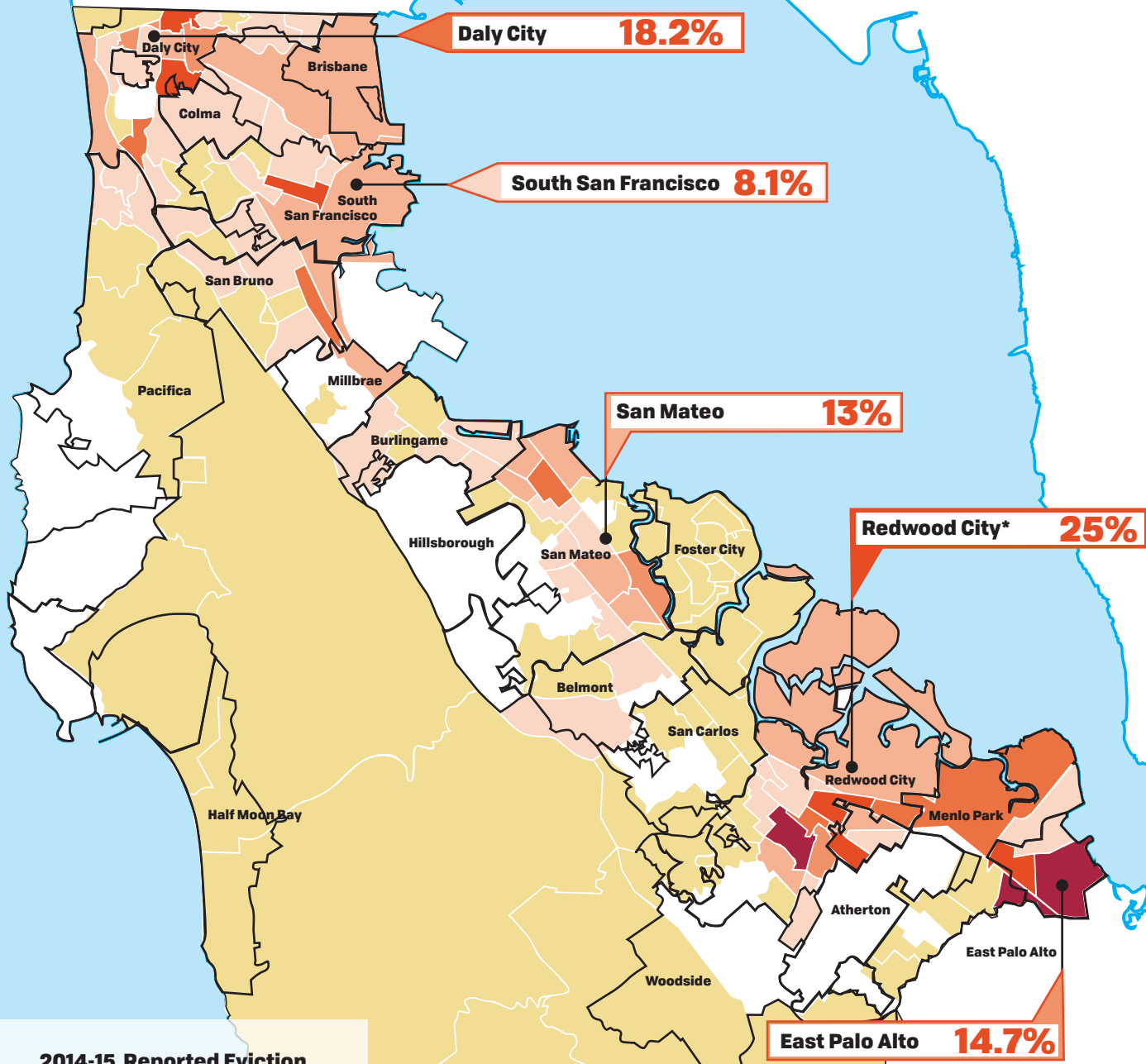
The number of reported No-Cause Eviction Notices represents an estimated **10%** of such cases

Reported No-Cause Eviction Notices in San Mateo County increased **308%** from 2012-13 to 2014-15

\*The East Palo Alto total includes "no cause" notices that would be invalid under East Palo Alto's just cause for eviction protections. It is more likely that East Palo Alto tenants receiving no cause notices were able to stay in their homes than tenants in other cities.



## 2014-15 Total Reported Eviction Notices



### 2014-15 Reported Eviction Notices by Census Tract



\* The statistics for Redwood City include cases from the unincorporated community of North Fair Oaks

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## Demographics of Displacement 2014-15

Hispanic / Latino people comprise **25%** of the population and **49%** of people evicted in San Mateo County

Black / African-American people comprise **2.5%** of the population and **21.4%** of people evicted in San Mateo County





# 34%

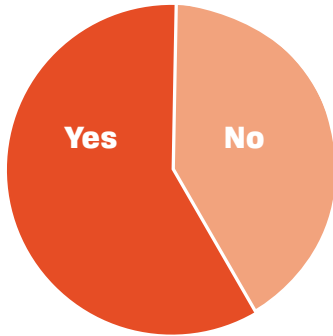
of respondents listed Spanish as their primary language

## Female Head of Household

Of the 573 respondents in 2014-15 for whom head of household information is known, 63% were female

**63%**  
Yes

**37%**  
No

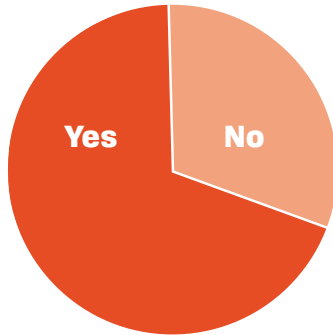


## Children in Household

For 1,100 reported households in 2014-15

**70%**  
Yes

**30%**  
No





# San Mateo County

## Demographics of Displacement

The average San Mateo 2-Bedroom apartment rent has increased

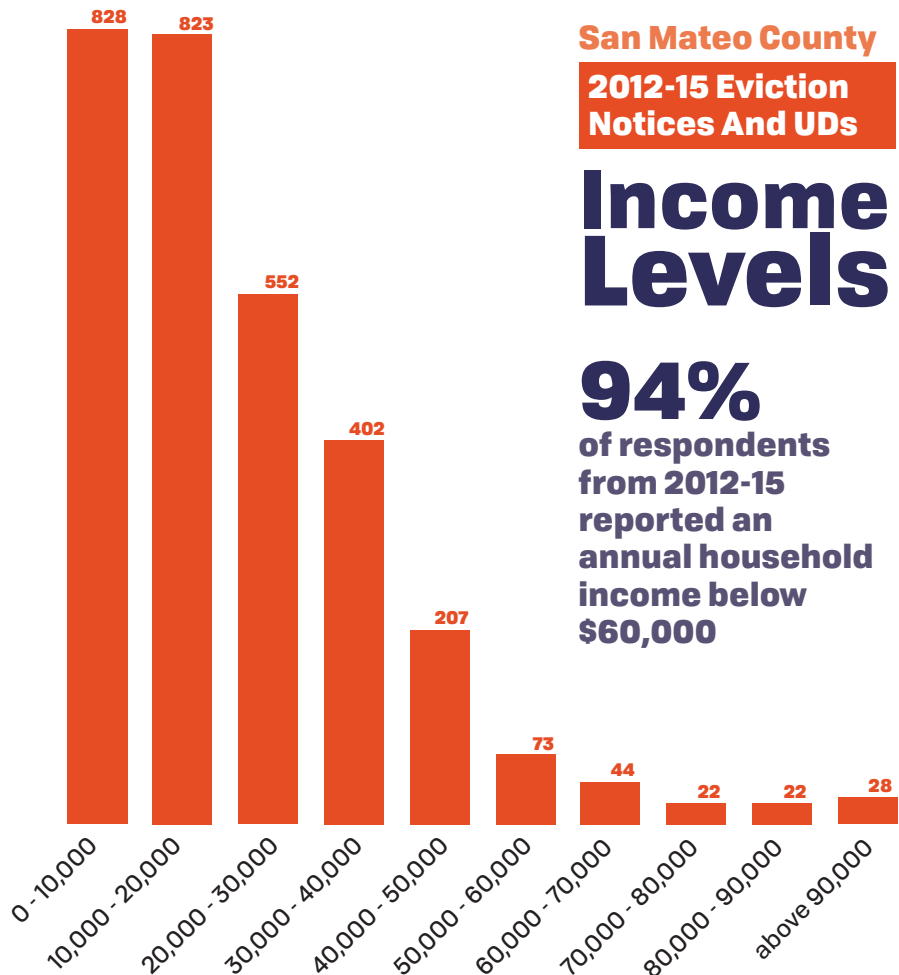
**60%**

in the last five years



**\$3300**

As of July 2016, average 2-bedroom apartment rent



San Mateo County

2012-15 Eviction Notices And UDs

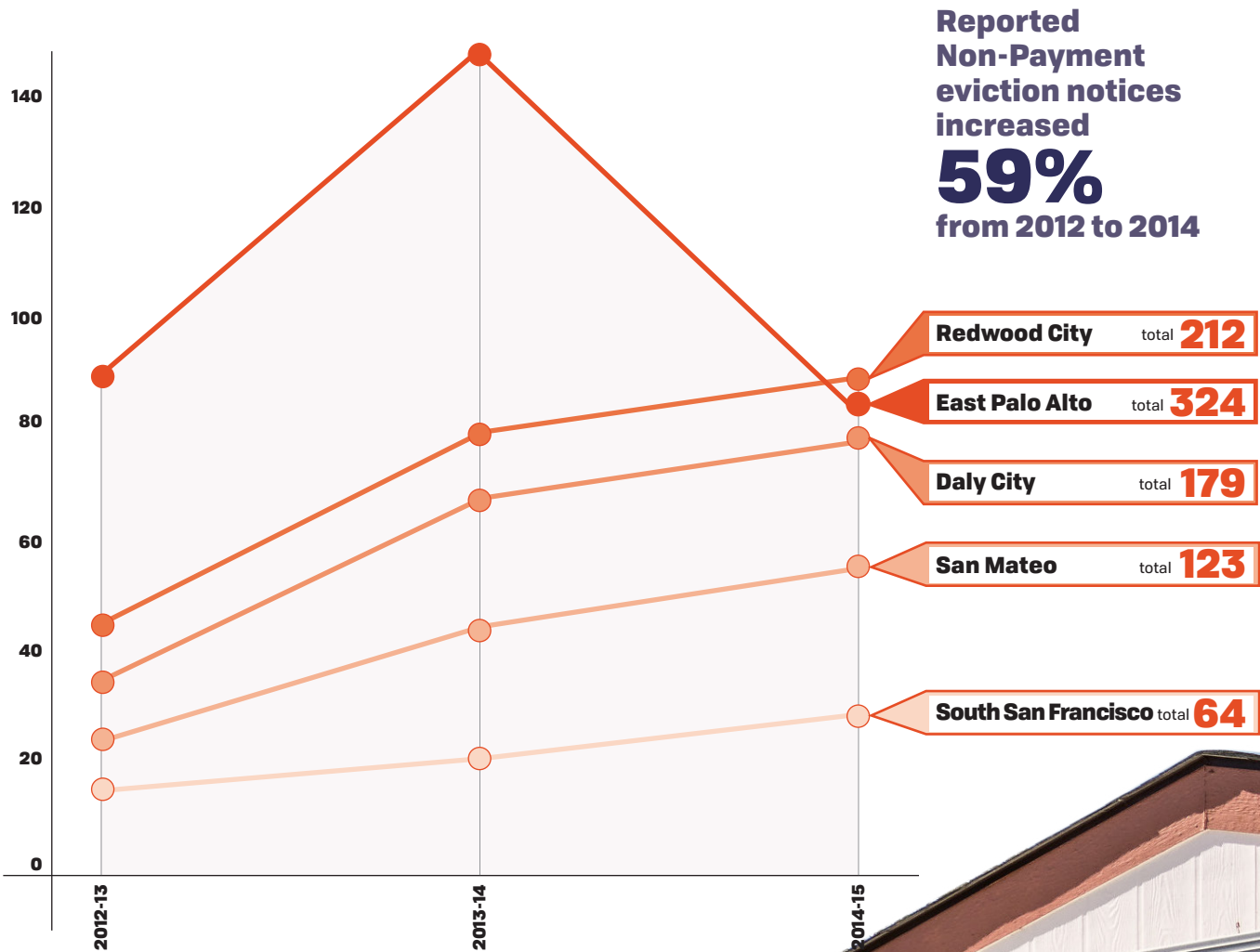
## Income Levels

**94%**

of respondents from 2012-15 reported an annual household income below \$60,000



## 2012-15 Non-Payment Eviction Notices - by Top Five Cities



**East Palo Alto** presents a unique set of factors that influence the apparent concentration of eviction activity in that city. About half of the rental housing stock in East Palo Alto (1800+ units) is owned by one large landlord. Based on the routine practices of that landlord, tenants are regularly served with three-day notices to pay rent or quit if monthly rent payments are late, and a certain number of these notices typically evolve into unlawful detainer cases. Also, because much of the rental housing in East Palo Alto is subject to rent control, East Palo Alto landlords may have particular financial motivation to encourage turnover of tenancies in those units.

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### Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County



Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County is a non-profit law firm that has been providing free legal services to low-income and vulnerable populations in San Mateo County since 1959. Our mission is to fight social injustice through civil legal advocacy for people living in poverty. We strive to empower people to overcome the causes and effects of poverty so they can participate in their community with dignity and respect. Our staff assists clients with legal issues and engages in impactful advocacy related to government benefits, housing, domestic violence, health care, elder law, special education access, and disability rights. [www.legalaidsmc.org](http://www.legalaidsmc.org)

### Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto



COMMUNITY  
LEGAL SERVICES IN  
EAST PALO ALTO

Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (CLSEPA) is a nonprofit law firm offering free and low-cost legal services that improve the lives of low-income families throughout the region. Our mission is to provide transformative legal services that enable diverse communities in East Palo Alto and beyond to achieve a secure and thriving future. We work side-by-side with low-income communities and partner with community-based organizations to bring about significant and lasting change. CLSEPA specializes in immigration, housing, workers' rights, criminal records clearance, consumer protection, and legal support for small businesses. [www.clsepa.org](http://www.clsepa.org)

### The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project

The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project is a data-visualization, data analysis, and digital storytelling collective documenting the dispossession of Bay Area residents in the wake of the Tech Boom 2.0. We are a collective of housing justice activists, researchers, data nerds, artists, and oral historians who work together to illuminate narratives of displacement and resistance in the Bay Area. [antievictionmap.com](http://antievictionmap.com)

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#### Footnotes from page 5, *Health Impact of Evictions*

1. Desmond, M., & Kimbro, R. "Eviction's Fallout: Housing, Hardship, and Health". *Social Forces*, 94(4), 2015.
2. Department of Public Health, City and County of San Francisco. "The San Francisco Indicator Project: Traffic Density". [www.sfindicatorproject.org/indicators/view/46](http://www.sfindicatorproject.org/indicators/view/46). Accessed July 27, 2016
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12. Ibid.
13. Desmond, M., & Gershenson, C. "Housing and Employment Insecurity among the Working Poor". *Social Problems*, 63. 2016.
14. Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. "The State of the Nation's Housing, 2016". [www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/jchs\\_2016\\_state\\_of\\_the\\_nations\\_housing\\_lowres.pdf](http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/jchs_2016_state_of_the_nations_housing_lowres.pdf). Accessed July 27, 2016.
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16. Desmond, M., & Kimbro, R. "Eviction's Fallout: Housing, Hardship, and Health". *Social Forces*, 94(4), 2015.
17. United States Census. Transportation Planning Package. 2010 Data.
18. Department of Public Health, City and County of San Francisco. "The San Francisco Indicator Project: Traffic Density". [www.sfindicatorproject.org/indicators/view/46](http://www.sfindicatorproject.org/indicators/view/46). Accessed July 27, 2016.