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March 12, 2013

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Dear Supervisors,

**Secretary**  
Mary McCue

**SPUR strongly supports the Mandatory Seismic Retrofit Program for Wood-Frame Buildings and urges you to move this important piece of legislation forward.** The Community Action Plan for Seismic Safety (CAPSS) estimates that at least 2,800 wood-frame buildings constructed in San Francisco prior to 1978 with five or more units and three or more stories have a soft-story condition. Because of large openings for windows or garage openings, the ground floor of the building may be weak (“soft”), leaving it vulnerable to damage or even collapse in an earthquake. The 2,800 multifamily buildings identified by CAPSS are home to roughly 58,000 people and 2,000 businesses employing an estimated 7,000 people.

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Currently, the multifamily soft-story buildings identified by CAPSS pose a significant threat to San Francisco’s ability to recover from a disaster. CAPSS estimates that 43 to 85 percent of the 2,800 soft-story buildings would be red-tagged after a magnitude 7.2 earthquake on the San Andreas fault. A quarter of the red-tagged buildings would be expected to collapse. However, **if these 2,800 buildings are retrofitted, the 58,000 people who live in these buildings are much more likely to remain in their homes rather than risk injury and/or displacement.**

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In our 2009 reports “Defining What San Francisco Needs From Its Seismic Mitigation Policies” and “The Dilemma of Existing Buildings: Private Property, Public Risk” SPUR wrote about the role that the existing housing stock can play in enhancing or undermining the city’s resilience. Resilience – the ability to respond to an earthquake emergency and to recover without lasting disruption – can be measured by the speed and completeness with which essential functions, and eventually routine operations, are restored. SPUR has proposed resilience targets for City services, housing, transportation, and other key sectors of the built environment. We identified a goal that 95 percent of San Francisco’s housing should be strong enough that people can stay within their homes after a magnitude 7.2 earthquake. **One of our key recommendations to achieve this goal was the development of a mandatory soft-story retrofit program for wood-frame multifamily housing.**

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In our 2012 report, “Safe Enough to Stay: What Will It Take For San Franciscans To Live Safely In Their Homes After An Earthquake?” we described how San Francisco has a limited number of emergency-shelter beds, and its capacity to provide interim housing after an earthquake is constrained due to both low vacancy rates and to minimal vacant land. Therefore the city should be taking steps now to ensure that most

San Francisco residents can “shelter-in-place” – i.e. stay in their own homes while they are being repaired – after a major earthquake. Estimates show that only 75 percent of the city’s current housing stock will provide adequate shelter for residents after a major earthquake. This means that San Francisco is at risk of losing its most important asset – its people.

**The mandatory soft-story retrofit program before you represents an opportunity for San Francisco to dramatically increase the number of units that will be safe enough for residents to stay.** We strongly encourage you to support its passage.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SK', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Karlinsky  
Deputy Director