Introduction

Berkeley's Rent Board operates one of the oldest rent stabilization programs in California and has developed a relatively successful system for collecting registration fees and administering tenant protections. At the same time, Berkeley faces unique challenges like a dense rental market, high rates of tenant turnover, and a large student population. These conditions can make registration compliance and data verification more difficult than in jurisdictions with more stable ownership patterns or lower tenant mobility. This report seeks to examine how peer jurisdictions have approached compliance tracking, outreach, verification, and enforcement, and to identify practices that may help Berkeley strengthen registration compliance. While no single model is fully transferable, the experiences of other California jurisdictions suggest several strategies that could be adapted to Berkeley's existing structure.

Compliance Overview

Measuring compliance is key to determining effectiveness of rent board policies and for deciding which steps or practices to implement. Commonly accepted definitions of compliance can differ, but they are largely predicated on a variety of similar factors across jurisdictions. For example, Alameda's rent board predicates compliance on factors such as whether or not program fees were paid and submitted and if landlords/property managers submitted data on units. These two factors (data submission and payment compliance) are useful in providing a base definition of compliance but frequently fail to capture complexities in the rental market and tend to encourage properties that are not on the radar of the rent board to fall through the gaps. Fully regulated and partially regulated buildings generally have different definitions of compliance, and tend to require different levels of engagement from landlords. Furthermore, compliance is largely tied to concepts of enforcement—the ability of a jurisdiction to pursue violators and effectively punish non-compliance seems to be the largest marker of whether or not compliance strategies are actually useful in the long term.

Evaluation of Current Enforcement Mechanisms

We would recommend that Berkeley shift toward a more active compliance model. Currently, Berkeley operates under a largely passive system, in which landlords are expected to self-register and update information annually, with limited follow-up or verification. An active model, by contrast, involves more consistent monitoring and enforcement, wherein the city tracks compliance over time and follows up with non-registrants. Within the different jurisdictions of California, many methods of enforcing rent compliance can be utilized. According to the Berkeley Rent Board, the enforcement mechanisms used in the Berkeley jurisdiction includes required registrations, tenant petitions, and housing code inspections.[1] Primarily, the registrations must be submitted annually and include a fee; failing to pay or file a Vacant Registration Form is considered noncompliance. Berkeley follows a generally registration and petition-based, self-reporting model, and does not rely heavily on more proactive enforcement. The compliance rates of Berkeley are, from current publicly-available data, 70-80%.[2]

Comparatively, cities with more proactive enforcement mechanisms such as Los Angeles, Oakland, or San Francisco have stronger compliance monitoring and more integrated code enforcement.

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[1] Berkeley Rent Board. *"Rent Control 101."* Berkeley Rent Board, https://rentboard.berkeleyca.gov/rights-responsibilities/rent-control-101

[2] Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board. *Regular Rent Board Meeting Agenda Packet: February 19, 2026*. City of Berkeley, 19 Feb. 2026. https://rentboard.berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/legislative-body-meeting-agendas/2026_February_19_Regular_Rent_Board_Meeting_Agenda_PACKET.pdf

In San Francisco more detailed registration filing is required as well as auditing of landlord submissions, meaning they are not as reliant on self-reporting. San Francisco also has a complete dataset of all regulated units that is updated continuously and is accessible by portal by both landlords and tenants.[3] Valid data submission is directly connected to legal permissions, so it acts as a form of ensuring compliance through gatekeeping. Their compliance rates are around 95% according to research previously gathered by the Student Policy Institute of Berkeley. Los Angeles, as well as Oakland, couples rent control mechanisms with inspections associated with rent programs, automatic penalties for noncompliance, and centralized enforcement agencies. In each of these three jurisdictions (San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles), rent stabilization systems are embedded within broader housing policy systems designed to ensure compliance.[4] In comparison, Berkeley separates rent regulation (entrusted to the Rent Board) and housing code enforcement (which is entrusted to the Planning Department).[5] This separation could potentially explain the lower compliance rates due to decreased efficiency and the lack of independent verification mechanisms.

Extant Registry and Aggregate Tools

The use of private data collection tools for public services has often been contested, especially in the context of markets and individual privacy.[6] In the context of rental property registration, they can certainly take administrative burden off of regulatory bodies.[7] Among the incentives for landlords are price setting algorithms, packaged within many private data collection tools, which suggest market price.[8] As big tech has marketed private tools for public services in recent decades, academic and political communities have widely critiqued the purportedly unbiased nature of such data and algorithms.[9] The questions of informed consent and data privacy are pertinent here too, but most are concerned about price setting.[10, 11] While jurisdictions wait for litigation at the state level to set precedent, the question of algorithmic data tools, especially for rent registries, remains.

California jurisdictions are increasingly turning to automated digital tools to help them maintain rental registries and track compliance. These technologies exist for the purpose of governments to manage properties within their municipalities. Fairfax, although currently without an official rent board, uses Deckard Technologies' Rentalscape platform to track compliance across the city's short-term rental

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[3] San Francisco Rent Board. *"Housing Inventory and Fee Portal."* San Francisco Rent Board Portal

[4] "What You Should Know About Rent Control in the San Francisco Bay Area." *Law Soup SF*, https://sf.lawsoup.org/legal-guides/tenant-renter/rent-control/

[5] Berkeley Rent Board. *"Landlord Resources."* City of Berkeley, https://rentboard.berkeleyca.gov/resources/landlord-resources

[6] Humber, Nadiyah J. "A Home for Digital Equity: Algorithmic Redlining and Property Technology." California Law Review 111, no. 5 (2023). 1431-1446. https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38ZP3W18S

[7] Janssen, Marijn. "The Challenges and Limits of Big Data Algorithms in Technocratic Governance." Government Information Quarterly 33, no. 3 (2016). 371-377. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2016.08.011

[8] Zimmerman, Allison J. "Nefarious Algorithms: Rent-Fixing via Algorithmic Collusion and the Role of Intentionality in the Pursuit of Class Monopoly Rent." Urban Science 9, no. 8 (2025). 15-18. https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci9080315

[9] Humber. "Digital Equity." 1431-1446.

[10] Green, Matthew. "Facing Costly Lawsuit, Berkeley Pauses Its Ban on Rent-Setting Algorithms." KQED, National Public Radio (2025). https://www.kqed.org/news/12045703/facing-costly-lawsuit-berkeley-likely-to-pause-ban-on-rent-setting-algorithms

[11] Elattar, Hosam. "Santa Ana Bans Automated Rent Price Fixing." Voice of Orange County, Orange County Civic Media Group (2026). https://voiceofoc.org/2026/02/santa-ana-bans-automated-rent-price-fixing/

properties. Deckard also provides a larger GovTech Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platform that maintains short- and long-term rentals, improving compliance rates up to 95%. Hayward is similarly looking to adopt automated tools in place of a traditional rental registry in order to mitigate some of the financial burdens of fully establishing and staffing a body to manage compliance. Apart from Deckard, many other rental tools exist that are tailored specifically for local governments. Among these are Citizenserve, which helps increase efficiency in managing properties, from permitting and zoning to compliance tracking. Tolemi, apart from serving as a registration platform, simplifies the process from the landlord side, providing services such as automated alerts to prevent accidental noncompliance. Furthermore, Tolemi uses data to prioritize inspections of certain high-risk properties while allowing low-risk properties to self-inspect, helping identify where best to delegate limited resources. Countless data collection tools currently exist that are made specifically for local governments, streamlining processes and increasing both transparency and compliance. Municipalities can choose which platform best fits their needs depending on the specialized service that each one provides. When considering AI tools, different jurisdictions have also taken different stances on possible applications. Pasadena has cited data security and privacy concerns in a lack of interest for using any kind of AI tools for rental compliance registration, while both Santa Monica and San Jose have indicated interest in the possibilities of using artificial intelligence for comparing registration data.

Comparative Analysis

Across Concord, Oakland, and Culver City, a major challenge was that all three jurisdictions still rely heavily on self-reported registration systems, making it difficult to identify unregistered properties or verify the accuracy of submitted data. Concord highlighted how rapidly expanding registry coverage to include single-family homes and duplexes created significant administrative strain, landlord pushback, and staffing needs, but officials also emphasized that strong community partnerships and cumulative fines have been effective tools for improving outreach and encouraging compliance. Oakland discussed many of the challenges that come with operating a newer registry system, particularly around public awareness, tenant outreach, and balancing limited staffing resources against enforcement needs. At the same time, Oakland has been moving toward a more active compliance model through expanded staffing, counseling, delinquency notices, and increased public transparency around registry data. Culver City presented a more streamlined and digitally managed system with relatively strong renewal compliance rates among already-registered landlords, though officials noted continued difficulties around ownership turnover, overlapping ordinances, and reactive enforcement due to staffing limitations. Overall, the interviews suggest that higher compliance rates depend not only on enforcement mechanisms, but also on administrative capacity, public transparency, accessible registry systems, and strong outreach efforts that keep landlords and tenants consistently engaged with progress.

The question of inspectors is something that the majority of rent boards have considered and have recognized as a useful addendum to their existing practices, but out of all 14 jurisdictions interviewed, only 2 (San Jose and Concord) have been able to incorporate an inspection-based model. Drawing on San Jose's methods, which have achieved a 99% rental registration compliance rate, rent boards should consider pursuing a comprehensive strategy focused on leveraging existing infrastructure, targeted outreach, and smarter administrative tools. San Jose's success is driven in large part by its use of general city inspectors, already deployed across departments, to flag non-compliant rentals, a low-cost approach that rent boards can explore by identifying whether similar inter-departmental partnerships are feasible here. Other jurisdictions, such as Beverly Hills, have outlined inspection programs that end up facing difficulties in implementation. During the establishment of the Beverly Hills rent board, a proactive inspection program was outlined that intended to establish a baseline inspection across the city of all apartment units. That inspection would then assign a "grade tier" which determines how often inspections may occur after that (ex. a grade tier 1 building would be inspected biannually while a grade tier 5 building would be inspected bimonthly). Repeat offenders would eventually have to compensate the city for the cost of these inspections, with the general goal being to penalize bad actors and support positive ones. However, budget constraints made this program difficult to implement and an inspection program does not currently exist in Beverly Hills. Jurisdictions like Alameda also voiced an interest in proactive inspection while noting it was not currently feasible given the capacity of their rent board.

While replicating San Jose's exact model may be difficult, rent boards can consider compensating through stronger registry management by adopting crosschecking mechanisms to identify gaps and inconsistencies in landlord registration data. On the outreach side, email newsletters and postcards offer a cost-effective baseline for communicating compliance deadlines and requirements. To push behavioral change and build trust, in-person workshops are a reliable practice. To that end, workshops should also address barriers to participation such as ICE-related fears, ensuring that vulnerable tenant populations are reached and that compliance efforts don't inadvertently widen existing gaps. Together, these steps position rent boards to improve compliance rates sustainably without requiring significant new resources. Santa Monica's approach offers an instructive case for an active, tenant-informed compliance model. Most notably, Santa Monica proactively sends newsletters and pamphlets to new tenants, prominently displaying the maximum allowable rent increase so tenants can immediately identify issues with landlords. Rent boards should consider adopting a similar practice, though cost is a real constraint: Santa Monica spends upwards of $20,000 biannually on printed materials, which may not be feasible depending on the landlord base. Postcards and digital communications, however, highlight the same key figure, and can be complemented with intermittent general outreach material in full print. Beyond outreach, perhaps Santa Monica's most transferable lesson is the value of a mature, well-maintained rental registry. Their compliance success is deeply tied to decades of investment in trusted data infrastructure, an administrative culture oriented around data-driven action, and the institutional knowledge that accumulates over time. While most rent boards may not be able to replicate that history, they can make deliberate investments now in data system quality, staff capacity, and AI-assisted crosschecking, and harness unique, existing institutional strengths that will compound over time for an elevated compliance program.

When considering the question of enforcement and contact with landowners, it will be useful to look to Beverly Hills' model, which has resulted in a 99% compliance rate for the 8,000 units covered under its jurisdiction. Instead of relying on monthly compliance reminders, Beverly Hills has committed itself to sending out weekly email-blasts and phone reminders once the 45 day compliance registration window has passed. These compliance reminders are slightly altered each week in order to use stronger language and create a sense of urgency within landowners. The importance of phone calls has proven to be key here—despite being time and manpower intensive, their long-term compliance benefits save both time and money overall. It's worth noting that unlike jurisdictions like Santa Monica, which have emphasized printed materials and pamphlets, Beverly Hills has shifted its enforcement model to be completely digital after determining that costs for printed materials outweighed their benefits. The question of digital vs print materials is ultimately largely a question of landlord and renter base — jurisdictions such as Alameda have an older landlord base that primarily uses physical mail, and thus have determined that digital communication will be of less benefit to their constituents.

We can also consider the city of Richmond's approach to tracking enrollment and compliance. In Richmond, information and data is gathered through the citywide database system, IMS. IMS is utilized by all sectors of Richmond and originates from the code of building. Every rental (residential) property is required to enroll with the program, which can be accessed through an app. There are two tiers of properties, the fully covered tier and the partial coverage tier, both are required to enroll and they are subject to rent ordinance and follow just-cause eviction notices. However, only the full-coverage tier is required to register. Enrollment, registration, and the annual payment of fees are all completed through IMS, which proves highly efficient in keeping data organized and easily accessible. Enrollment entails the provision of ownership information which is useful to compare to the data provided by the county detailing change of property ownership. This method is how the Richmond rent board team of Public Information and Enrollment continuously tracks and reaches out to make sure each property is properly enrolled with the system. While Richmond does not have a compliance percentage available at this time, mainly due to the relative newness of the program, it is believed to be highly effective and streamlined with the rest of the city. Despite the fact that this represents a more passive approach, the ease of access and the interconnection with other city programs help regulate and track property information with high efficiency and collaboration.

Final Recommendations

1) Strengthen Registry Technology and Data Verification

A recurring challenge across jurisdictions was identifying landlords who never register in the first place and ensuring the accuracy of self-reported data. Richmond cross-references enrollment records with county ownership-change data, while Oakland compares registry information against county records to identify gaps. Berkeley should explore opportunities to routinely cross-reference Rent Board records with county assessor and ownership-transfer data to identify potentially unregistered properties and improve registry accuracy. Given Berkeley's high turnover rate and large number of independently owned rental properties, stronger data verification may be one of the most effective ways to improve compliance without substantially increasing enforcement activity.

2) Expand Tenant Outreach and Awareness Efforts

Several jurisdictions emphasized that compliance improves when tenants understand both their rights and the registration status of their units. This is particularly important in Berkeley, where many student renters are leasing for the first time and may be unfamiliar with rent stabilization protections, petition processes, and available enforcement mechanisms. Expanding workshops, digital communications, newsletters, and partnerships with student-serving organizations could improve awareness while also creating an additional channel for identifying potential compliance issues.

3) Adopt More Frequent and Escalating Compliance Reminders

The jurisdictions with the highest reported compliance rates consistently emphasized persistent outreach to landlords. Beverly Hills, which reports approximately 99% compliance, utilizes weekly email and phone reminders after registration deadlines pass, with communications becoming progressively more urgent over time. While Berkeley's staffing constraints may make a fully comparable system difficult to implement, the interviews suggest that communication frequency is an important factor in compliance. More frequent reminders, particularly for repeat noncompliant properties, may improve registration rates without requiring major structural changes.

4) Evaluate Opportunities for Active Monitoring

Jurisdictions with more active compliance systems generally reported stronger monitoring outcomes, though many also noted that dedicated inspection programs can be costly and difficult to staff. Concord conducts annual inspections of multifamily properties, while San Jose uses inspectors already deployed across city departments to flag potentially noncompliant rentals. Berkeley should evaluate whether existing inspection, permitting, or code-enforcement activities could be leveraged to identify unregistered properties and improve registry accuracy without creating a standalone inspection program.

5) Tailor Outreach Methods to Different Landlord Populations

The effectiveness of outreach strategies varied considerably across jurisdictions. While Santa Monica reported success with printed newsletters and pamphlets, Beverly Hills has largely transitioned to digital communication, and Alameda noted that many landlords still respond most effectively to physical mail. Berkeley should evaluate which landlord populations are least responsive to existing outreach efforts and tailor communication methods accordingly, using a combination of digital communications, targeted mailings, and direct outreach where appropriate.

Conclusion

Across the jurisdictions examined, the strongest compliance outcomes were typically supported by a combination of accurate registry data, consistent outreach, tenant awareness, and mechanisms for identifying properties that fall outside the registration system. While jurisdictions differed considerably in size, staffing levels, and enforcement authority, a common lesson emerged: compliance improves when registration is actively maintained rather than treated as a once-a-year requirement. Berkeley's existing system already provides a strong foundation through its established rent stabilization program and high fee compliance rates. The recommendations outlined in this report are intended to build on that foundation by improving data quality, strengthening outreach efforts, and making it easier to identify noncompliant properties. Taken together, these measures may help the Rent Board move toward a more complete and accurate registry while remaining responsive to the unique challenges of Berkeley's housing market.