

***Inland Valley Daily Bulletin; April 30, 2007***  
**Letter to the Editor**  
**Homeownership Dream Becomes a Nightmare**

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Achieving a fuller understanding of the complex housing market in Southern California - a region that acts as a bellwether for our nation - is a difficult task. We, therefore, applaud Michael Rappaport for shedding much-needed light on a buried issue that underlies current mortgage industry problems: the shortage of affordable homes for working families.

That shortage is aggravated by a tremendous home affordability gap, which is created by the crushing combination of high home costs and stagnant income. As it grows, the affordability gap diminishes the possibility of homeownership for thousands of Inland Empire working families. As Mr. Rappaport noted, area teachers, firefighters, office workers, retail associates - citizens who form the backbone of the communities - can no longer afford to live near their places of work.

Addressing this issue is critical to the economic and social health of the Inland Empire. Employers, civic leaders, policymakers and advocates must come together to make hard decisions about policy changes that will alleviate this growing crisis. They must promote those solutions before too many working families are robbed of the American Dream.

Christina, an Ontario resident and mother of two, recently wrote to me, "We currently rent a two-bedroom apartment, for \$1,000 a month. My husband has a good job, but we struggle to pay all the bills and never seem to get a chance to save for anything. This just is not fair."

The numbers are startling. From 2001 to 2005, the number of Inland Empire families who could afford a median-priced home dropped from 48 percent to 18 percent, while home prices doubled. Although the housing market appears to have softened over the last half of 2006, affordability actually decreased over the year as mortgage rates increased and lending criteria began to tighten. As a result, many working families have been forced to reach, in some cases too far, to attain a home. And now some of those families are in worse shape than ever - facing foreclosure, ruined credit and an erosion of savings. For many, the American Dream has become a working family's nightmare.