

April 14, 2020

[executiveoffice@bos.lacounty.gov](mailto:executiveoffice@bos.lacounty.gov)

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors  
Board Operations Division  
Executive Office  
500 West Temple Street, Room 383  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Re: Motion #8 Piloting a Comprehensive Crisis Response to Ensure Post-COVID-19 Housing for Homeless Older Adults in Los Angeles County**

Dear Board of Supervisors:

We thank Supervisor Ridley-Thomas and Supervisor Hahn for authoring agenda item 8. The UCLA School of Law Veterans Legal Clinic (“Clinic”) is housed at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs West Los Angeles campus. Clinic clientele are primarily veterans who are chronically homeless and those who are aging, disabled, and returning from incarceration. The clinic provides assistance with disability compensation and other public benefits, as well as citation defense. In 2019 alone, clinic staff and students provided legal assistance or information in 294 matters on behalf of 208 veterans. We are proud to be part of the solution to homelessness for the veteran community of Los Angeles. With over 3,500 homeless veterans on any given night, Los Angeles County continues to have the nation’s largest homeless veteran population.

Protecting Los Angeles residents from the COVID-19 public health crisis requires us to address the circumstances of COVID-19, houselessness, and incarceration together. Racial disparities in COVID-19 transmissions and outcomes bring to light structural inequality in access to health care and treatment. The racial disparities in houselessness and incarceration rates in Los Angeles County only exacerbate the need for a multi-pronged response. The county should leverage all of its tools and resources to create long-term solutions to these problems. For already marginalized unhoused veterans in Los Angeles county, the COVID-19 physical distancing strategy has led to further isolation and mental health concerns for our clients. Our clients have pre-existing chronic illnesses that present high risks for poor outcomes upon transmission of COVID-19.

We know firsthand the important step motion #8 provides to addressing the criminalization of houselessness. The Governor’s plan includes recommendations to increase pre-trial diversion funding associated with it AB1810 efforts. Doing so would provide necessary resources for people with mental health disabilities and for those who need and desire treatment. Our chronically homeless and housing insecure clients, many of whom have diagnosed mental illnesses or PTSD, recount moving from states of houselessness, imprisonment, and hospitalization. They are best able to stabilize their health when housing is provided by the VA (or the County) and consistent treatment is available. The County should ensure that all people benefit from the strategies presented in the Governor’s plan, especially those most impacted by incarceration and

criminalization. The county should work to remove all barriers to permanent housing, especially for justice-involved community members.

Moreover, the County should track and regularly report on its progress towards addressing racial disparities in houslessness, criminal arrests and citations of the unhoused, and transmission and death rates of COVID19.

Agenda item number 8 is an important start to addressing the crisis of houselessness. The Board should expand the scope of the pilot to address everyone designated by the CDC as higher risk including medically vulnerable people in the jail and the houseless population. The CDC list would require expansion to:

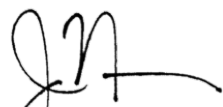
- People living with chronic lung conditions such as asthma and COPD.
- People with HIV.
- People with diabetes, who represent one-third of those hospitalized with COVID-19. In 2018, roughly 900 people in the county jails had been diagnosed with diabetes.
- People with who have mental health disabilities including those who have been conserved but are stuck in the county jails without safer housing.

Thank you for your time and attention. You may direct any further inquiries or concerns to Professor Sunita Patel at [patel@law.ucla.edu](mailto:patel@law.ucla.edu).

Respectfully,



Sunita Patel  
Assistant Professor of Law  
Faculty Director, UCLA Veterans Legal Clinic  
UCLA School of Law



Jeanne Nishimoto  
Associate Director, UCLA Veterans Legal Clinic  
UCLA School of Law