

The “No Place Like Home” Initiative
***California Senate Strategic Legislative Package to
Prevent and Address Homelessness in our Local Communities***

Owning a home has traditionally been viewed as the center tentpole of the American Dream. Yet – even at a time of continued overall economic growth -- for millions of Californians, obtaining and maintaining stable housing has proven increasingly challenging.

Homelessness is not just a social-justice issue that affects a handful of distressed communities or major urban centers. It is a fundamental economic, public health, public safety and quality-of-life issue that impacts families, businesses, cities and counties in every part of California.

And the related problems are becoming more costly and prevalent.

In response, a bipartisan coalition of members from the California State Senate today is introducing a comprehensive and first-of-its kind “No Place like Home” initiative to assist local communities in preventing and addressing homelessness.

This unprecedented policy framework builds on years of research and best practices – and is guided by the core belief that no individual or family in California should ever experience the uncertainty and pain of living without a home – and, to our local communities, the cost of doing nothing is far greater than the preventative cost of providing housing and coordinated services.

The Senate proposal is crafted with the understanding that fighting modern homelessness – with long-term solutions, not short-term band-aids -- requires a localized approach sustained by a strategic statewide commitment.

Our proposals will empower local governments with additional resources and flexibility to better serve homeless individuals and families, increase access to affordable housing, address the effects of income inequality and, and extend proven programs for homeless who are either disabled or in need of mental-health assistance.

We see the unfortunate reality of California’s stratified economy on our streets every day. Our state has the nation’s largest homeless population while at the same time ranking as the seventh largest economy of the world. The 114,000 total homeless people who live across our state make up 22 percent of the nation’s homeless population, with Los Angeles holding the dubious ranking of the homeless capital of the country with nearly 42,000 homeless residents. Homelessness affects our businesses, safety, government resources, but most of all, it flies in the face of the compassion we aspire to as Californians.

This session, the Senate is focused on policies that lift up all Californians, especially the least fortunate and most vulnerable among us. That while housing and mental health

services are governed by local governments, the State Legislature will directly focus on providing assistance to better manage existing resources and assist local governments through incentives for creating and maintaining permanent housing essential to reducing homelessness.

With this proposal the state will now secure progress on tackling homelessness through an unprecedented amount of funding support and expansion of programs to make services more accessible on the ground.

Many effective programs to deal with homelessness have unfortunately stalled at the local and county level and many Californians that need access to critical services are left helpless because they don't have a registered address. There is even more urgency to get people into shelter with El Niño storms fast approaching.

Even though cities and counties officials have the on-the-ground perspective to assess and respond to conditions that contribute to homelessness in their areas, the state must also provide them the tools to stay at the forefront and maintain access to support services, treatment, housing, and jobs.

The Senate proposal on homelessness re-purposes Prop. 63 bond money and creatively leverages billions of additional dollars from other local, state, and federal funding to achieve the following goals:

Housing:

- \$2 billion bond to construct permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless persons with mental illness.
- \$200 million, over 4 years, to provide supportive housing in the shorter-term, rent subsidies, while the permanent housing is constructed or rehabilitated.
- Support for two special housing programs that will assist families:
The "Bringing Families Home" pilot project, a county matching grant program to reduce homelessness among families that are part of the child welfare system.
The CalWORKs Housing Support Program, which provides housing and support services for CalWORKs families in danger of homelessness.

Income support and outreach:

- An increase in Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/SSP) program grants which provide income support for the aged, blind, and disabled poor who cannot work.
Rates of homelessness are higher for persons with disabilities who cannot work; SSI/SSP is intended to help them make ends meet, and a large portion of grants usually goes toward rent.
These increases will assist about 1.3 million low-income Californians (72% with disabilities and 28% who are elderly).

- A one-time investment to incentivize local governments to boost outreach efforts and advocacy to get more eligible poor people enrolled in the SSI/SSP program.

The federal government covers 72% of the total costs of the SSI/SSP program, so state and local benefits are multiplied significantly for each newly eligible recipient.

The Senate package is multi-pronged, attacking homelessness with immediate and longer-term resources, while leveraging existing local, state, and federal dollars. The competitive grants will also put in place checks and safeguards to ensure cities and counties are using the additional revenue in the most efficient way possible.

California also has more than one third of the nation's chronically homeless – those with mental illness or other significant problems, and an even higher percentage among homeless women. Of the 28,200 chronically homeless in California, nearly 85 percent are unsheltered with this group absorbing the greatest amount of taxpayers' resources, often topping \$100,000 annually per person in public costs for emergency room visits, hospital stays, law enforcement, and other social services.

The Senate proposal supports a "housing first" strategy. Many homeless advocates and social service experts prefer this approach which has been used successfully in other states because it provides safe, secure housing creates an environment that allows for wrap-around services, such as mental health treatment, to take hold. Studies show homelessness aggravates mental illness, making it more difficult to reach and house those with the greatest need of shelter and treatment.

For a homeless person living without shelter, the key to a home could very well open a future that holds hope for restored health and successful reintegration into society.

There are local programs, such as Project 25 in San Diego, which are successfully housing, treating, and transitioning chronically homeless clients back into society. Project 25 is a 3-year-pilot program funded by the United Way of San Diego and led by St. Vincent de Paul which uses the housing first model as a means of intensive case management and delivery of psychiatric and medical care to several dozen clients. Project 25 is paying dividends for the taxpayers. In two years the annual public costs related to participants of Project 25 were reduced nearly 63 percent, to \$1.6 million from \$4.3 million.

Finding housing for the chronically homeless is an important and humane step in making the best use of local and state resources. Doing nothing hurts the state fiscally and also morally.

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For more information contact 916-651-4024