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# STREET SHEET

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**SHELTER WAITLIST UPDATE:**  
As of February 28th there are **1,116 people** on the shelter waitlist in San Francisco.

Art by Josh MacPhee of Just Seeds  
Image description: A large black box with letters that read “MARCH” is centered, with legs protruding from the top and bottom of it. Light background.

## COMMAND CENTER POLICE RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS

KELLEY CUTLER

The cold winter winds whipped under the freeway overpass at Dore Street and a piece of paper tied to a green tent with a rubber band flapped in the wind. In big bold lettering the message on the paper warns: “RESOLUTION DAY: TUES. FEB. 27th, 2018” “NOTICE TO VACATE.” The notice also notes that those who have not vacated may be subject to citation and/or arrest, and that the City will conduct a clean up of the area “including the removal of all individuals.”

About a month ago, this encampment tucked away under the freeway in an industrial area made it to the top of the City’s list to be “resolved.” City outreach workers have been getting folks into Navigation Centers, but more people have been showing up in need of shelter. Getting a bed is dependent on beds becoming available, which happens mostly when other people are discharged back to the street.

On the morning of this resolution, a resident of the encampment was awoken by law enforcement at 7 a.m. and told she needed to pack up and vacate. She went to wake up and inform her neighbors of the eviction that was upon them. When she returned to where she had slept the night before she found that her tent and all of her belongings were gone. City workers had tossed her possessions on the back of a flatbed truck to be discarded, but fortunately she was able to pull her belongings off the truck before they were lost for good.

*continued page 2*



Oh but what a curse it is  
To be aware of truths that give

Nothing but pain  
Nothing but sorrow

Nothing but killing the hope of tomorrow

Woe to dreams that have slowly died  
Sent to the barren fields where legacies lie

Mother's tears rain down across time  
From ghettos to Jim Crow to plantations

Collecting to slowly feed and drown the next generations

Sometimes you can feel the weight of it all crushing your bones  
Locking even the strongest spirit into hellish catacombs

Because once you see you can never forget  
Despairing as they pray to all the gods of power

And mourn eternally for the bodies they greedily to devoured

You can't help but wonder if it was all meant to pass before it even began  
But it is too cruel to believe the flimsy excuse of some holy plan

Even after all the fights for justice  
The same story repeats

The hydra sprouts new heads just as one falls in defeat

# WE WANT TO GET TO KNOW YOU!



Help us improve the Street Sheet by filling out our reader survey online! SCAN this code or visit StreetSheet.org to begin!

# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS!

Do you love comics? Do you you like to draw? April 1st is our annual Comics Issue of the Street Sheet. We welcome comic submissions from everyone, with a special interest in comics that discuss poverty and homelessness in San Francisco. Please email submissions to [QWATTS@COHSF.ORG](mailto:QWATTS@COHSF.ORG) by March 20th to be considered!

# ASK US ANYTHING

HAVE A QUESTION YOU WANT US TO ANSWER ABOUT  
HOMELESSNESS OR HOUSING IN THE BAY AREA? ASK US AT  
[STREETSHHEET@COHSF.ORG](mailto:STREETSHHEET@COHSF.ORG)  
OR (415) 346-3740 AND IT COULD BE ANSWERED IN THE  
NEXT ISSUE!

# COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS

The STREET SHEET is a project of the Coalition on Homelessness. The Coalition on Homelessness organizes poor and homeless people to create permanent solutions to poverty while protecting the civil and human rights of those forced to remain on the streets.

Our organizing is based on extensive peer outreach, and the information gathered directly drives the Coalition's work. We do not bring our agenda to poor and homeless people: They bring their agenda to us.

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# STREET SHEET STAFF

The Street Sheet is a publication of the Coalition on Homelessness. Some stories are collectively written, and some stories have individual authors. But whoever sets fingers to keyboard, all stories are formed by the collective work of dozens of volunteers, and our outreach to hundreds of homeless people.

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# WORKGROUP MEETINGS

AT 468 TURK STREET

## HOUSING JUSTICE WORK GROUP

Every Tuesday at noon  
The Housing Justice Workgroup is working toward a San Francisco in which every human being can have and maintain decent, habitable, safe, and secure housing. This meeting is in English and Spanish and open to everyone!

## HUMAN RIGHTS WORK GROUP

Every Wednesday at 12:30 p.m.  
The Human Rights Workgroup has been doing some serious heavy lifting on these issues: conducting direct research, outreach to people on the streets, running multiple campaigns, developing policy, staging direct actions, capturing media attention, and so much more. All those down for the cause are welcome to join!

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO OUR WORK GROUP MEETINGS.

To learn more about COH workgroup meetings, contact us at : 415-346-3740. or go at : [www.cohsf.org](http://www.cohsf.org)

# NEW COMMAND CENTER THREATENS HOMELESS PEOPLE

continued from front page

Before the “resolution,” another unhoused woman was working with City outreach workers to get into the Navigation Center. The morning of the “resolution,” she said she was waiting for the bed to become available, but that the Homeless Outreach Team worker was helping her, and she was hopeful. Later that day, she called the Coalition on Homelessness office, distressed to report that Department of Public Works staff had thrown her wheelchair into the crusher truck and demolished it.

“I need my wheelchair to get around!” she said.

The Navigation Center is part of a complaint-based system, so when an encampment gets enough complaints from neighbors, the City will do a “resolution.” City outreach workers go out and work with folks to get them into shelter, connected to resources, treatment or a one-way bus ticket out of town. Once a location has been “resolved” this location is now off limits to encampment residents. This means that people can’t just sign up on a list to get a bed; instead, they have to be specifically referred by the outreach workers, meaning homeless folks sometimes try to set up camp at a location they know has plans to be “resolved.”

There is a myth that people are “service resistant,” but the reality is that resources are extremely limited. The City has between 1,000 to 1,500 people waiting on the single adult shelter waitlist for a tempo-

rary bed, while the average wait for a family to get into shelter is 111 days. In response to the lack of coordination between the various departments engaged in addressing encampments, the police department started a new command center and are calling it “Healthy Streets Operation Center” or HSOC. But will the new Command Center address homeless people’s needs? Laura Guzman, director of Everyone Home Continuum of Care in Alameda County who was former director of the Mission Neighborhood Resource Center in San Francisco, is skeptical that it would, pointing out it shortcomings. She says that “no housing exits, access based on complaints rather than vulnerability, and shorter stays than even traditional shelters do not address our communities needs, but only hide visible homelessness. Most importantly, there is no community oversight.”

While on the national level there is movement away from using law



image description: police clearing homeless people’s belongings on Dore Alley during an encampment sweep

enforcement to respond to street homelessness and encampments, San Francisco police have been playing a dominant role in responding to our housing crisis. On June 29, 2017, the City began their strategic effort of addressing encampments and placing the people living in encampments in the Mission district into Navigation Centers. They called this operation the “Mission District Homeless Outreach Program (MDHOP)”. The goal was for SFPD, the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH), City outreach workers (SFHOT), Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Department of Public Works (DPW) to meet every day at 8 a.m. five days a week to strategize what location to focus their attention on to clear encampments. No non-profit homeless service providers, advocates nor people experiencing homelessness were included in this effort.

Since June, the number of tents in the Mission decreased from 256 to about 60. Based on MDHOP’s results, Mayor Ed Lee made the decision to replicate that model in Central Market and the Civic Center, calling it “harm reduction” and having targeted mental health and drug addiction outreach, since tents aren’t as prevalent of an issue in these locations. They created a Unified Command System (UCS) — a command system that’s based on a national model for staying organized during emergencies — for the City on homelessness. This command system is located at the Department of Emergency Management on Turk Street.

In January 2018, the City created HSOC, a.k.a. The Command Center. This coordinated effort involves several City agencies: the Police, Public Works, Public Health and

Homeless departments; the City Administrator, who oversees the city’s 311 system; as well as the City Controller, City Administrator and the Mayor’s Office of Housing. Notably absent are nonprofits, community advocates and, most critically, people who are themselves experiencing homelessness.

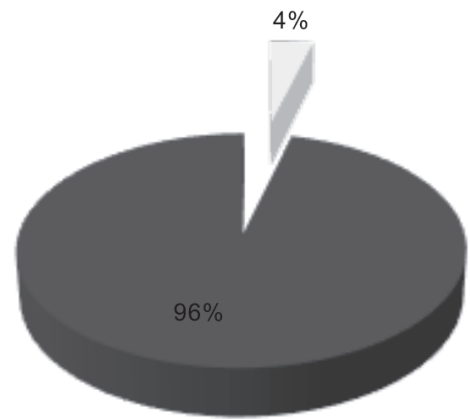
The Command Center is tasked with addressing the long-standing issue of dispatching appropriate responders to incidents related to homelessness. Up until now, there have been two paths used for reporting incidents — 311 and SFPD’s non-emergency line — but the two paths have not been in communication with each other. Now all the homeless-related calls will be routed to the command center, which will dispatch calls to the appropriate responder from that location.

Dispatch protocol needs restructuring so that police aren’t first responders to someone in need of help from a social service provider. It’s not the role of law enforcement to be tasked with these things, but they have been put in this role. We need to quit kidding ourselves into believing that we can arrest our way out of this housing crisis or that anything is resolved by telling people to “move along.”

There needs to be community involvement. There needs to be transparency. Law enforcement and City agencies cannot just do whatever the hell they want. The issue is not “visible homelessness,” but that people are forced to sleep on the streets because our government has failed to provide the basic human right to housing. ■

## Housing Units Available Annually

■ Total Exiting Homelessness ■ Remaining Unhoused



**TOTAL NUMBER OF HOMELESS EACH YEAR**  
21000

**TOTAL NEWLY HOMELESS**  
8000

**TOTAL EXITING HOMELESSNESS**  
800

**REMAINING UNHOUSED**  
20200



# CONSERVATORSHIP LEGISLATION THREATENS

## If passed may allow clinicians to hospitalize p

State legislators are proposing a host of changes to conservatorship laws that govern when people with disabilities can be institutionalized. While there are four different pieces of legislation being considered, one is getting a lot of play in San Francisco, and that is Senator Weiner's legislation to change the definition of "gravely disabled" to include addiction, homelessness and frequent hospitalization.

We have a tragic history of violating the civil liberties of mental health consumers – both locking them up, and then by gutting our community mental health system, forcing them to live on the streets untreated. After abuse was uncovered, protections were crafted to strike a careful balance to ensure that disability rights were not violated, while safeguarding the individual who truly cannot care for themselves, or are a

harm to themselves or others. As these solutions came out of a consumer movement, any changes to this law must come from and center around mental health consumers themselves.

It is important to remember that Mental health conservatorships, which are sometimes called LPS conservatorships because they are governed by the Lanterman-Petris-Short Act, can involve confinement in a locked psychiatric facility, which means the person is deprived of personal liberty. Therefore, there are strict legal procedures and laws that must be followed by doctors and hospitals and which involve review and monitoring by the Probate Court.

### HOW IT IS NOW

Right now police or sometimes a licensed 5150 card holder can determine

that someone is at risk of harm to self or others, or gravely disabled to the point that they cannot care for themselves, and can then take the person to SFGH locked psych ward. The psych ward can hold someone for up to 72 hours and decide whether or not the person meets the criteria. Typically, a person held in this manner will be released back to the streets pretty quickly because there are no resources in community to send them to and they have stabilized.

If clinicians feel the person should be held longer because they continue to meet the criteria for conservatorship, they can request an investigation by the Office of the Public Conservator which is a division of Aging and Adult Services. If the Public Conservator agrees with the clinicians, they petition for a temporary and eventually permanent conservatorship from the Probate Court, which then

assigns a public defender as well.

A temporary conservatorship cannot last longer than 30 days. At the end of 30 days, the Probate Judge considers the petition for the general conservatorship. Evidence supporting the petition is presented by attorneys from the District Attorney, Public Defender, and the person being conserved or others may testify. The public guardian must prove the proposed conservatee was 'gravely disabled' beyond a reasonable doubt. The stricter criminal standard is used because the threat to the conservatee's individual liberty and personal reputation is no different than the burdens associated with criminal prosecutions. The definition of 'gravely disabled' includes both mental illnesses, and alcoholism, currently. However, alcoholism is rarely used to hold people around the state because there are no locked facilities available to



# HOMELESS SAN FRANCISCANS

JENNIFER FRIEDENBACH

## people against their will solely based on housing status

care for alcoholics.

On the basis of the testimony, together with the report of the conservatorship investigator, the Judge will grant or deny the petition, or continue the proceeding at a later date. In most situations, if the person is granted conservatorship, they are placed in a locked facility. Again, there are no other placements available that are appropriate – for example supportive housing is unavailable, or does not have the necessary intensive services needed.

In most cases, the conservatorship could have been avoided if the individual got the care they needed early on. For many, the process is just more traumatic churning leading them further down the road of trauma and untreated illness – circling from streets to institutions and back to streets again. This will only

change with a serious rebuild of our housing and behavioral health infrastructure.

### WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED

Senator Weiner is proposing to change the definition of “gravely disabled” to include homelessness, addiction, and frequent hospitalization. It is a spot bill and he has promised to get input, but going off what is included in the bill now, there are many issues with this approach. We will start with the big picture.

For decades, there has been movement to stop the over reliance on hospitalization in our mental health system. For a large proportion of the population, the very first introduction to care is in handcuffs, a locked facility and restraints on a bed. Traumatizing experience like these often discourages people from seeking care

on their own. It is also very expensive, costing at thousands of dollars a night.

We have become so reliant on this high level of care because our community mental health system has been destroyed through state realignment which resulted in massive cuts, and a loss of about half of our board and care facilities. This coupled with divestment from housing on the federal level meant that many people with mental illnesses found themselves homeless. During the great recession, we lost over \$40 million in direct services funding through the SF Department of Public Health (DPH) alone – leading hundreds of people to lose access to critical mental health and substance abuse services. For many more, the multiple traumas of living on the streets caused their mental health to disintegrate, and then led them to self-medicate with drugs and alcohol. Most

experts agree that we need to invest in community mental health and rebuild our substance abuse treatment system so we don’t wait until folks are completely decompensated to get care.

While we eliminate care, our society has tended to then blame the people impacted by these losses. Typically, we focus on people “refusing care” as justification for criminalization or institutionalization. This also lets our policy makers off the hook and is a convenient election time refrain. That said, we never talk about the fact that most of those “refusing care” were never offered adequate services, and that even more salient, that the overwhelming majority of folks are trying to get care and can’t get it. When we have studied this problem, we have found that the problem is that homeless mentally ill and/or addicted individuals are “locked out” of services, not that they need to be

“locked up”.

But let’s dig into Weiner’s proposal. He wants to add homelessness as a criteria that, if met, could justify conservatorship. Homelessness is not a disability, or a trait, it is a temporary state.

If this passes as currently described it would mean a person could be legally determined to be unable to care for themselves because of their homeless status, creating a double standard that does not apply to housed people, and conversely applying to homeless people who are not mentally ill. Currently, the state of mental illness is what determines whether a person will be held against their will, so a person who is homeless AND mentally ill would meet that standard without adding in homelessness as a factor. Frequent hospitalizations would follow the same reasoning – what is it about being hospitalized in and of itself that justifies a hold? In addition, with the ability of the state to conserve someone comes a duty to provide assistance, but the plan lacks any funding to pay for housing, so people might be conserved solely because of their homeless status and then released right back to the streets. There is nowhere for them to go, and this bill doesn’t change that – it simple makes it easier to hold a larger group of people temporarily in hospitals.

When Senator Weiner introduced this bill, he talked a lot about the neglect of people on the streets, how it is not humane or progressive to leave them on the streets. True. It is also true that this bill will not change that and any false promises make it that much harder to forge real solutions. A stint in a locked ward or a bill that creates a hold in a place that does not exist does not demonstrate anything but continued neglect. As a society, we have immorally cut services and housing, and then we complain when we see people acting out on the streets. Our response should not be to make it easier to lock them up. This is a policy loop that will lead us nowhere. We need to jump off this cycle, and carefully, work together to craft solutions that work. And we know what works, it just takes real political will, not political games. ■



Art credit: Crystal Chen

Image description: A Black figure sits with knees folded to their chest, hands clasped on their shins. they are looking out at a colorful San Francisco skyline. The image is created using strips of newsprint.



# RESIDENTS AT MOSSER PROPERTIES RALLY FOR JUSTICE

LEO SCHWARTZ

On Tuesday morning, chants filled the air as FiDi workers with take-out lunches in hand tried to navigate their way through the sidewalk. Their main obstacles were activists protesting outside of 220 Montgomery Street, the headquarters of San Francisco real estate magnate Neveo Mosser. The activists were led by tenants of two Mosser properties—285 Turk and 425 Hyde—who have levied claims of neglect and greed against the property owner.

285 Turk Street has been an issue going back to 2016, when Mosser bought the building and immediately informed the tenants that rents would be raised by ten percent, and soon after another 70 percent. After successful protests aided by Supervisor Jane Kim, he rescinded the latter increase, but followed up last June with rent hikes ranging from five to 25 percent.

After a series of protests in Fall of 2017—covered in the September issue of Street Sheet—Mosser agreed to hold off once again on the proposed increases and meet with the tenants as a collective to settle on fair rent increase terms. According to local activists from Hospitality House though, he hasn't held true to this promise. Even though negotiations are supposedly still in progress, Mosser hasn't responded to requests for further meetings. Residents continue to live in fear of sudden rent increases that will displace them from

their homes.

Tenants at 425 Hyde Street are facing similar neglect. Residents have been facing ongoing water intrusion and mold issues for years. Although they repeatedly bring this to the attention of the property manager, they are met with indifference at best and eviction notices at worst.

One resident, Sato, said that she moved into the building eight months ago and immediately started experiencing water and mold issues. She contacted the property manager but was told that she would have to pay out of her own pocket for damage assessment. She did, and was informed by the inspector that the mold had led to spores which were emitting toxins. When she told the property management once again, the building sent a handyman who did patch-up work insufficient to prevent future water intrusion and mold. Both have since resurfaced.

She figured that other people in the building were having the same problem and asked around. She learned that there was a family with a six-year-old boy living in an apartment in the building who had been diagnosed with respiratory issues related to the mold.

Sato received eviction warning from the property manager and Mosser

Companies when she continued to bring up the issue. On one occasion, they served her an eviction warning citing that she had not allowed them into her apartment. According to Sato, though, she had in fact allowed them into her apartment to inspect the mold, but they refused to enter when she told them she would record the inspection. She also asserted that because she is a recent resident paying market rate, the property manager has responded to her more swiftly than longer term residents. Another resident who has been living at the property for more than four years, Sandra, affirmed this. Sandra also said that her unit has likely not been remodeled for decades, which has resulted in perpetual water intrusion. The residents are asking for proper maintenance and mold removal to ensure that they can live in a healthy, safe environment.

As detailed in the previous report on 285 Turk St, Mosser has a reputation of greed and negligence. He was sued by the City of San Francisco in 2002 after inheriting his father's SRO hotels and engaging in the illegal practice of "musical rooms," or forcing hotel guests out before they had stayed for 28 days to prevent them from gaining tenant rights.

His role in San Francisco property management is complicated by the fact that he has served as the alternate

landlord commissioner for the powerful San Francisco Rent Board—which enforces rent control and mediates tenant/landlord conflicts—since 1996.

Local activists are unfortunately all too familiar with complaints against Mosser, and the tenants were flanked by representatives from the Housing Rights Committee, the Tenderloin People's Congress, the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation, the Tenderloin Filipino Association, Glide, and Hospitality House.

They hope that with enough voices, Mosser will finally be forced to make a change. As Sato said at the rally, "We have no hidden agenda. We are fighting for health and justice."

Mosser Companies had not responded to request for comment at the time of publishing. ■

## BREAKING SILENCE

D GIGANTE

Why don't we as a black community think we need to seek mental health? Why do we have to think we are crazy to see a PYSCH? Well, living in S.F. Housing Development and surviving more than 80 drive-by shootings, and over 40 murders in a 2-block radius, if you weren't crazy you will be. We all must suffer from PTSD on some level whether we know it or not. I suffer from a severe case of PTSD and agoraphobia. I thought I would get over it with time and just pull up my boot straps. But not! I have finally sought out help through the Victims of Violent Crimes website. I built up a false sense of courage and anger issues. Women can also become violent due to PTSD. Their partners can be victims of domestic violence. PTSD can affect our black community in so many negative ways.

Can we show each other that our black lives matter? When will we break silence about Mental Health? ■

image description: a line of housing activists hold a banner reading "RENTERS UNITE! Don't be afraid to fight back!" with an image of three buildings. Folks pictured appear to be chanting.

image credit: Leo Schwartz



Since 1989, the STREET SHEET has been an independent media organization that provides a powerful platform to homeless people to reclaim and shift narratives about homelessness in San Francisco. visit [www.cohsf.org](http://www.cohsf.org) and click "Donate Now" to help keep it that way!

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO GET INVOLVED, CONTACT QUIVER WATTS AT [QWATTS@COHSF.ORG](mailto:QWATTS@COHSF.ORG)

STREET SHEET THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING US!

# SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

MARCH 6	MARCH 8	MARCH 11	MARCH 14
<b>INSURGENT VOICES: STRIVING TO END RACISM IN AMERICA</b>  <b>WHERE:</b> MARINES’ MEMORIAL THEATRE 609 SUTTER ST, SECOND LEVEL @7-9PM  Join The Women’s Building for an evening of theatrical excerpts and conversation with Alicia Garza, Anna Deavere, and Lateefah Simon. This event is a fundraiser for The Women’s Building’s newest advocacy work: To end violence against women.	<b>SF FOOD NOT BOMBS THURSDAY FOOD SHARE</b>  <b>WHERE:</b> 16TH & MISSION BART STATION @6PM  We will share free hot food in the 16th & Mission BART plaza at 6pm until the food runs out. We welcome help! Talk to us at the serving if you’d like to help us cook, serve, or clean up.	<b>COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS AND EL RIO PRESENT: SALSA SUNDAY</b>  <b>WHERE:</b> EL RIO, 3158 MISSION ST @3-8PM  SALSA SUNDAY w DANILO Y ORQUESTA UNIVERSAL! On Sunday, March 11 our Salsa Sunday beneficiary will be Coalition on Homelessness!!	<b>LIVING DISABILITY: A BIG IDEAS TALK WITH SARA ACEVEDO</b>  <b>WHERE:</b> CIIS PUBLIC PROGRAMS 1453 MISSION ST@7-9PM  Join Sara Acevedo for this talk inviting participants to learn about disability culture and identity, including language use, from the perspective of grassroots and scholarly disability communities themselves.
MARCH 17	MARCH 24	MARCH 24	MARCH 30
<b>MAYORAL CANDIDATES TOWN HALL ON HOUSING</b>  <b>WHERE:</b> KELLY CULLEN COMMUNITY 220 GOLDEN GATE AVE @ 4-5:30PM  Join us for a town hall-style candidates forum focusing on San Francisco’s critical affordable housing issues, moderated by KQED reporter Erika Aguilar.	<b>MARCH FOR OUR LIVES SAN FRANCISCO RALLY</b>  <b>WHERE:</b> CIVIC CENTER @1PM  Instead of crying they are speaking. Instead of mourning they are protesting. And instead of waiting, the children of Stoneman Douglas High School are begging for our help.  We must stand with them and #MarchForOurLives	<b>DROP LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE HOSTED BY CA COALITION FOR WOMEN PRISONERS</b>  <b>WHERE:</b> RED BAY COFFEE ROASTERY, BAR & GARDEN, 3098 E 10TH ST, OAKLAND @5-8PM  Engage with a panel of formerly incarcerated women, including survivors of the life without parole sentence and learn how you can get involved!	<b>AN EVENING WITH CHELSEA MANNING</b>  <b>WHERE:</b> HERBST THEATRE 401 VAN NESS AVE STE 110 @7:30-9:30PM  Join Chelsea Manning for a conversation exploring ethical questions presented by Artificial Intelligence and human consciousness, as well as transgender issues and identity.

## NEW PROPOSAL FOR COORDINATED ENTRY FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES FALLS SHORT

QUIVER WATTS

The Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) has a bold plan to implement Coordinated Entry, a system intended to cut down on the runaround homeless people often must go through to get access to stable housing. Rather than being sent from provider to provider, this system would ideally keep track of all information kept by various providers on each individual and prioritize who is funneled into the limited housing units available.

The first part of this plan has already gone into effect, with Coordinated Entry being introduced for homeless families attempting to access stable shelter. There are generally two types of shelter; 90 - 120 day stable shelter beds or those you access on an emergency basis, typically night by night with mats on the floor, called emergency beds. Before the system went into effect, families waited on long waitlists to be considered for stable shelter, with priority offered to those with serious medical conditions. For the past year however, the waitlists have been abandoned. At first, the Coordinated Entry system offered no priority for people with health conditions, instead prioritizing those living on the streets. This created a huge problem because it incentivized families to stay on the streets to garner access more stable shelters and left out families with severe

medical conditions that were being denied treatment until they had stable shelter. But Compass Family Services intervened, taking over part of the program and reinstating a preference for those who could prove they had medical conditions that made it more urgent that they be housed, who had new born babies or other extenuating circumstances. Even so, this system has been extremely complicated and has failed to ensure equity for those waiting to be housed.

But in an effort to correct this failing, HSH is about to implement something that may be even more confusing and will likely fall far short in addressing the problems it has created. The new system seeks to address the issue of incentivizing families to stay on the street, but it eliminates any priority given to people with medical conditions, or people with extremely young children. Instead it makes the length of time that a person has experienced homelessness the sole factor in housing placement, and creates an unnecessarily complicated point system that awards 1 point for families who are sleeping on the streets or in under-resourced emergency shelters such as First Friendship but .6 points for families staying in Hamilton Family Services Emergency Beds.

While this acknowledges the disparity of

resources between family shelters, it is a move to let the City off the hook for failing to provide adequate and equitable resources to all family shelters. Rather than simply prioritize families in underfunded shelters, the city should be committing to improving shelter conditions in shelters that are currently failing to serve their clients.

Also of concern is the new plan to require that length of homelessness for families staying on the street be verified by a team of two outreach workers currently assigned in the Bayview. The first date of homelessness would be the date the family is verified, even if they have been on the streets for a very long time. This is a tremendous undertaking, as families are often pushed from place to place by sweeps, fear of child protective services reports, and other harassment and so are extremely difficult to keep track of. The federal HUD guidelines recommend that homeless people be allowed to self-report their length of homelessness, rather than developing complicated bureaucratic tasks like this one, and would punish families who are unable to get verified.

Additionally, in order to address the shortfalls of the new Coordinated Entry system failing to prioritize families with chronic health conditions, HSH has proposed us-

ing medical hotel rooms to house people suffering from illness. This is a departure from the policy up to this point, which has been that these rooms be made available only to contain contagious diseases and only with the approval of Department of Public Health. In addition, there are only 2 hotel rooms, and far more need.

The failings of the proposed new Coordinated Entry system for families should come as no surprise. The new plan was developed with absolutely no input from homeless families themselves, or from the service providers. Without such input, HSH cannot anticipate and avoid the problems that come up in the day-to-day lives of homeless families. When the first Coordinated Entry plan was initially proposed, the Homeless Emergency Service Providers Association (HESPA) took it upon themselves to seek extensive community input from homeless people and the larger community and put together a list of recommendations to guide HSH in implementing a system that would ensure equity for families. This list should be a resource to HSH as they rework the proposed changes to Coordinated Entry to ensure that the needs of homeless families are represented in the proposal. ■



