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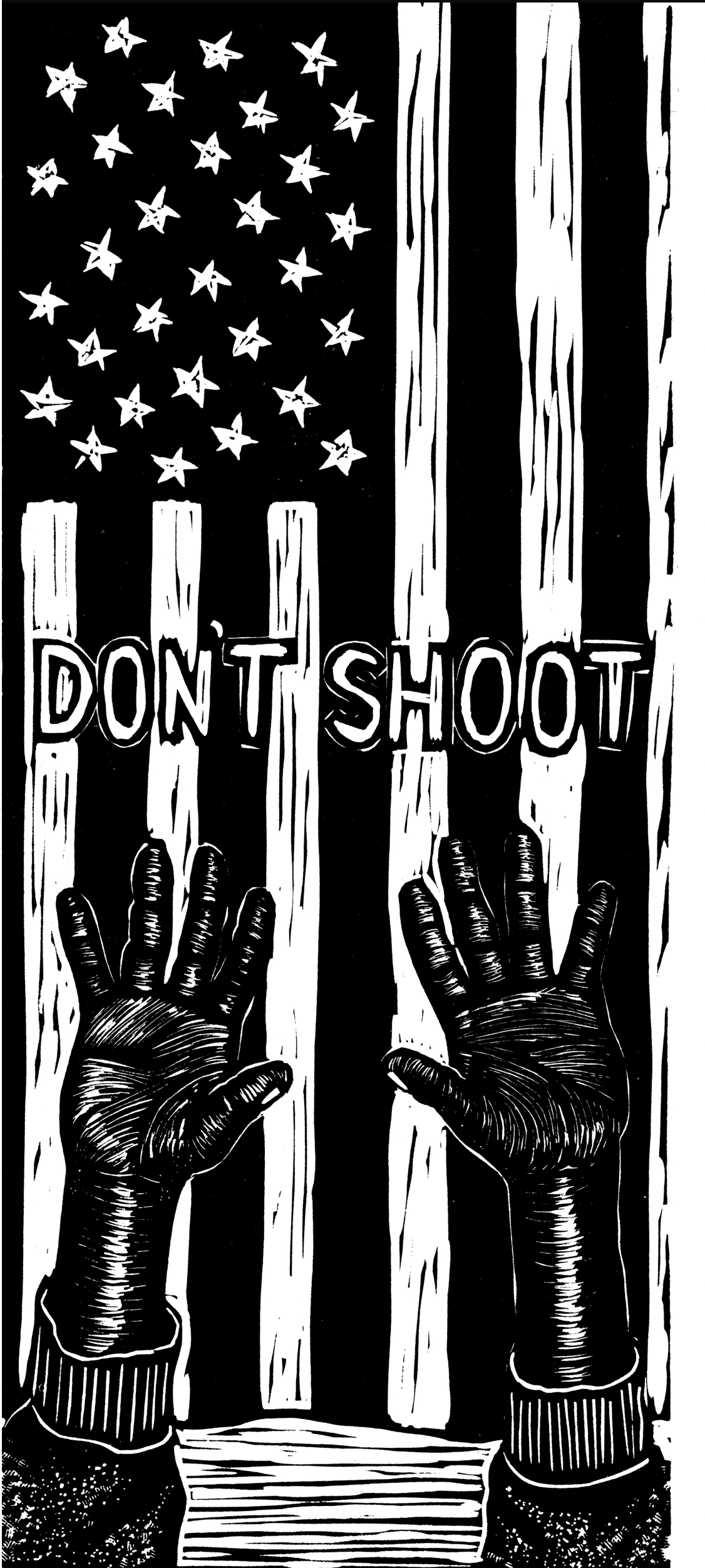
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STREET SHEET

REST IN POWER SEAN MONTERROSA & ERIK SALGADO



SF PD out of the TL

2 MAYOR LONDON BREED TEXTS POLICE CHIEF TO TARGET HOMELESS SAN FRANCISCANS

3 UC HASTINGS URGES CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE TENDERLOIN

4 HOW HOMELESS PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SURVIVING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC EVEN AS THE CITY TURNS ITS BACK

5 SROS ARE A SYMPTOM OF POVERTY: LIVING THROUGH COVID IN CONGREGATE SETTINGS

6 & 7 A TIMELINE OF DESPAIR AND RESISTANCE: HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS HAS CHANGED (AND HASN'T) DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

8 AN ACTIVIST WITH 37MLK LOCKS DOWN AT OAKLAND'S PALMS MOTEL

9 ADVOCATING FOR SHELTER RESIDENTS IN A CRISIS & THE CUBA PROJECT

10 DEFUND THE POLICE: ON THE ROAD TO ABOLITION

11 DETENTION PANDEMIC: DISPATCHES FROM ICE DETENTION

12 OUR COLLABORATION WITH HARMONIC HUMANITY IS ON SALE NOW!

HOTEL COUNT:
AS OF JULY
1ST THERE ARE
1,765 HOMELESS
PEOPLE IN
HOTEL ROOMS.
THOUSANDS ARE
LEFT ON THE
STREETS.

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San Francisco

RONNIE GOODMAN

Why Mayor Breed's Texts on Homelessness Matter

Madeleine Matz

“Man sleeping on bench on Hayes St. near Gough.

Can someone come asap, I am in the area having lunch,” San Francisco Mayor London Breed texted police Chief William Scott in August of 2019.

“Copy. We are sending a team,” he responded two minutes later.

Eight minutes after that, when the police had presumably not shown up to escort the homeless man away, Breed texted Chief Scott again.

“He’s still here but not sleeping.”

“Following up now,” the chief replied.

These texts, and many others, were released May 25, when an anonymous public records request was fulfilled. Reading them is an exercise in incredulity. Just days after Mayor Breed publicly affirmed her commitment to ending encampment sweeps and seizures of property, her personal messages reveal a very different approach to public health and the rights of unhoused people.

Indeed, of the text conversations Breed initiated with Chief Scott in the 2019 texts released to the public, over 87% were about homeless people whom Breed wants removed from public areas. In the 2020 texts, a selection which includes the first months of shelter in place, over 60% of Breed’s texts to the chief focused on unhoused people in public spaces. While many of these texts were also sent to others, presumably the directors of City departments serving homeless San Franciscans, the responses from Chief Scott show that he sent a team of cops to address her complaints every time.

Breed’s complaints to the chief about the myriad homeless people she sees in her daily life might seem petty, a reflection of her personal distaste for the unhoused, but they reflect a grave trend in San Francisco’s effort to police the homeless.

In his American Sociological Review article “Complaint Oriented Policing: Regulating Homelessness in Public Spaces,” sociologist Chris Herring analyzed over 4 million 911 and 311 records to find trends in the type and quantity of calls about unhoused people. He found that the vast majority of police contact with unhoused people was instigated by calls from housed people.

“According to the SFPD lieutenant commanding the homeless outreach unit, over 90% of police and homeless interactions across the city are initiated through complaints,” Herring wrote in that article.

Instead of a system of enforcement based on quotas or top-down directives, Herring found that the police enforce anti-homeless

policies selectively, by responding to the concerns of housed people. And these complaints are getting all the more frequent.

According to his research “unsheltered homelessness increased by less than 1% between 2013 and 2017, yet 911 dispatches for homeless complaints increased 72% and 311 complaints increased 781%.”

In San Francisco, the harassment of homeless people is based on the whims of their housed neighbors and the judgment of the police called in to enforce these desires. But taking someone’s belongings or giving a “move along” order, which is the majority of the enforcement that Herring observed in his time shadowing the SFPD, reduces the visibility of poverty without addressing the root causes of homelessness.

Breed’s texts to Chief Scott, when read in this framework, are particularly disturbing. The relationship between complaint and policing changes when the mayor is the one lodging the complaint. Unlike most San Franciscans, Breed doesn’t have to go through 311 or 911 to get the police to force an unhoused person to move from a public park, sidewalk or vacant lot. Instead, when she sees someone lying on a bench while she eats her lunch, she can text the chief of police. In doing so, she uses her power as chief executive in San Francisco to further the criminalization of homelessness, rather than the justice-focused approach she has promised San Franciscans again and again.

Additionally, unlike the average 911 or 311 caller, Breed knows intimately the alternatives to reporting an unhoused person to the police. She has the directors of the Department of Public Health and the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, as well as other city departments at her beck and call. In fact, these people were likely included — assuming theirs were the names that were redacted — in some of the texts she sent to Chief Scott. But based on Scott’s responses, we know for sure that a team of police officers followed up on every single complaint she made.

Long before these texts were released, Herring found that police officers were frustrated with the way policing homelessness seemed to privilege the needs of those in proximity to elected leaders.

In his ASR piece, Herring quoted a police officer on how such calls are prioritized: “I mean, I’m trying to get through this queue [of homeless complaints] and it’s like just because the supervisor’s friend or supporter has an issue, or some camp near the highway turnoff in his district makes him look like

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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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he’s not dealing with homelessness we got to deal with it.”

This pattern emerges directly in Breed’s texts, where she directs the police to areas she and her associates frequent for sweeps. Many of the texts Breed sent to the chief were about the 800 block of Market, around the corner from John’s Grill, which is owned by longtime supporter and mega-donor John Kostin. Indeed, the trove of texts included no fewer than six requests to sweep the block around John’s Grill, which the mayor called “our bread and butter” in an August 23, 2019 text to the chief.

Three years earlier, in 2016, the mayor had forwarded an email from Kostin about a homeless woman near the grill directly to then-director of Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing Jeff Kositsky and then-director of Public Works Moham-

med Nuru. “Please work on this,” she wrote. Given the direct relationship between Kostin and Breed, and her history of facilitating sweeps on his behalf, it’s hard not to wonder which of the 2019 and 2020 texts about the 800 block of Market were incited by Kostin’s complaints, or which of her other complaints about unhoused people came from her supporters.

On the afternoon of August 17, 2019, the mayor texted the chief of police and others. “No one should be sleeping on the sidewalk in broad daylight,” she wrote.

On this, we all agree. No one should lack a comfortable, warm bed to sleep in, whether in the middle of the afternoon or the dead of night. But when the Mayor sees people arrayed across the sidewalk her texts do not express concern. San Francisco deserves better. ■

Ramsey E Dunlap

TENDERLOIN IN UC HASTING’S CROSSHAIRS: NO POLICE RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS

UC Hastings sued the City to clear the tents out of the Tenderloin, during a time when they have a \$450 million student staff housing development. The number of tents has increased by 285% in the Tenderloin as shelters are closed and more folks are experiencing homelessness. The tiny piece of fabric homeless neighbors find shelter under helps stop the spread of COVID, so folks are staying in tents.

The City of San Francisco and UC Hastings College of Law reached agreement and filed an injunction Friday June 12, 2020. As thousands protest to end police violence during a pandemic, disproportionately Black homeless residents are facing massive police enforcement as a result of this filing. The agreement, which is not approved until the Board of Supervisors approves it, compels the City to “employ enforcement measures” for those who do not accept shelter placements or safe sleeping sites — yet provides less than 10% of homeless residents in the district with such offers.

Coalition on Homelessness, Hospitality House and Faithful Fools sued to intervene, as the groups are interested in representing unhoused community members, who previously had no voice in the lawsuit. On Tuesday, March 30, Judge Tyger approved the intervention, so now unhoused community members will have a seat at the table as represented by these three organizations.

The terms of the injunction propose to use police to displace the mostly Black unhoused members of the Tenderloin community. The settlement proposes that the City remove tents and offer hotel rooms and safe camping sites for only a tiny portion of the people living on the streets of the Tenderloin. The intervening non-profits contend that the 300 hotel rooms and 75 slots for tents in safe sites is insufficient to meet the needs of more than 3,659 unhoused residents of District 6. The organizations seek better conditions for homeless San Franciscans. But everytime the City attempts to end homelessness by using enforcement, conditions get worse. It is disappointing that the agreement between the City and the plaintiffs focused only on the short-term goal of removing tents.

This neighborhood deserves a plan that takes into account the complexity of the problem, proposes solutions that will address the long-term and the short-term, and most importantly address the issue in a way that meets the needs of both housed and unhoused residents of the Tenderloin.

The unapproved settlement proposes the removal of 70% of the tents currently in the Tenderloin by July 20, 2020 and authorizes the use of enforcement, presumably police enforcement, to prevent re-encampment. The settlement also states that,

“the City will make all reasonable efforts to achieve the shared goal of permanently reducing the number of tents, along with all other encamping materials and related personal property, to zero.” At the same time, none of the City’s homeless shelters are accepting new residents.

Meanwhile the city has moved forward on offering the 300 hotel rooms to people on the streets. These rooms were promised long before the unapproved settlement agreement was met, however at that time DPH was going to prioritize those most in need. What changed with the settlement was a move to offer rooms through Healthy Streets Operation Center (HSOC). That meant instead of medical priority, rooms were offered based on whether someone had a tent. Or was near a tent. In other words, they targeted blocks that had a large number of tents and offered rooms.

We believe the settlement could violate homeless people’s right to use tents and sleeping bags to sleep safely on the streets. First, CDC guidelines recommend that if individual housing options are not available, allow people who are living unsheltered or in encampments to remain where they are. Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread.

Second, the right to use tents and maintain personal property was acknowledged by the Federal Court in *Martin v. Boise* in 2019. The Court held that absent safe and appropriate shelter or housing, these residents have a constitutional right to be free from criminalization if they are residing outside with no available shelter options. A zero-tent policy in the Tenderloin would likely criminalize homeless people for non-criminal behavior in the Tenderloin.

Prior to the motion for intervention and

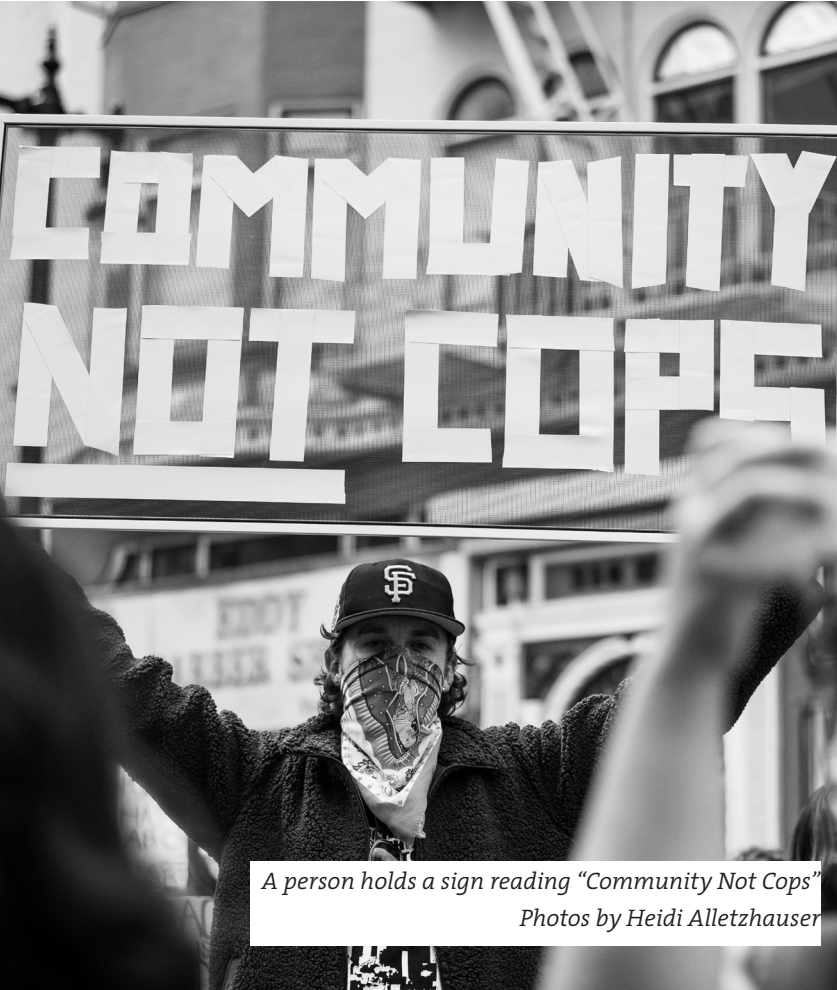
subsequent settlement, dozens of community organizations serving Tenderloin residents urged Hastings to protect the rights of unhoused residents to the same extent they are seeking to protect housed residents in a petition that Hastings Chancellor David Faigman refused to sign. Statements from the lawsuit’s plaintiffs make clear that their intent is to clear homeless residents rather than provide them the housing they need. In one recent CNN interview, Faigman stated, “What we want is to clear the streets.”

In the midst of a public health crisis, housing for all should be the highest priority. UC Hastings along with the City, in approving this, has chosen human removal over human rights - a dangerous precedent. Now is the time for more justice - not more class-based racism against poor and unhoused people. Luckily, with the approval of the intervention, the organizations can turn things around.

300 hotel rooms is nowhere near enough for the number of people who are on the street. If hotels are not offered, our unhoused neighbors have a right to tents to keep themselves and their community safe during this pandemic. Removing tents is an ineffective means of addressing homelessness. Just yesterday, the Mayor announced SFPD reforms including an end to the police response to homelessness, in response to Black and allied protests taking place in the City and across the country. This settlement is in direct contradiction to Mayor Breed’s call for an alternative to a police response to homelessness and behavioral health challenges. Instead, to date the response to the unapproved settlement is a police effort, the Healthy Streets Operations Center that is deciding who gets hotel rooms - skipping over the most needy in the neighborhood and distributing rooms based on the ownership of a tent. ■

40 Tenderloin organizations are calling for a neighborhood policy that includes the following requests:

- Provision of hotel rooms for at least half the approximately 2,000 unhoused neighbors residing in the Tenderloin, or 1,000 rooms
- Removal of HSOC from hotel room distribution, return this responsibility to DPH and allow community organizational placement in response to public health needs.
- Halting of the use of police in Tenderloin for non-criminal activities to displace unhoused residents activity as the Mayor has publicly committed.
- Follow CDC guidelines regarding the COVID-19 pandemic:
- Provision of safe sleeping areas for remaining unhoused residents, until more permanent and healthy housing accommodations can be identified.
- Until alternative housing is secured, work in collaboration with unhoused community to safely manage tents, which includes regular distribution of garbage bags, brooms, regular trash pick up, access to water, bathrooms, hygiene and hand washing, slowing of streets, clear walkways/pathways of 36 inches, keep curb cut-outs and doorways clear of obstruction, and distribution of masks and hand sanitizer.
- Create more public open space through shared streets and/or parking and lane removal as an alternative solution to our crowded sidewalks.



A person holds a sign reading “Community Not Cops”
Photos by Heidi Alletzhauser

REPORT ON THE ACTION TO ABOLISH POLICE AND URGE HASTINGS TO DROP THE LAWSUIT

Emmett House

As people know UC Hasting filed a lawsuit, in so many words “to clean” the Tenderloin streets of homelessness. What this really means is they - Hastings, the City, and businesses that care more of profit than people - want to rid the streets of ME. We will remind everyone that San Francisco’s general population is less than 5% Black, yet more than a third of our unhoused community is Black. Make no mistake. When Hastings says they want to rid the streets of homelessness (without any offers of permanent housing) they are saying they want to eradicate the streets of people like me- Black San Franciscans.

The action was powerful. We started out in front of UC Hastings to hear lovely speeches from Black TL residents and activists like Ms. Jeanetta Johnson of TGJIP and our very own Shyhyenne Brown. Tracy Mixon did a nice job as emcee. Then we walked through streets of SF to the Tenderloin police station. There again we made more noise. There were more than a dozen cops lined up in riot gear, militarized with heavy artillery. There was even a sniper adorned atop the station All for peaceful protest. Once I saw that sniper, although I saw the hundreds of people around me, standing up for Black Lives, that sniper reminded me that we are not free. Not until we abolish the police. ■

LIFE UNDER QUARANTINE: UNHOUSED, SHELTERED IN PLACE

TJ Johnston

June 4 -- Already normalized by COVID-19 “shelter in place” conditions that were prompted by the pandemic, housed and unhoused San Franciscans alike found themselves beset by a curfew that Mayor London Breed imposed on City residents for five nights from May 31 through June 4.

Through demonstrations and vocal outcry, community members rebuked the City’s response to nationwide protests against the killing of George Floyd and countless African Americans slain by police officers as part of the nation’s systemic and social racism. The curfew was from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. Though unhoused people were exempt under the mayor’s curfew and shelter in place orders, many still reported harassment from police who disproportionately enforce social distancing and move-along orders on unsheltered people against federal guidelines.

As of publication, the City of San Francisco has placed 1,765 homeless people into 2,348 rooms, meaning 577 rooms paid for designated for unhoused people sit empty. In May, Mayor Breed adamantly refused to implement the Board of Supervisors’ ordinance requiring her to open 8,250 vacant hotel rooms to unhoused San Franciscans.

At the same time, the City sanctioned “safe sleeping villages” where dozens of people stay in tents in the Civic Center and Upper Haight areas, while rough sleepers, a term for people who sleep outside, beyond these camps risk penalties for performing the life-sustaining act of rest.

Since the City instituted this “new normal,” the Coalition on Homelessness and its paper, the Street Sheet, has been collecting stories that would otherwise get buried amid rapidly changing developments throughout the 24/7 news cycle. The Coalition has been reaching out to people staying in encampments, shelters and hotels. As part of its COVID-19 coverage, Street Sheet reports their stories.

‘PERMISSION TO BE HERE’ - TORO

The reduced enforcement of so-called “quality of life” laws and City workers’ seizure of unhoused people’s property is one blessing that Toro Castano can count. A former museum worker, Castano is something of a community leader among the 20 residents of about a dozen tents outside a public library branch in the Castro District. He checks in with his encamped neighbors and, whenever possible, advocates for them.

The response to street homelessness has largely been marked by law enforcement ordering unhoused folks to move along. Castano, who was ticketed three times under an anti-camping ordinance, has been holding off the displacement of his fellow villagers — or at least ensuring that displacement is just temporary.

“Sometimes we resist (in moving along),” he said. “And (the cops) say ‘OK,” or they make us leave,” only to return shortly thereafter.

Policing near 16th and Market streets is under the jurisdiction of the Mission station, and Castano pointed out how unpredictable officers are when he comes in contact with them. There are two different crews at that station, he said, and some officers act nicer toward him than others, depending on who is working which shift.

Last month, a patrol officer slashed tents in the area “out of pure vindictiveness” and another cop took away his clothes, Castano said. But enforcement has slowed down because of the pandemic.

“The shelter in place has given us permission to be out here, otherwise it was just cat and mouse,” he said.

Catano hasn’t been tested for the coronavirus yet, because “there hasn’t been the urgency.” Nearby, a handwashing station and a Pit Stop bathroom is available for hygiene. People drop off food donations. The Homeless Outreach Team also checks in with him, and if he needs medical treatment, “I know I can go to the Tom Waddell (clinic) or SF General.”

‘THERE’S A LOT OF PARANOIA’ - JOSHUA

Joshua Owens’ journey to Royal Pacific Motor Inn in Chinatown included stops at a drug rehab facility and a hospital emergency room. His impression on that course sounds like a scene from a film noir or a spy novel.

Owens, 45, is a harm reduction advocate who does outreach for the Coalition on Homelessness, which publishes Street Sheet. He also worked at GLIDE as part of the End Hep C Initiative, as well as the Needle Exchange on Sixth Street.

Earlier this year, Owens relapsed and checked into a Walden House facility on Treasure Island. On May 10, he spent over an hour in the shower, suffering from cold sweats, migraines and vomiting. He feared having COVID-19 symptoms. But Walden staff accused him of using and ordered, “Gimme the dope.” They immediately kicked him out without any protest from Owens.

“I was sick and in no shape for a physical or verbal altercation,” he said.

Delirious and occasionally passing out, Owens somehow made his way to Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and got tested. Several hours later, hospital staff asked him if he wanted to go to a quarantine hotel. He accepted, though he was afraid of being disappeared.

“It’s scary coming here, especially for people using on the street and with mental health issues, there’s a lot of paranoia,” Owens said.

“I didn’t know if I was being taken to a black site.”

He added, “There are these things running in your head when they put you in the van and they take you there.”

The man who drove Owens in the van to the Royal Pacific didn’t tell him where they were going; he didn’t even want Owens to so much as breathe near him, fearing infection.

Once Owens arrived, nobody else was volunteering him any information, so he had to grill the hotel employees on what he could expect.

“Ninety-five percent of everything I know is through my own questions,” he said. When his questions were answered, all worries were set aside. “Fortunately those fears were completely ungrounded.”

Owens got a blood oxygen test on his finger; though the results aren’t in yet, he hasn’t been feeling sick since, and gets temperature checks daily. Staff deliver meals to him, as well as cigarette rations.

So far, Owens is satisfied with his accommodations at the Royal Pacific, which opened as a tourist hotel during the 1960s motor inn craze. The hotel advertises rooms with large beds, pull-out sofas and private bathrooms — comforts most homeless people don’t enjoy when checking into single-room occupancy hotels.

“It’s the kind of room when if you’re homeless, you try to scrounge some money and get inside,” he said. “The food is good, they give you coffee. It’s clean, no bugs — not like an SRO. it’s like I paid for a weekend at the Days Inn.”

As Street Sheet interviewed Owens, news of the death of Ian Carrier — a friend of Owens — made headlines. Carrier was a 36-year-old unhoused person who was found dead on a Tenderloin sidewalk one day after being discharged from the UC San Francisco hospital. Owens laments that no one at the hospital could find a hotel where Carrier could rest and recuperate.

“Ian was a friend, and the system failed him,” he said. “I wish they had an opportunity for him as I had here.”

‘YOU DON’T GET A KEY’ - TENECIA

When Street Sheet contacted her in late May, Tenecia Gippson had been staying at the Hotel Whitcomb on Market and Eighth streets for exactly two months. She got the room through the City-run Medical Respite and Sobering Center, just one block away on Mission and Eighth, where she was recovering from a stroke.

Like many who shared their shelter in place hotel stories with Street Sheet, Gippson has mostly found her hotel stay to be positive.

She has her meals delivered three times daily and her meds refilled promptly when they run out. Nurses visit her three times a week, and medical professionals are on site — bonuses for someone like Gippson, whose bad knees require her to move around in a wheelchair and with a cane.

Caregivers from City-contracted Homebridge come in and clean the rooms, and Gippson enjoys conversations with them as they keep house, she said.

Each day, Gippson goes to her daughter’s place, looks after her granddaughter and returns by the hotel’s 10 p.m. check-in. But one day, medical bureaucracy at the hotel almost blocked Gippson from her babysitting gig. She had already tested negative and was on her way to her granddaughter’s. A clerk told her, “It says right here on the paper that you’re quarantined.” Gippson told the clerk to confirm with her nurse. It was all cleared up quickly with a phone call, though she has yet to receive documented proof of her diagnosis.

Other things are also amiss: “The only thing is, you don’t get a key to your own room,” Gippson said. Under most circumstances, guests are given keys at check-in and can freely come and go.

The Whitcomb also doesn’t provide its shelter-in-place guests with refrigerators or microwaves, common amenities found even in a Travelodge. Apparently, the hotel removed them as it became a quarantine hotel, Gippson noted. “They said they didn’t want them there because we’d mess them up,” she said. When she was served a burger for dinner, she discovered the patty was pink on the inside and had to ask staff to heat it up.

It’s not as if the Whitcomb can’t afford the upkeep: its website advertises historic landmark status, an artisanal deli, a cocktail bar serving locally sourced beverages and an immersive theater venue that simulates Parisian can-can clubs of the 1890s.

When Mayor London Breed declared a citywide curfew, Gippson faced a curtailing of her child care duties, as well as an increased police presence on the streets — something African Americans like her have uncomfortably navigated since slavery days.

“It’s terrible because every day I go out to babysit my granddaughter, and I don’t get out until 8 p.m.,” she said. “All I see is cops on motorcycles and SUVs. I’ve seen them before, but not like this!”

‘NEVER BEEN TREATED THIS NICELY’ - CARRIE

Carrie Ann Moon and her boyfriend were among the first people to be moved out of the Division Street navigation center in April when the first COVID-19 case among its sheltered homeless population was found

PAGE 5

JULY COVID ISSUE

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SROS ARE A SYMPTOM OF THE DISEASE CALLED POVERTY

Anakh Sul Rama

I am Anakh Sul Rama. I am formerly homeless and I live with and community-organize with formerly homeless people in single resident occupancy hotels, or SROs.

I don't think that people know what they are saying when they say that “We are ALL in this together.” We are not all in this together. Similar to how the phrase “ALL lives matter” whitewashes the implications of police violence on black people, “we are all in this together” minimizes the incredible struggle disparity that exists in our day-to-day from a race and class context. I thought about giving a play-by-play description of how many objects I have to touch that untold others have had to touch in order to go to the bathroom, kitchen, down the hall, outside, and come back to my room. It's not so simple as sanitizing

those items though, and I don't want you to think we can easily adapt and change our behaviors to survive. There's the larger context and long-term survival of my neighbors and our communities at stake.

I share kitchens and bathrooms with 50 other people surviving poverty-induced traumas. In some SRO buildings folks share space with many more. Our rooms are not divided by insulated walls, and our neighbor is literally breathing feet away in some instances. Poverty trauma, mental illness, addiction and inopportunity create environments where no- and low-income people distrust information given to and about us because we know we are not prioritized for survival by the same systems that keep driving race and class disparity. Thus virus denial is a thing.

If you think you're stressed being indoors,

imagine that space is less than 10-by-10 feet with all your belongings in it. I am unable to walk more than four full foot-steps and two regular paces in my space. I HAVE to go outside because I don't have a place to stretch my legs. Nor does my dog.

I spray clean the toilet, but I have already touched at least two common door knobs before I get back to my room, so I have to sanitize my hands again. For weeks I have been trying to get sanitizer bottles for 108 units in three buildings in my neighborhood, and we just can't resource that amount of smaller bottles.

The City passed an ordinance mandating that the public wear masks before ensuring that people in poverty would have access to them. There is one property manager with a family and three buildings a block apart with 108 people. He couldn't keep up delivering the food donations, so we only get that once a week. He is doing the best he can with what he's got. It's not like we are living it up and being catered to as some would have you believe.

Systems of inopportunity and unequal access drives race and class divide that keeps SRO hotels in existence. Why then are we not repurposing some of the vacant hotels to bring people off the streets? These hotel rooms are coveted by those of us in SROs because they have their own bathrooms and often, kitchenettes. Our SRO rooms are good if they have a usable sink. We know our neighbors on the streets need those rooms to be safe, but we are talking about tens of thousands of rooms throughout the city and region. It's not us or them. We know if our leaders and decision makers truly prioritized us they would have already created a housing mobility mechanism so that people who are in supportive SROs can move into spaces with their own bathrooms and kitchenettes that are effectively micro studios. This would create a flow for people who have more intensive needs to access SRO-supportive environments.

Unfortunately, the forces of tough love moderation and luxury housing choice supporters are united and are making decisions as if the previous status quo in housing inequity is the end game. Why did we see luxury housing production continue for weeks after SIP was announced? Eventually complaints meant that construction was dialed back to affordable housing only. Yet the housing pipeline continues to approve housing formulas pre-pandemic as if that's an ok norm to aspire to. Tens of millions are out of work and no one can pay



their rent right now but we still need more \$3,000 condos to alleviate luxury choice. We need to face the post pandemic reality that millions are out of work and millions are already homeless. Millions more are about to be. We need better plans. What if we used this opportunity to incentivize displaced black and brown communities to return? Call it antigentrification and replacement return. Maybe the decision makers should consider what that would look like. No more status quo.

I have often cringed when people say that they want to “end homelessness” or “solve homelessness.” Unless the economic conditions which create homelessness like evictions, unequal economic access and racial disparity are challenged, we will not have any movement in curing the disease, only treating the symptom. It's clear decision makers are worried about the visible symptomatic aspects of homelessness and poverty, and we need them to come with holistic solutions that prioritizes the whole of our community having safe homes. Permanent solutions like housing homeless people in hotel rooms now and creating housing flow for people in SROs will create the community interventions we will need to save the ENTIRE community from viral resurgence.

I hadn't even touched on food inequities, criminal justice inequities and debt inequity faced by myself and neighbors in this pandemic because abruptly yesterday I recognized I could no longer ignore the multiple subtle symptoms and have since gotten tested. I chose to be open with my neighbors in the hopes it will encourage others with even mild symptoms to get tested. I will find out by tomorrow but if it's negative I expect I will have to take the test again in the coming weeks as this won't end for us in low income congregate space when it does for the rest of people. ■

LIFE UNDER QUARANTINE, CONT...

there.

Now that Moon and her partner are enjoying comfort at the Americania Hotel in South of Market, they don't know where they'll go after their stay ends.

“I'm pretty shocked that, because of the pandemic, the people are nice to us — maybe it's because of the different type of people working here, but they've treated us like regular people staying here,” she said.

Moon, 46, has been living unhoused in San Francisco since 2012. She lived in a tent under the Central Freeway onramp, just 500 feet away from Division Circle. Navigation centers are famous for allowing people to move in “the three P's” — pets, partners and possessions. Moon and her boyfriend's entry was expedited within three days of contacting a caseworker from Episcopal Community Services, and they moved their camping gear there.

The stretch where Moon lived has been targeted by encampment sweeps led by San Francisco police and Public Works. The City used to sweep encampments there every day, with cops supervising the operations and Public Works staff illegally disposing people's survival gear and prized possessions.

But since the pandemic, sweeps occur just once or twice a week, Moon said.

“It was unpredictable. You never know when (the cops) are in the mood to harass us, like 4 a.m. or 5 a.m.,” she said. “Every time I heard the ‘beep beep’ of the DPW truck, I cried.”

Pre-COVID-19, Moon was a high priority for housing because of her chronic homelessness and her diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder.

She gets Social Security Disability Insurance, but the \$1,800 maximum payment is only half of San Francisco market rental rates.

Her hotel is staffed with social workers and mental health professionals. Moon already has her own psychiatrist, with whom she keeps appointments by phone. For the first two weeks, she and her boyfriend were quarantined when he got a tooth infection. He was treated with antibiotics.

A quick look at the Americania's website shows nightly rates for two people ranging from \$111 to \$230. Conveniences in each room include a coffee/tea maker, flat-screen TV, internet access, an iron and ironing board and an in-room safe. But like the Hotel Whitcomb, there's no place in the rooms to store or cook food.

Moon is waiting to hear from her caseworker. Initially, City workers at the hotel suggested the couple go to the pop-up shelter at the Moscone Center, but reports of the congregate shelter's unsuitable conditions forced those plans to be scrapped.

“We're still waiting for (the caseworker) to call us back, but if our only option is Moscone Center, we are probably just going to get a tent and stay outside,” she said.

Still, the hotel stay has been a welcome reprieve from the harshness of street life.

“As homeless people we have not been treated this good for years,” Moon said. “We usually get treated like crap ... I've never been treated this nicely. Normally, they're doing everything to bug us.” ■

UNHOUSED DURING COVID:

A TIMELINE OF DESPAIR AND RESISTANCE

MARCH 13

Coalition on Homelessness closes its doors to visitors, and puts a skeleton crew in place to answer phones. Street Sheet stops distribution. Daily COVID police calls start, and the work quickly pivots to a response to the pandemic.

MARCH 16

San Francisco orders "Shelter in Place". It excludes unhoused people from this order

MARCH 19

Mutual Aid Networks pop up - including tent distribution to allow folks to shelter in place inside tents. Many individuals start hand making masks and hand sanitizer to hand out to unhoused population. Food distribution starts massively expanding.

On that same day, over 8,000 people who were unhoused did not have the same opportunity to shelter in place. Neither did the over 20,000 residents of single room occupancy hotels who continued to share bathrooms and common space.

MARCH 27

Mayor criticizes poor people who are unhoused during COVID. She claims there is a problem with housing homeless people, dialing down on substance use, claiming that homeless people will not stay in housing, and create chaos that needs to be dealt with. While she repeated these themes for at least 6 weeks of press conferences, these claims never came to fruition.

MARCH 20

City starts planning mega-shelters, looking at various sites, including one at Moscone Center

APRIL 1

Trent Rhorer announces they have 1,000 rooms under contract but only 123 occupied. He also announces that he doesn't want to rent too many out of "fiscal prudence". Only folks getting hotel rooms are COVID+ or those in COVID recovery. He did promise another 1,500 rooms.



APRIL 6

Street Sheet gets leaked photos from inside Moscone West of the proposed shelter. Photos go viral when Street Sheet posts and the city scraps the plans for Moscone

APRIL 9

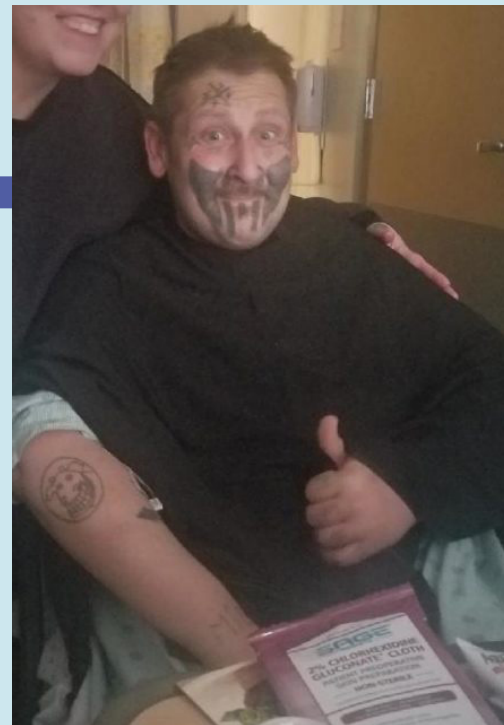
Frustrated by the city's slow response to give unhoused people in the Bayview the opportunity to shelter in place, United Council opened its own safe sleeping village in the park next to Martin Luther King pool in the Bayview. The city allowed it to stay.

APRIL 10

COVID outbreak at MSC-South - city's largest homeless shelter. Over a hundred test positive, almost all without symptoms. They move the residents into hotel rooms and close the shelter.

APRIL 25

Mayor Breed writes a Medium Post stating she won't sign the supervisors' legislation demanding that the city open hotel rooms by April 26. At that point, the city had secured a few more than 1,500 rooms, many still sitting empty.



APRIL 27

Ian Carrier, who appeared in the New York Times as one of the first victims of COVID19, was released from the hospital and sent not to a hotel room for the city's vulnerable populations but to the burgeoning tent encampment near the Asian Art Museum. The City had plenty of empty hotel rooms to offer.

APRIL 14

The Board of Supervisors passes legislation that requires the city to provide 7,200 hotel rooms to unhoused residents. This would mean unhoused people could get hotel rooms regardless of whether they meet FEMA guidelines or health requirements. The Mayor refuses to comply.

APRIL 24

Coalition on Homelessness with help from United in Crisis organized a car caravan out in front of the Emergency Command Center at Moscone.

APRIL 28

Ian Carrier passes within a day. He leaves behind a loving family, community, his wheelchair and his discharge papers.

APRIL 29

Mayor Breed goes on the attack again. This time she announces that homeless people are coming in from out of town. That Sunday, Matier and Ross run a piece in the Chronicle bizarrely with a quote from the Fire Department Chief backing her up. This allegation was then disproved the next day in a piece that appeared in the Mission Local.

Mayor also announces they will use Pier 94 as a place for RVs. This comes after the City spent half a million dollars on another RV site that has never been used.



MAY DAY

House the Bay (FKA Reclaim SF) takes over a vacant investment property in the Castro and helps move two homeless women off the streets, in coordination with widespread demonstrations calling for a rent moratorium. The group demands the city release the funds from Prop C that would open 4,000 units to homeless San Franciscans. Police wearing racist "Blue Lives Matter" masks force the women from their new home.

May 4
The city has 2,373 hotel units under contract. Only 1,150 are occupied. Another 10,000 have been offered for use by the city by hoteliers. Many of the hotels refuse to allow homeless people in.

May 5th
Coalition on Homelessness sends demand letter to city threatening lawsuit if they don't provide the hotels rooms as outlined in the hotel legislation.

UC Hastings sues city to clear tents from the Tenderloin neighborhood.

May 6th
SF releases first Unhoused COVID plan in Tenderloin without input from unhoused people. The plan centers on the presence of tents and among other things, and calls for a measly 300 hotel rooms for the neighborhood.

MAY 15TH
Housing is the Cure Manifesto is released by medical experts, faith community and community organizations.

MAY 15TH
Civic Center safe sleeping site opens up after a very brutal start. The city puts up ugly fencing around the people who were already camping there, and then without engaging folks in democratic decision making superimposes "contract" that they can take or leave - as in leave the campsite. Urban Alchemy takes over the site after city bungles relationships in opening it, by having heavy police and DPW presence. Campers were relieved not to have the police shining bright lights on them all night any more, and to have access to showers and bathrooms.

MAY 12
City moves the entire bayview camp into RV's. Folks get a step up in sleeping accommodations.

MAY 20TH
SF United in Crisis forms as an alliance between community groups working on poverty issues, and organized labor. The group pulls together several press conferences, protests, research and coordinates community response to the crisis.

MAY 22ND
San Francisco announces that it will lease about 3,000 hotel rooms.

MAY 23RD
Anti homeless posters put in the Haight

MAY 25TH
Sunshine records reveal texts between Mayor Breed and Chief Scott, ordering him to sweep homeless folks.

Mayor London Breed		Chief William Scott	"Please have officers deal with the people on Masonic and haight who are sleeping and sitting in the middle of the sidewalk "
Chief William Scott		Mayor London Breed	"We got it. "

MAY 27TH
Mission plan for unhoused in COVID kicks off with walking census. Group does not repeat mistakes of Tenderloin plan and includes unhoused people in effort.

MAY 26TH
DPH puts out a report noting that homeless deaths have tripled during COVID, compared to same period last year. Medical Analysis from Do No Harm is that they died from cruel policy of managing COVID.

MAY 30TH
Car Caravan organized by COH and Housing is the Cure gathers at the Painted Ladies calling for hotel rooms. Doctors in white coats pose for pictures with banner #Housing is the Cure

JUNE 3RD
Next Door shelter - city's second largest shelter closes

JUNE 4TH
Letter sent to UC Hasting from 27 Tenderloin organizations asking them to sign a pledge to honor human rights of unhoused people in Tenderloin.

JUNE 10TH
UC Hastings refuses to sign pledge

JUNE 17TH
40 organizations send letter to UC Hastings and Mayor Breed demanding they amend the settlement to have more hotel rooms and halt the police response.

JUNE 16TH
Coalition on Homelessness, Faithful Fools and Hospitality House files intervention in UC Hastings Lawsuit

JUNE 12TH
UC Hastings along with the city file a settlement before the Board of Supervisors approves it, that calls for clearing of tents. Sadly, the agreement does not include one hotel room more then the city already agreed to more than a month earlier.



photo credit: Heidi Alletzhauser

JUNE 23RD
BLM Stop UC Hastings Action in front of UC Hastings by COH in conjunction with other organizations - groups marches to Tenderloin Police Station



HOUSE THE BAY

We are a group of housed and unhoused community members who are tired of waiting for the city to address the very immediate need for housing.

Right before the pandemic hit, our community called on Mayor London Breed to sign a pledge affirming that she would honor the will of the voters who passed Our City Our Home, an initiative that would open housing to 4,000 homeless people. She refused, and has continued to refuse to open housing even as the global pandemic threatens the lives of the thousands of San Franciscans currently in congregate shelters, SROs, and tent encampments.

If the City won't take action to house our neighbors during a global pandemic, then it is up to us to turn the thousands of vacant properties here in San Francisco over to unhoused people.

We can't wait another day.



SCAN HERE TO GET INVOLVED

A PALACE TO US:

RESIDENTS DEMAND HOTEL ROOMS, OCCUPY PALMS MOTEL IN OAKLAND

Quiver Watts

On May 22nd several dozen people gathered outside the unassuming Palms Motel in Oakland, CA with signs reading “Housing is a Human Right” and “Hotels Not Graves.” Inside, Stefani Echeverría-Fenn, an adjunct classics lecturer who herself was formerly homeless and has lived in the neighborhood for 11 years, has chained herself in the bathroom of a small room. She has been demanding that the City of Oakland offer hotel rooms where she has helped set up for her unhoused neighbors at the intentional encampment at 37th Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Way.

The 37MLK camp, as the encampment is familiarly known, has been hit hard by the outbreak of coronavirus. Before the pandemic hit, the community had organized dozens of housed people who were coming by to drop off food, help with building, and keep the camp going. But now that people are sheltering in place, those without shelter have found themselves without support.

Echeverría-Fenn says she was pushed to take action after a woman at the 37MLK camp was exposed to a close relative who had tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19, and the City of Oakland failed to offer safe housing to campers. Undeterred by the inaction, she says she took all of her savings out and paid to move all the residents into hotel rooms, which they have continued paying for using crowdfunded resources. But, she says, today all of that money ran out.

“It’s not realistic to keep continuing

to fundraise among our networks who are basically all just equally broke people when the City and the County has the resources, has the legal authority to put us in hotels now, if they wanted to,” Echeverría-Fenn said. “I’m here putting my body on the line because I feel like even as a disabled person with multiple chronic conditions that make me more susceptible to COVID, that it is still safer for me to be in jail fighting for our people than it is for our people to be out on the street.”

Mayor Libby Schaff has emergency powers that allow her to open up empty hotel rooms, but she has failed to move the thousands of homeless Oaklanders off the streets. Homeless people qualify for the state program “Project Roomkey” only if they can prove they have severe disabilities or underlying health conditions, or if they are over 65. But qualifying doesn’t actually get you a room key; hotel staff keep the guests’ room keys and have strict rules allowing guests to leave their rooms only three times a day for 20 minutes or less. Guests are also forced to abandon their pets if they want to move into safety.

As reported by the Street Spirit, the East Bay’s street newspaper, there are currently three hotels in Oakland being used to shelter about 300 people. An additional 130 unsheltered people have been housed in state-donated FEMA trailers. Most of those who have been moved into the hotel rooms were previously living in shelters, while the city’s 3,000 plus unsheltered homeless people, who are not already in the county’s

coordinated entry system, have largely been unable to access the rooms.

Two days prior to the occupation, Oakland had declared a local health emergency for African-Americans, citing the disparate impacts Black Oaklanders have suffered. But Echeverría-Fenn says that the City’s refusal to open hotel rooms to the homeless community underscores the disregard local leaders have for Black lives. One resident of the Black-led 37MLK encampment tried to access a hotel room through the City because they suffer from sickle cell anemia, and was told that their underlying health condition, one that mainly impacts Black people, was not on the list of disabilities that could provide them access to a room.

“It’s impossible to quarantine in place when you don’t have a place,” Echeverría-Fenn said. “So there needs to stop being this quibbling over the minutiae of ‘Are you 64 or 65?’, ‘Is your disability moderate or severe?’ Because the fact of the matter is everyone living on the street is just facing profound health consequences of living on the street whether or not that is seen or validated by the City. Everyone at our camp is at profound risk.”

When asked by the Street Spirit for a comment about the action outside the Palms Motel, Karen Boyd, the City of Oakland’s spokesperson, replied with the following:

Oakland is supporting the County in the acquisition of two additional hotels in Oakland for COVID response and for eventual permanent homeless use. Two weeks ago, we opened our Operation HomeBase site with 67 FEMA trailers, and have been bringing vulnerable, unsheltered East Oaklanders inside to respond to the virus. We continue to support the County in making referrals into their hotel programs. Moreover, our emergency COVID-19 budget proposed additional support for motel vouchers and for funding to help people exit homelessness into permanent housing. And Mayor Schaaf is pushing our partners at the State hard for money in the next budget that would support not just buying additional hotels and buildings, but also operating them and

ensuring they have adequate services. We are taking every step to address this crisis—and are doing so in a thoughtful way that positions us for long-term success.

Rachel Clemente and her husband Martin were among those gathered outside the occupation. They have been homeless on and off over the last three years and had found a place to move shortly before the pandemic hit. Now their move-in date has been pushed back and so they have been trying their best to stay safe on the streets after leaving the shelter system, which they say was failing to follow health guidelines around social distancing.

“My husband and I wanted to join the protest because we have not been able to get any help from none of the programs. Not 211, nobody, the hospital, we haven’t been able to get any hotel vouchers,” she said. “They should help the homeless and support us in any way they can and put us up in hotels.”

At the time that this article is being published, the occupation at the Palms Motel continues, but hotel staff have escalated the confrontation, physically threatening Echeverría-Fenn and locking her alone in the room. She is asking for supporters to show up to the motel to help keep her safe through the night and onward.

Stefani Echeverría-Fenn says she is not going anywhere. Looking around, it is clear that this is not a place of luxury. The furniture is dilapidated, the bathroom coated with a thin layer of grime. But it beats trying to stay safe outside.

“If you look even at the condition of this room for example, this is what we are begging for, not like a palace,” Echeverría-Fenn says. “But this would be a palace for us. So the immediate demand we are agitating for right now is getting our people inside for the duration of the pandemic, but our longer term kind of goal is to find a material situation where we can be stable and continue our work together as a community, because we have become a family.” ■



CRISIS RESPONSE: A SHELTER ADVOCATE REFLECTS

Meghan "Roadkill" Johnson

As San Francisco starts to slowly emerge back into a false sense of normality, I wonder where that will leave the homeless population staying in “shelter in place” hotels and shelters scattered throughout the city. Before I cover that, I must recollect what events took place to get us here today.

Back in March, everyone was on the fence about just how serious COVID-19 would be. No one could fully grasp then just how long we all would be under shelter in place, or what that entailed.

I was afraid of the unknown just like most of the globe, but it was also a critical moment for action — homeless action, that is.

Word of the pandemic hit many different homeless nonprofit sectors fast because we serve one of the most vulnerable populations out there. I work as a shelter client advocate, and as such, I am an independent party representing shelter residents who face losing vital services and a place to fulfill their basic human needs in informal hearings held by shelter staff.

We are a small four-person program known as the Shelter Client Advocates and managed by Eviction Defense Collaborative. While holding onto our grassroots, our program was birthed by Arnett Watson, a fierce, formerly homeless woman of color, and co-founded by the Coalition on Homelessness. So our program remains having ties to the heart of our mission, in one of the largest neighborhoods serving homeless people.

A handful of advocates, including myself, pushed for the City to respond to safety measures concerning our unhoused residents in shelter, before a shelter-in-place order was officially declared in mid-March. It unfortunately was a long, delayed process and all the while shelter residents were still being forced from

shelters at high numbers. Clients were not being given proper paperwork at the time of exit, therefore missing out on our program’s services. The shelters would do little to nothing in correcting the misuse of forms and would not remedy these serious technical errors, causing shelter residents to have to stay out of shelter twice as long as a normal wait out of shelter.

We finally succeeded in persuading the City to put into place a moratorium that restricts the causes under which a shelter could expel a resident. Slowly, we started seeing a decline in “denials of service” (DOS) — the official term we use for shelter residents who are forced from shelters/navigation centers. Before, the advocates would regularly see 15 to 25 DOS hearings weekly; later, the number dropped to two to four hearings per week!

A huge victory, but we were far from seeing an impactful change.

Individual shelters were misinterpreting guidelines from the City’s Homelessness and Supportive Housing Departments and started to enforce rules that were originally intended as recommendations, allowing them to drop a shelter resident’s bed. This infringed the shelter resident’s civil rights as they were not offered access to our services through due process.

Soon, shelter residents started flooding our main phone lines in search of any clarity as to why their DOS’s were happening. On several calls, our clients were in full crisis mode yet mustered the courage to convey the frustration, hurt and confusion to a complete stranger.

So, back to the drawing board we went. This time we would get the support of the Department of Public Health, in partnership with HSH, to revise and clarify rules so that no one could be denied services unless they posed an immediate threat to the shelter congregation. These threats included unchecked

weapons, acts of violence or threats of violence. Also, a shelter would no longer be able to drop a client’s shelter reservation because they were out for more than three hours.

Another victory, but our work was still not over.

We also saw an alarming pattern in DOS’s involving shelter residents of color being mislabeled as “aggressive.” Implicit biases are dangerous, and any time a shelter attempts this false narrative, wherever possible, we push back on these unsupported claims against our clients. We also reported staff to HSH, depending on the severity of the case. Yet that didn’t stop the shelter from denying residents service and negatively profiling them— a tactic that dehumanizes the individual and justifies staff’s negative actions toward the client.

In times where fears of housing insecurity plague the back of my mind, only time will tell if shelter residents will get evicted from City-funded hotels once “shelter in place” is lifted. Our program is keeping a close eye on the City and its response to the lifting of the order. If the City continues to go down that dark rabbit hole where sweeps start again and people are violently thrown back into homelessness, our program will be waiting in the wings to form legislation to protect shelter residents’ civil rights.

It is hard to measure the work that my fellow advocates and I really do, because we feel that it is our commitment to combat a systematically oppressive structure through our program’s efforts to bring methods of restorative justice to shelters.

In a strange way, we are a necessary evil. Without homelessness there wouldn’t be a need for our program to exist. However, because that need does exist, and our services are more critical now during a pandemic than ever before. We don’t see ourselves stopping this crucial work anytime soon. So long as shelters continue to operate and shelter residents are still being denied services, we as advocates will continue our due diligence and create a platform for our clients’ voices to be heard. ■

THE CUBA PROJECT: HOW THE STORY OF ONE MAN INSPIRED A PHOTO DOCUMENTARY & ADVOCACY PROJECT TO GET FOLKS INDOORS

A city worker called me to deliver a tent to a one legged man in a wheelchair. When I arrived I met 70-year-old Amos, who people call ‘Cuba.’ The city’s own policies call for those over 60 years old (or with particular medical vulnerabilities) to be housed in hotel rooms during the SIP Covid health crisis. But the city had let Cuba fall through the cracks... He had been in a navigation center when a positive case was found. The city moved him to a quarantine & isolation hotel for 2 weeks where he tested negative for the virus 3 times. The city plan was to move him to a SIP hotel. But because he uses a wheelchair and the city lacked ADA hotel rooms at that moment, the city put him back out on the street for weeks until we met him. By taking his photograph, posting a video interview with him and advocating for him on social media, we got the city to act. It took 5 days but Cuba got that hotel room. But there are so many others like Cuba who need to be indoors. Photographer Heidi Alletzhauer and advocate Christin Evans joined by writer Nuala Bishari seek to tell the stories through visual means & the written word of the many folks living out in San Francisco’s streets during the global pandemic.

To see more photos from this project follow “People on the Street” on Facebook.



Jordan Kevin

DEFUNDING THE POLICE: ON THE ROAD TO ABOLISHING OPPRESSION

Black Lives Matter and other abolitionist groups are leading communities across the country to recognize that the criminal justice system is a powerhouse of violence and white supremacy. Policing was racist at birth, with its origins in scalping Indigenous people and kidnapping Black people escaping slavery. It has a long history of keeping non-white property owning people “under foot” and disempowered. From Reconstruction to Jim Crow and up to the present, the police budget has continued to grow, and so too have the oppressive laws that target poor people, Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color. Selective enforcement of the law is a pretext that justifies siphoning money from the public good and instead criminalizing peoples’ very existence. Abolition is the only solution. With that comes an opportunity to redirect funding away from the bloated police budget and into the hands of community members, who will support and empower rather than terrorize. As we work to defund the police, its racist, classist systems and laws must go as well. We need to eliminate the police force’s myriad Specialized Units, which, among other things, are tasked with responding to homelessness and enforcing the hundreds of laws that prohibit basic survival activities. We need to overturn Privatized Policing Programs, which use public money to bolster the power of property owners. We need to abolish policing once and for all, and in its place foster healthy, vibrant, and liberated communities.

OVERTURN HISTORICALLY DISCRIMINATORY LAWS AND POLICING

In conjunction with defunding police departments more generally, eliminating the laws that police use to target poor and homeless people is a critical step towards a more just society. This country has a long and brutal history of enacting laws that specifically aim to remove the presence of poor people, especially Black people and Indigenous people, from our communities. Ugly Laws of the 1860s, the Sundown Towns, Anti-Okie Laws, and Jim Crow laws are a few examples of targeted laws that have wielded the power of police departments to enforce blatantly discriminatory, racist, and oppressive social control. Some, such as Vagrancy Laws criminalizing homelessness, were not overturned until 2018. This brutal history is in many ways a recent history, and a blatant injustice we live with now.

The books remain filled with laws that continue to criminalize basic survival activities, such as standing still (“loitering”), sitting, sleeping, laying down, eating, hanging out on the street corner, and sharing food. These laws are often deployed in the process of “sweeps”—evictions—of people with nowhere else to go. Today, they are used as a “tool” that addresses homelessness by criminalizing people with no housing and justifies inflated police budgets. These laws are selectively enforced to appease people in power and to try to make homelessness disappear, just as they have been used to appease and make others disappear in the past. In 2018, WRAP member groups conducted a survey of 1,657 homeless people regarding their interaction with policing and the main “illegal offenses” that people are being targeted with. Eighty-two percent reported being harassed, cited, or arrested for sleeping, 77% for laying down, and 75% for loitering. Among those surveyed, 1,275 people reported that they had been targeted by the police based on their economic status, and 597 people said they were targeted because of their race. If these laws were ever enforced without discrimination, ev-

eryone would be guilty of breaking them; instead poor and homeless people -- especially those who are Black, Indigenous, and Latinx -- are targeted.

Too many laws deny people who are homeless basic civil and human rights and harm our communities. Decriminalizing survival activities, such as sleeping, standing still, and eating—eliminating key laws that facilitate white supremacist policing, in other words—is a simple solution and requires absolutely no funding. Additionally, eliminating such archaic laws would immediately allow for the reallocation of enforcement funding into local community control and efforts that promote health, education, and housing opportunities for all. With the elimination of clearly racist and oppressive legal codes, there would be no justification for the police to harass poor and homeless people, and end the incarceration of people based on their housing status, the color of their skin, or a disability. As we work to defund the police, these laws must go as well.

ABOLISH SPECIALIZED UNITS

As communities look towards defunding oppressive and violent police forces and their discriminatory practices, it is also important to scrutinize the growing prevalence of Specialized Units within local police departments. Coinciding with the advent of contemporary homelessness in the early 1980s after Reagan cut HUD’s budget by nearly 80%, Specialized Units such as “Homeless Outreach Teams,” “Homeless Abatement Teams,” and “Homeless Liaison Officers” have spread like wildfire across the country. These units operate on the fallacy that police should be at the forefront of addressing social issues. We have borne witness to the lethal contradiction between the supposed intent of these units and their oppressive applications. Such specialized policing has perpetuated a myth that police departments need to pay special attention to, control, and eliminate the presence of people who are unhoused in our community. Disproportionately poor people of color — housed or unhoused — are the targets of police oppression. With Specialized Units, police departments have created an industry that drains millions and millions of dollars in local, federal, and corporate foundation funding under the guise of “helping” the homeless.

Irrefutably, police department staffing and funding has no bearing on solving homelessness. Millions of people are living without housing in the US, and the policing

apparatus has never been capable of addressing this issue. Increasing cops will never decrease homelessness. Clearly, the sole purpose of policing in this context is not to address homelessness but rather to mitigate the visibility of homelessness and its impact on business and property interests. The millions spent perpetuating such fraud and oppression should immediately be cut from police departments and reallocated to the community, who can then dictate where those funds serve the greatest public benefit. For too long, police departments have exploited funding cuts for healthcare, housing, and residential treatment programs that should be at the service of community members. Instead, they have amalgamated funding, staffing, union power, and social control over issues of poverty, racism, classism, and ableism. This is a self-perpetuating machine. Specialized Units were never intended to help the people they target. Instead, they have become modus operandi for police departments intent on increasing their wealth and power — and those of largely white and often corporate property owners — by degrading and dehumanizing the existence of poor people.

DISMANTLE PRIVATE POLICING STRUCTURES

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are key entities that legitimize the use of public funds to privately police public space. BIDs are bounded geographic areas in which mandatory fee assessments are levied on



OPPRESSIVE POLICING

property owners, including public agencies. There are more than 1,200 BIDs in US cities, spanning a few to a few hundred blocks each. The vast majority of funds collected via BID assessments pay for private security and additional police patrols whose primary purpose is to surveil and control poor and homeless people within the BID. BIDs also use their funds to advocate for the enactment, preservation, and strengthening of local and state laws that violate the rights of poor and homeless people. The hyper-oppressive command and control policing that BIDs promote impacts our whole community, including street vendors, buskers, artists, day laborers, protestors, homeless people, local residents, and people who are shopping whom security guards deem untrustworthy. BIDs have a long and well-documented history of increasing violent conflicts between police, security, and poor and homeless people, the overwhelming majority of whom are BIPOC. In short, BIDs use legally required and publicly collected money to lobby for anti-poor people laws, ambassadors, police, and armed private security, who regularly arrest, cite, harass, and remove poor and homeless people from public spaces.

WRAP’s core member groups have long demanded that local governments end the criminalization of poor and homeless people and, especially relevant to this moment, stop all public funding of and revenue collection related to BIDs. Dismantling the structures that allow for the private policing and criminalization of poor and homeless people is particularly urgent in this moment of community demands to defund police. Given the racist and oppressive history of policing in the US, we need to make sure that as public policing is defunded, private policing does not become the go-to solution.

FUND THE PEOPLE, DEFUND THE POLICE

Making our communities safe requires not only the defunding of police departments, but also dismantling discriminatory laws that target survival activities such as sleeping, sitting, lying down, and eating in public space: removing such historically discriminatory laws from the books eliminates the justification for increased policing to enforce them, including Specialized Units and systems of publicly-funded private policing.

The recent seismic uprisings in support of dismantling racist, classist structures of policing have made clear that the romanticized refrains of Constitutionally-endowed equality and pursuit of happiness are bullshit. This framework applies only to white property owners and the wealthy elite,

both historically and at present. The overwhelming majority of people in the US at the time this framework was drafted and implemented -- women, Indigenous people, enslaved people, poor people, non-white people -- were not among those included in the declaration, “All Men Are Created Equal” as it was written and remains celebrated today. The military apparatus, the distribution of wealth, the government and representation therein, and policing are the basis of suffering. For far too long, we have lived under systemic racism, systemic classism, and a systemic lack of meaningful representation within our structure of governance. As people today are calling to defund or abolish policing as an apparatus of oppression, we need to always stay mindful of police as one brick in the wall that has divided the “entitled” from the “non-entitled.” The entitled are prioritized within our local, state, and federal governmental structures. Meanwhile, those who are not entitled find their livelihood, healthcare, housing, employment, and education either completely ignored or addressed as matters of charity, and therefore only available to the worthy or the eligible or the compliant. When these structures of racism, colonization, and neoliberalism are finally torn down and reimagined, we will have created a form of community governance that sees in itself a structure that finally and truly embraces the American ideal of a government of the people, by the people, for the people. ■



DETENTION PANDEMIC

Detention Digest is a publication aimed at exposing the injustice of ICE detainment at Yuba County Jail. Sign up for our email list, leave a comment, or reach out to us here: <https://forms.gle/xihc452yYvkze5Gt8>

JMR I have been in I.C.E. detention for 32 months now, and let me tell you it does not get any easier. In the 32 months I have been in 3 detention facilities in California, and Yuba County Jail is by far the worst! When I think about it, it makes sense why it remains in business. 6.5 million dollars a year for the I.C.E. contract, yet we can’t get adequate hygiene, decent clothes, a clean housing area, shoes to wear, exercise equipment, basic medical attention, not even a pillow! The list is endless. Most of the staff are very unprofessional with a “this is my house” attitude or a “if you don’t like it, don’t come to jail” attitude. This very attitude and environment make most people lose their patience so they just sign for their deportation. So if you’re in the deportation business this sub-standard, inhumane cage is the perfect tool to make sure we don’t fight our deportation.

Recently the entire world has been devastated by this deadly virus. Around the world is the same sentiment, unity and to care for our loved ones and our neighbors. Well not if you’re in detention. It seems we are subhuman. Even in these dire times we are not worthy or deserving of being with our family. Now we just have one more thing to worry about, one more reason to just sign our deportation. The entire nation is told to keep “social distance,” but for us in detention that’s impossible. These cages, tanks, and housing aren’t big enough to keep 6ft apart. No matter what we do we are always in close quarters. Sure, they may have released some of the “high risk” detainees but not because it was the right thing to do or because they were compelled by human kindness. The only reason they released them is because they were forced to do it by the courts. Let’s be honest: they say that they’re detaining us for the safety of the community, that they are doing a good deed by keeping us off the streets. The truth is we are just a paycheck to Yuba. If you were to take away that hefty 6.5 million dollar check, they would kick us right out! With no concern for the community. They would no longer be interested in their “good deed.” The truth is we are not a threat to the community, but if we were released we would be a threat to their pockets — a 6.5 million dollar threat.

This Covid-19 pandemic is horrifying, and I wouldn’t wish this virus on anyone. My heart goes out to the family members who may have lost a loved one to this illness. I give my utmost respect to those in the front line fighting this, from medical staff to volunteers providing food and services to all. I would like the people to know we have another pandemic that is going unnoticed: detention. So many families are ripped apart by this Deportation Machine, and just like Covid-19 I wouldn’t wish it on anyone. Detention at Yuba is cruel and inhumane, it deserves attention and justice. Please take a stand against this discrimination, help us end this division of race. Let’s unite as one race, the human race.

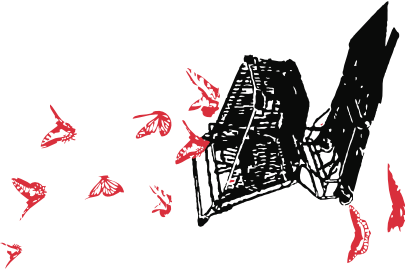
This Detention Pandemic must not and cannot continue! Thank you all who have helped voice the voiceless in detention.

Your Fellow Human friend,

JMR

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ROCK STARS COLLABORATE ON HERO ALBUM TO SUPPORT STREET SHEET VENDORS

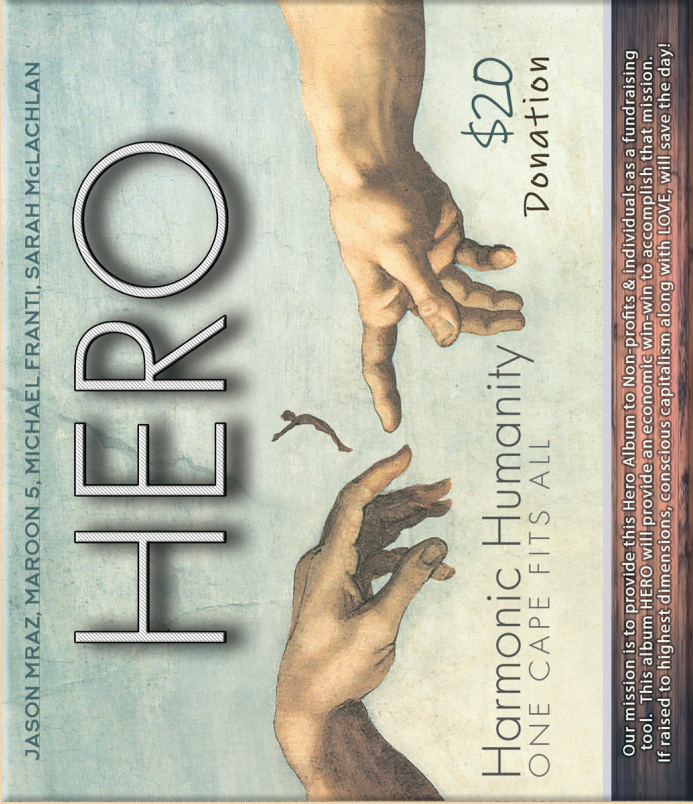
What do Maroon 5, Micheal Franti, Jason Mraz, Sarah McLachlan & Ace of Cups, have in common? These musicians have joined forces to support the homeless vendors of the local Street Sheet newspaper by selling their music on the streets. This Rock Star alliance is called Harmonic Humanity, and the new music album is entitled, “HERO, one cape fits all”.

After a three month hiatus in observation of the local “shelter in place” order, Street Sheet returns to print on July 1st with a special full color issue reporting on how COVID-19 has impacted poor and homeless communities. Along with the papers, the hundreds of homeless vendors who rely on this program will be able to pick up the new “HERO” album starting today.

“Each song on this album was selected for its message of hope and courage,” says Joseph Jaques of Harmonic Humanity. “If you see a Street Sheet Vendor selling this HERO CD, please buy one.”

Since 2013 Harmonic Humanity & Street Sheet have worked together to add a selling boost for the hundreds of homeless vendors who rely on selling the Street Sheet, a newspaper that prints the reporting of poor and homeless people on the political issues impacting them. Now these vendors will also be carrying the new album, “HERO, One Cape Fits All”, which goes for \$20 a pop.

Learn more about the artists behind this album at harmonichumanity.org



Home

“There is no place to go to out here. You’re just always on the grid. You’re always front and center and you have nowhere to go because of “move along, move along”. It’s so aggravating at times.”

“It’s so frustrating because they are always knocking you down. For a while the DPW employees were told to follow us so when we got to where we were going we had to move from there. There were times we had to move three times in a day. It’s more harassment than anything. The City practices classicism, a type of discrimination and it starts at the top.”

“I’ll (move inside) if you place me in housing that is not a shelter nor Navigation Center. An SRO would be fine. It doesn’t have to a fancy, just somewhere I’m housed that’s mine. Someplace I can open the door with a key, close the door and the outside world is

outside and I’m inside. I miss home.”

“When I go to appointments I have to be in the right set of mind. I have to have someone to watch my stuff because if I just leave it often times I’ll come back and it will be gone. I had an option of going to my housing appointment or not going and I said, “I’m just going to go”. I got the housing for 4 weeks but when I came back everything was taken. Everything was gone, and I had to start over.”

“I’ve had to start over I don’t know how many times over the last few years. Over and over and over. Sometimes when I have to take medicine I have to ask them to give me more of the same one because someone stole my bag - that happens a lot.”

“Why can’t we setup a system where everyone has a locker? Some kind of storage where we can put our stuff and not

have to worry about it. It doesn’t have to be that big but at least somewhere I can go and put my stuff for the day so I can go to my medical appointment. Or my GA appointment. Or I can go to my food stamp appointment, or my housing appointment, or I can get assessed at the “1,2,3” over there on 10th street.”

“These appointments don’t happen in a blink of an eye. You have to be away for awhile and you got to go there and you got to wait for your name to be called and you do your appointment. Then you got to come back and before you know it, it’s 3 hours later and your stuff is picked through or gone.”

“We all got to live in the sandbox so let’s play nice. I’ll stay over here but come on give us some slack here. We are all equal, I don’t care if you’re the mayor, the governor, the maid, the dishwasher, it doesn’t really matter. We are all equal.”