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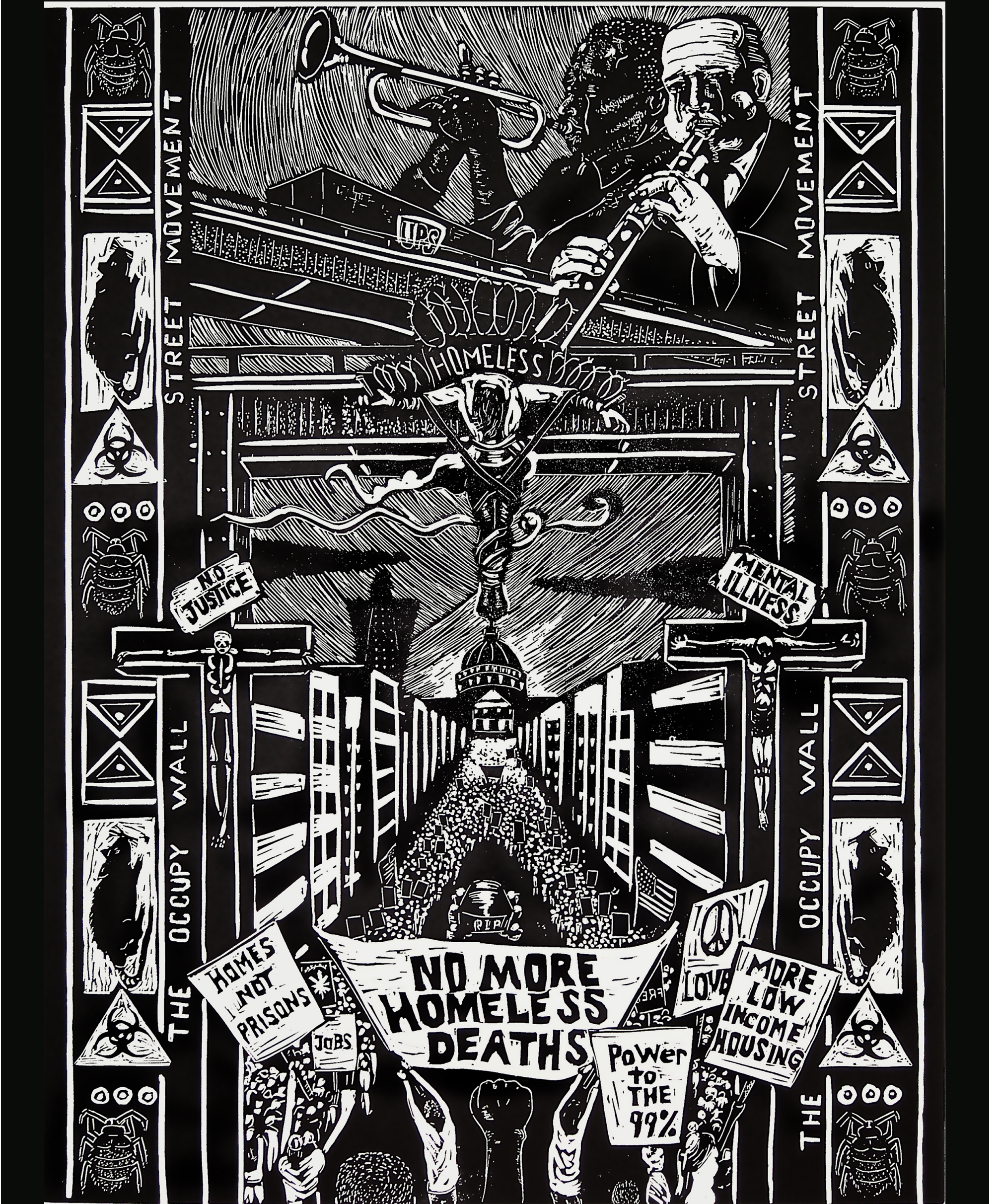
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REST IN POWER RONNIE GOODMAN AND MIKE LEE



BEFORE THEY HAUL YOUR HOME

Stella Kunkat

Towing practices have always been a particular plague for poor and homeless people, especially in San Francisco – the city with the nation’s highest towing fees, averaging \$574 in the current fiscal year. However, when the current shelter-in-place order was issued, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) stopped what advocates call “poverty tows.” Normally, poverty tows occur when vehicles accrue five or more unpaid parking tickets, a vehicle’s registration has been expired for more than six months; or when vehicles are legally parked in the same place for over 72 hours.

Towing for these reasons disproportionately affect people who rely on their vehicle as a home. The SFMTA’s decision to halt these tows brought relief for many of them. It also brought renewed attention to these poverty tows and possibly an opportunity to end them.

But as of June 15, the ticketing of vehicles has resumed.

A five-person legal team from The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights is representing the Coalition on Homelessness, as well as 26 other organizations and individuals, and they are fighting against the towing practices of the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) in the name of economic and racial justice.

On June 19, 2020, the lawyers wrote their first letter to SFMTA director Jeffrey Tumlin and the agency’s board, urging them to implement more just policies and end poverty tows.

For example, they recommend improving the SFMTA’s low-income payment plan by sending out monthly payment statements and email or text reminders. This would make it easier for people to keep track of their payments. The lawyers further argue that people should have the opportunity to re-enroll with their same unpaid citations even after they have defaulted. Finally, they suggest a warning system for people to be notified through text when their vehicle is

about to get towed, giving people the last-minute chance to move their vehicle.

Fast forward to mid-July, when we – an outreach team from the Coalition on Homelessness – reached out to people living in their vehicles in Bayview to ask about their recent ticketing and towing experiences.

On Bayshore Avenue, we walked up a block where around five trailers were parked. One of the first people we met was Ron Trathen. He quickly told us that he had extensive experiences with ticketing, towing, hearings and the City-contracted towing service known as AutoReturn. He was outspoken and savvy regarding municipal codes and relevant documentation required for towing hearings.

Ron’s first towing experience was in the Avenues. He told us that he owed \$1,000 to AutoReturn for the extra towing and storage charges due to his vehicle’s bigger size. AutoReturn gave him 30 days to pay before his trailer would be up for auction. When he checked on his trailer after 20 days, he was told that it was already auctioned off. When pointing out the 30-day rule, he was told that his van was in a different value category and that the 30-day rule did not apply. He never saw that trailer again, nor any of the contents that were inside.

Ron’s other towing experience went a little differently. Yet, he had to deal with equally uncooperative employees and unforgiving rules at AutoReturn. His vehicle was parked on private property when it got towed. Ron managed to contest this towing at a towing hearing, at which he presented a GPS map showing the exact location of the slab of private property on which he had parked. But the hearing officer at AutoReturn was not interested in the map nor Ron’s argument.

When it was clear to Ron that he would not get his vehicle back, he tried to get his

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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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Assistant Editor, TJ Johnston
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WORKGROUP MEETINGS

HOUSING JUSTICE WORK GROUP
Every Tuesday at noon

AT 280 TURK STREET

HUMAN RIGHTS WORK GROUP
Every Wednesday at 12:30 p.m.

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO OUR WORK GROUP MEETINGS. Our new office has an elevator for anyone who can not use the stairs. Simply call up and someone will come escort you.

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belongings – at least. At AutoReturn, he was given 15-minute intervals to get his stuff out, which means only 15 minutes at a time, minus the time it takes to walk through the warehouse to the vehicle. Ron took 10 trips to AutoReturn because he had his whole RV full of belongings to retrieve. At some point, employees started rushing him, and eventually, he was told he could recover no more of his possessions, with half of his belongings remaining in his RV. Eventually, Ron was able to find the person who bought his RV at the auction and thus could get some more of his stuff back.

Ron can’t help but think that AutoReturn employees purposefully make things even more difficult for people who are already under stress of losing their home and belongings.

On another day, in Ron Trathen in front of his current mobile home in Bayview, SF.

the same area, we met a man, Damar Johnson, who recounted similarly stressful experiences with AutoReturn. When we walked up to Damar and let him know we were interested in people’s towing experiences, he became talkative.

Damar had been towed twice in the past, before the Covid-19 pandemic. The memory and the frustration around it are fresh in his mind. His vehicles got towed in the past because he couldn’t keep track of the many tickets he received. As we have heard from many other vehicle owners, Damar had received tickets because he couldn’t – and still cannot – safely drive his van due to mechanical issues. Hence he receives tickets on street cleaning days.

Damar also told us that the MTA is operating in new ways; up until a few months ago SFMTA enforcers would drive around, write down the ticket while physically present at the vehicle, and then place the ticket. This way – assuming that one was present at that moment – vehicle owners had the chance to communicate and, at times, negotiate or move their vehicle.

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STORIES OF ENDING POVERTY TOWS

continued from page 2...

Today though, most tickets are generated and registered by photo monitoring and only placed on the vehicle once they're already in the SFMTA's system. With this change in procedure, any possibility for negotiation or last-minute moving gets lost — a process of depersonalization and dehumanization.

Damar explained to us in detail how the rules around retrieval imposed by AutoReturn have changed as well, and that it has gotten more complicated and obstacle-ridden. After receiving a bill for towing and storing that many, including Damar, are unable to pay, vehicle owners are confronted with frustrating rules around access to their towed vehicle and their belongings inside.

Damar tells us that the minimum paperwork required is the release of liability statement for the vehicle. Without this form, you cannot even get something as important as your ID out of your vehicle. If you have this form, you need to fill out a sheet at AutoReturn and state precisely what items you want to get out. These stated items are the only items that you are allowed to return with.

Moreover, if you wish to get all of your belongings out of the car, you have to have the paperwork proving that you are the vehicle's registered owner. In Damar's case, he had lost it, meaning that he had to go to the DMV, hence yet another bill of around \$200. When he returned to AutoReturn, they suddenly also expected the paperwork for



the insurance of the vehicle.

At the end of the day, Damar gave up, defeated in his battle with AutoReturn to get his vehicle and belongings back, only to be stuck with more payments, more bureaucracy and no success.

Every requirement puts another barrier in your way and imposes an even higher financial burden – a cycle that forces you to give up, as Damar puts it.

Finally, he tells us that even if he had been successful in getting back his vehicle at the AutoReturn auction, he would have encountered another risk. That is because, at the auction center, all license plates are removed from the vehicles. As a homeless person you therefore run the risk of driving a vehicle without a license plate while searching for a spot to stay –since you don't have a safe garage and home to drive to– and

Damar Johnson in front of his current mobile home parked in Bayview, SF.

getting pulled over by the police or fined by the MTA first thing after getting your vehicle back.

Damar wants nothing more than to get out of this situation and into a home. For now, he knows that he will be moving soon since the risk of being towed is too high. He will likely have to abandon his van, as it is too damaged to be fixed on the spot, and moving the vehicle constantly is a stressful reality. A reality that Damar has been dealing with for a long time now.

Poverty tows need to end. Far too many people share Ron and Damar's experiences throughout this city — experiences of cycles into poverty, debt and homelessness. The SFMTA has to start taking responsibility and stop punishing people for being poor and homeless. ■



STREET SPEAK

Episode 3: What Are Shelters Like in the Time of COVID-19?

In this episode we speak with Meghan “Roadkill” Johnson and Ben Baczkowski, both Shelter Client Advocates who work at the Eviction Defense Collaborative to protect the rights of people living in San Francisco’s shelter system. They offer a brief history and overview of the program before diving into the nitty-gritty details of how COVID-19 has changed everything.

Listen to this episode on Spotify or visit our website our website www.streetsheet.org/street-speak-podcast/

A LITTLE LOT FOR A LOT OF HELP: DESPITE DISPUTES, THE EMBARCADERO NAVIGATION CENTER DEBUTS

Silas Valentino

If your tickets to the Giants game are in sections 126 through 135 at Oracle Park, then you might meet Joanna Shober.

She’s worked in guest services for the Giants the last eight seasons, guiding people to their seats and offering her assistance as needed. In between baseball seasons, she’ll take similar jobs at the Chase and Moscone Centers.

“I help people,” she said succinctly, seated at a lime green table last winter with a Giants ballcap shielding her from the sun and a Fitbit wrapped over her left wrist that she found one day on the street. Now it’s Joanna’s turn to receive a little extra help and she explains how she found a temporary housing at the new Embarcadero Naviga-

tion Center.

Joanna, whose nickname is “Squeaky” amongst friends, has lived in the Bay Area since 1981, sometimes housed and sometimes not. When she’s having an offseason and can’t find work, she lives on the street. Joanna camped out by the Ferry Building along The Embarcadero for the past year until an invitation arrived for a bed at the recently-constructed Navigation Center nearby on Beale Street.

This was in early January and Joanna was with three companions near their camps close to the Embarcadero’s clock tower. They were approached by members of the San Francisco Homeless Outreach Team, who don jackets with the acronym HOT on their backs, during their daily walks reaching out to folks in the neighbor-

hood. The Embarcadero SAFE Navigation Center had opened a week prior and joining the team for their routine that day was Mayor London Breed.

After building trust and a friendship with persons living on the street in the Embarcadero neighborhood, the Homeless Outreach Team extended an invitation to Joanna and the other three to become guests of a Navigation Center. It’s how the system was designed: Relationships with folks on the street are forged, an offer is made and the individual is invited to temporarily live at the shelter as they work on finding permanent housing and gaining social services.

It’s not a first-come, first-served shelter and camping around the Center for chances to get in is discouraged.

Joanna accepted the invitation, along with two of her three companions, and they were welcomed inside the center. Although the fourth person wasn’t yet ready for services, the Homeless Outreach Team would be back the next day to continue building trust.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the Navigation Center has followed the guidance of the Department of Public Health. There’s been a pause on reservations and new placements, enhanced janitorial and hygiene services and some rules that could result in a Denial of Service were reduced to support people to shelter in place. Since DPH never issued a health order mandating individual shelter in place, guest of the Navigation Center were allowed to come continued on page 6...

RONNIE GOODMAN,

TJ Johnston

ARTIST WITH A ‘VISUAL VOICE’ ON HOMELESSNESS, 1960-2020

Almost prophetically, Ronnie Goodman made an etching of people marching in the street and carrying a banner that reads “No More Homeless Deaths,” one in a myriad of drawings, paintings and engravings he produced.

After a lifetime of creating art while homeless or incarcerated, on August 7, Ronnie Lamont Goodman was found dead in his

tent outside the Redstone Building in San Francisco’s Mission District, where he intermittently stayed and stored his drawings and illustrations. He was 60.

Goodman was a self-taught artist whose work was prominently displayed in venues ranging from the San Francisco Public Library to MoMA PS 1 in New York to the pages of Street Sheet and other homeless

publications to the office of then-San Francisco Supervisor, now Mayor London Breed.

As prolific as his artistic output was, Goodman also lost many of his works to sweeps conducted by San Francisco’s police and public works departments. In one such incident in 2017, police detained him for vandalism and ticketed him for illegal lodging when he tried to prevent a Public Works employee from seizing 50 linocut drawings and the tent where he was sleeping.

In recalling that and similar incidents for the Stolen Belonging project in 2018, Goodman described his passion for creating art and the desperation he felt when the authorities deprived him of his handiwork and the tools he used to devise it.

“And they took at least over a period of a year, or two years, probably 400 different art items that I need to have,” he said. “What I mean by items, drawings, sketches, drawing books, sketchbooks, painting, paints and supplies and inks and stuff like that.

“And right now, it’s like I’ve got to go beg for help to get some items so I can create. Because that’s what I like doing. I like drawing, I like creating on the spot. But since I don’t have that stuff, I’ve got to go out and be like everybody else. I’ve got to panhandle for some money in order to get something to eat, or in order to get some art materials, because of what the police and DPW are doing.

“They’re making my life very, very horrendous, and they’re making it so anti-productive that it’s insane. Because I’m like, ‘hey man, I’m an artist, and this is how I make my living.’ That’s my survival. It’s like, y’all work, and this is your survival. This is my work, this is my survival.”

A self-described “hippie child,” Goodman was born on July 25, 1960 and grew up in San Francisco’s Haight and Fillmore districts where art surrounded him and fed his muse.

He started drawing at the age of 6, and was

inspired by the political activity and vibrant social experiment of the 1960s. The countercultural movement in the Haight was in full swing; redevelopment in the Fillmore uprooted mostly Black residents.

At the same time, Goodman fell into addiction and was imprisoned for burglary. During his eight and a half years in San Quentin State Prison, he made greeting cards and drew portraits in exchange for coffee, cigarettes and anything that could be bought at the prison’s commissary.

When he was paroled in 2010, Goodman continued to devote himself to art and a long-distance running regimen. In 2014, he raced the San Francisco Half-Marathon as a fundraiser for Hospitality House, a homeless service organization that runs a community arts program. Through running the 13.1-mile course and auctioning off one of his paintings, he raised over \$40,000. In 2016, he ran the half-marathon again, benefitting the Redstone Building, which provides space for community-based organizations on 16th and Capp streets.

The Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) was another beneficiary of Goodman’s work. Art Hazelwood, the homeless organization’s self-described “minister of culture,” said Goodman’s images amplified the message of social justice movements.

“In recent years, Ronnie Goodman has been a strong visual voice for WRAP,” Hazelwood

“MY ONLY WAY TO SURVIVE WAS TO MAKE ART”

Ronnie Goodman

THIS PIECE ORIGINALLY RAN IN THE FEB 15TH, 2015 ISSUE OF THE STREET SHEET

I grew up in San Francisco. I’m what you call one of those hippie childs. I grew up in the Haight Ashbury and I been here all my life, other than in prison. I grew up in the Fillmore area also, which back then, was the Black area of San Francisco in the 60s and part of the 70s. I went to Roosevelt Junior High and Washington High School.

I started drawing when I was six years old from my mother’s boyfriend who used to design Harley Davidsons. He started giving me comic books. They had a lot of community art programs back then; there were a lot of street artists. They would sit there and draw and paint and did beat work and did all kinds of stuff in front of you. I grew up around it. My mother herself wasn’t an artist, but I just became an artist because I started seeing art. My first drawing instruction was from my cousin—he showed me how to draw Batman and all the comic strips.

Growing up here in the city has had a great impact. I’ve seen marches, political activity, seeing people with signs. I was around the Black Panthers and other underground stuff that I barely remember as a child.

I was around what they call the John Coltrane Church—I used to eat there on Divisadero Street.

When I went to prison, I became a prolific artist. It was a dark time, but it also became my light. I came to learn how to create. I was around nothing but artists in prison: tattoo artists, con artists, muralists—all types of artists that you could think of. By me drawing there, it was the only way I could buy things from the canteen; I had to draw for my living. I used to make greeting cards and trade them for a pack of cigarettes. Zuzus and wam wams, they were called. Coffee and cigarettes. I did family portraits and people bought me things from the canteen. It’s illegal to do that in prison, but we got around that. My only way to survive was to make art. If I didn’t do good art, I didn’t get good money. I became sought out in prison as one of the best portrait artists. Nobody sent me no money.

I was in and out of prison. Four counts of bank robbery. Burglary. I was a drug addict. I thought that I was a thug; I was under the false illusion that it was only my way

out. I didn’t have a mentor, no direction, nothing to grab onto. No one was in my life was there to influence me except pimps, players, and prostitutes.

When I got out, I went to Precita Eyes, and that’s when I started how to be an artist and how to make an income. I got to do a mural on Third and Carol named “Soul Journey.” It made me learn that you can make a small income from your art, and I thought it was the best thing in the world. I got involved with Art Hazelwood, and he got me involved with the Street Sheet and I thought it was one of the greatest things that there was, to get involved. I started donating my art, and I didn’t think my art would be able to support different programs like Hospitality House, but I helped raise a lot of money for their art program.

When I got out of prison, I had no choice but to be homeless. I just would get a tent and a sleeping bag and do the best I could. But my art was created to bring a light to homelessness. I went to Hospitality House and it was a safe haven and they hold onto your artwork if you’re homeless. You just have to suck things up and try to stay





said in 2015. “He has made powerful pieces about homelessness.”

Those pieces often appeared in Street Sheet, the newspaper that the Coalition on Homelessness publishes. In a 2017 article he authored, Goodman advised artists: “Stay creative and stay focused and don’t try to overthink anything. Come from the heart and how you feel. Try to step back a few steps and listen to others opinions and reflect on it. But don’t stop, don’t ever stop creating.”

He was survived by Tanya Goldman, his wife; Nicole Goodman and Piara Goodman, his daughters; and Marinte Goodman, his son. Ronnie Goodman, Jr., another son, died in 2014.

A GoFundMe has been set up to cover funeral expenses. ■

healthy and focused. It’s a struggle. Being homeless is a struggle. You can be homeless, but you don’t have to be hopeless. Why I’m here now is to give. Giving my art is something that I think is important. It belongs to the people to recognize the fact that art can make a difference.

I’m very visual because I can barely read and write. I live the life of an activist. I’ve been in prison, and I’ve been on food strikes, hunger strikes, I’ve been in riots. I’ve seen all of that stuff. I saw how art can make a big difference. You don’t have to be violent. My greatest tool is my creative tool, which is my pencil and my paintbrush and that’s my activism and my voice.

What I would say to aspiring artists is this: Stay creative and stay focused and don’t try to overthink anything. Come from the heart and how you feel. Try to step back a few steps and listen to others opinions and reflect on it. But don’t stop, don’t ever stop creating. Just do it because you truly love what you’re doing. The rest will come.

For more art by Ronnie Goodman, visit: www.RonnieGoodman.com. ■



BERKELEY MOURNS THE PASSING OF A HOMELESS ACTIVIST: GUY “MIKE” LEE IS DEAD AT 64

Tim Houchen

Bay Area homeless activist, Guy “Mike” Lee, has died in Berkeley at the age of 64. Lee, aka “Sam Spade” to his many Facebook friends and followers, was diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD) and had recently been hospitalized for his debilitating respiratory condition.

Lee was an ardent community activist and a passionate advocate and defender of homeless rights. He led protests and participated in the occupation of People’s Park and proudly served as a member of HAWG, (Homeless Advocacy Working Group) that established policies and monitored how homeless people were treated and often abused in the City of Oakland. Lee sued Berkeley for violating his first amendment rights after police allegedly confiscated and later destroyed personal property in the process of disbanding the homeless encampment he lived in.

Mike moved to the Bay Area from Portland, Oregon when he was a teenager, but spent the majority of his life living on the streets of Berkeley. In 2018, Mike moved into an apartment by way of the Coordinated Entry System, which prioritizes the transition of homeless individuals into permanent housing based on vulnerabilities due to age and physical health conditions.

In 2016, Lee ran for mayor of Berkeley on a platform focused on homelessness and affordable housing. With \$100 in his campaign war chest, he narrated a dialogue that provoked the confrontation of issues of homelessness across the entire field of mayoral candidates. Without the participation of Lee, issues regarding homelessness in Berkeley may not have been hot topics for discussion during the campaigns of other candidates for mayor that year.

“I am saddened to hear of the sudden passing of Mike Lee. Mike dedicated his life to fighting for justice and cared deeply about Berkeley,” said Mayor Jesse Arreguín in a statement. “He worked to protect People’s Park, save our Downtown Berkeley Post Office and was a powerful and effective voice for the homeless.”

According to Arreguín, Lee’s 2016 campaign for mayor made the needs of the homeless population a central focus for Berkeley. Arreguín added that Lee’s activism resulted in policies and programs to help the most vulnerable people in the city.

Derrick Soo, a friend and fellow advocate to Mike Lee, had worked together in Oakland. Lee’s vision was to implement a pilot project for “tiny homes” and to reinstate the self-governed city-sanctioned 77th Avenue Rangers homeless encampment in Oakland. Soo is determined to continue working to make both projects regional models to share with other municipalities to help them address affordable housing shortages.

When Soo shared his aspirations of running for mayor in Oakland, Lee offered him encouragement. Soo is now more determined than ever and dead-set on making a run for the mayor’s office in the future.

This is an example of how Mike Lee inspired others in life. Remembering him gives hope that his life will continue to inspire others in the future.

Candice Elder of the East Oakland Collective worked with Lee over the past few years. She remembers Lee as a “fierce force to be reckoned with when it came to advocating and organizing for the unhoused population.”

“He was always ready to hold elected officials accountable,” says Elder.

“He was very outspoken and always willing to go down into the homeless encampments to help and protect the most vulnerable residents.”

Lee was critical of what he called the social services industrial complex and he always expected a greater contribution from society and government towards homeless solutions.

Lee said this about the current systems that deliver homeless services and care to persons experiencing homelessness.

“The basic message is to teach homeless people you have to be helpless,” said Lee. “We have a system that is broken. It has no priorities. Their only solutions are criminalization or charity.”

“My focus is to provide a hand up and not a hand out,” Lee once said.

The story of Guy “Mike” Lee should inspire persons experiencing homelessness and their advocates everywhere to become more active in the process of creating solutions that end homelessness.

Mike once said, “In order to solve this problem we must include the expert opinion of the homeless themselves. When you need a tooth pulled do you go to an expert or an auto mechanic?”

The pure wisdom and persistence of Guy “Mike” Lee will remain in the memories of the many people that he helped and defended for a very long time. ■

This piece originally ran in Homeless Perspective

THE EMBARCADERO NAVIGATION CENTER DEBUTS

continued from page 3...

and go, but all were encouraged to shelter in place.

Meals are provided, laundry is available, shower and bath facilities are kept clean and there's computer access near a communal television. Beds are laid out in dormitories and housed under structures from the company Sprung who specialize in industrial and commercial markets, as well as homeless navigation shelters.

Dormitory B waits for occupants and for now is mostly empty. The Embarcadero Navigation Center was designed to serve up to 200 guests at a time but amidst COVID-19 abiding by DPH guidance regarding bed spacing and layout, it now has 88 active beds at the site.

Dormitory B is an airy space, well ventilated for having no windows and smells like fresh polyurethane-coated fabric. At the front desk of the dorm is a copy of DeVon Franklin's "The Success Commandments" next to some sticky notes and a nasal Narcan device. The L-shaped dorm cubicles have a few drawers for storage and clothing and the navy-blue cots are doubled padded.

Each guest is assigned a personal care manager who assists in signing up for the General Assistance Program and housing programs. If a guest is exhibiting a commitment to exiting homelessness, they will not be asked to leave and can remain at the Navigation Center until their pathway forward is created. However, guests will be asked to leave if the safety of those around them is threatened.

The first Navigation Center opened March 2015 and hits its 5-year mark with six shelters in operation and two more on the way expected by the end of the year: 75 beds for a Transition Aged Youth center located at 888 Post Street and 200 beds set for 33 Gough Street. From 2015 through the end of 2018, 46% of Navigation Center exits were either to permanent housing or reunifications with family or friends through the Homeward Bound program.

Abigail Stewart-Kahn, director of strategy and external affairs with DSHS, explained how the success of Navigation Centers, with nearly 2,500 individuals finding homes over the last five years, should not necessarily be gauged by the number of folks who did not exit homelessness.

"The majority of those exits, the other side of the coin, were people leaving on their own. They either declined services or left by their own choice," she said. "It's important to emphasize that success should not be measured that way. The success is if people what to come inside the center; do they stay, do they build a community—do they get safe?"

In reference to folks who decline services or an invitation to the Navigation Center, Ms. Stewart-Kahn says the Home-

less Outreach Team understands they need to remain consistent and dependable to eventually earn the trust of a person living on the street while respecting their individual personal situation.

"You say great, we'll come back and see you tomorrow," she said. "If we can pivot away from the idea of what's wrong with you to what happened to you, then we can start to build that compassion and better help people."

////

The flat parcel of asphalt along The Embarcadero was only a parking lot with tire marks and erosion last baseball season, often used by sports fans before the half-mile stroll south to the Giants' stadium.

All that remains of the former function of Sewall Lot 330, the 2.3-acre plot across from Piers 30-32, is a canvas of painted white lines used to separate parking spaces.

Sewall Lot 330, once used for temporary parking, has been adapted into temporary shelter for some of the Embarcadero neighborhood's more vulnerable residents. It's the latest Navigation Center to go up from the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. It's large enough to provide temporary housing for eventually 200 guests with room, board, safety and social services. As well as 200 new opportunities for them to find a way home.

This Navigation Center is not only the largest shelter yet in terms of its quantity of beds, but it was perhaps the most disputed, receiving pushback from local residents, businesses and other non-profits who coalesced to form the Safe Embarcadero For All community organization to voice concerns about public safety. There were dual fundraising efforts, either supporting the construction or the delay of the homeless shelter, and a months-long legal dispute that ended in favor of the center's construction.

Opened during the final days of 2019, the barren blacktop now supports three granite grey fabric membrane structures, about two stories high and maybe half-a-football field in length each. They encompass nearly the entire lot with an outdoor center area with neon-colored chairs and planter boxes for growing saplings courtesy of the Friends of the Urban Forest.

The clamor of the city behind the wooden fence, intensified by the constant rush of traffic from the Bay Bridge a mere block away, becomes white noise inside the triangular lot. Guests can spend their full days inside the safety of the shelter or choose to go out. Whenever they return, they sign in, receive a full pat down with a metal-detector and if they possess a weapon, they

log it to be stored during their stay.

Mike Tillman is one the multiple employees with Five Keys, a nonprofit charter school operator contracted by the city to operate the Navigation Center. He wears the uniform of a sky-blue t-shirt and is the key master for the bicycle storage facility near the front door.

Five Keys and Heluna Health, the service that runs the Homeless Outreach Team, are always hiring—particularly people who have been homeless themselves. Both organizations have job boards on their websites with a multitude of open positions for a variety of positions and skill-sets. Learn more at fivekeyscharter.org and helunahealth.org under the careers tab.

Mr. Tillman was part of the team that set up the Embarcadero Navigation Center, which opened on January 30. "I was helping to bring in tables and break up boxes," he said. "At first, there were five people then I looked up and there was 20 people—then 80!"

The Embarcadero shelter was announced in March 2019 and was swiftly met with push back from residents in the neighborhood. Critics challenged the city's planning department's decision to exempt the project from an environmental review to expedite the construction of the shelter and argued that the shelter would attract further public alcohol and drug consumption, police interventions, property crime, personal assaults and additional homeless encampments.

Two online fundraisers through GoFundMe were created in response; to raise money for the legal fees to counter the Center's development, Safe Embarcadero For All raised \$102,005. Responding to this campaign was A Safer Embarcadero For All which supported the Center and raised \$176,015. [The Coalition for Homeless, which operates the Street Sheet, was the benefactor of this donation.]

The Port of San Francisco created the Embarcadero SAFE Navigation Center Advisory Group to allow concerned community members the opportunity to communicate with the organizations operating the shelter. Since August 2019, there have been public meetings held almost monthly.

Wallace Lee, speaking on behalf of the organization Safe Embarcadero for All, said such meetings have been a good way for the community to let the City and Navigation Center operator, Five Keys, know about problems.

"I have found that the City and Navigation Center representatives genuinely want to be helpful in resolving the issues, but they don't really have the ability to do anything meaningful, which can be frustrating," Mr. Lee said.

He described his disappointment in an increase of open drug use, drug dealing and improperly discarded syringes he's observed in the area around the Navigation Center since its opening. He also said he felt betrayed by the City's promises that the Navigation Center would not attract encampments.

"While the City has generally been responsive to reports of blocked sidewalks and menacing behavior towards pedestrians, encampments have been appearing at an increasing rate around the Navigation Center," Mr. Lee said. "Some of the encampments are from those seeking to get a space in the Navigation Center, but surprisingly, some have been from Navigation Center guests who refuse to sleep indoors."

Posted around the Embarcadero Navigation Center are blue, lamented notices with a phone number advising neighbors to contact the Center if anything needs to be picked up, cleaned or removed. The Center's operators explained that camping in the parameter is discouraged and folks are informed that it does not enhance the likelihood of an invitation.

Ms. Stewart-Kahn says that she's received a number of positive calls and emails from neighbors who commend the Center for its cleanliness and even offer to help volunteer. She acknowledges the concerns from disappointed neighbors and encourages a little extra empathy.

"That's the work and we're thankful they're raising question," she said. "We just hope they raise those questions and understand the humanity and dignity of the people who are in homelessness. Then we're very happy to engage with conversations." ■



PAYING TOO MUCH FOR RENT? #30RightNow!

Jordan Davis

Starting in August, all tenants in Direct Access to Housing (DAH) program will be paying only 30% of their income towards rent. Previously, while most supportive housing units (and all units that have come online since 2016) were at 30%, 678 tenants in the DAH program were paying literally half their income towards rent, a legacy of backwards and cruel policies from the city and county of San Francisco.

The funding that was released came from a \$1 million allocation that came as a result of me hunger striking for rent relief in 2019, and since it would cost roughly \$1 million to get DAH tenants down to the Department of Housing and Urban Development standard of 30%, it was agreed that the DAH tenants who were paying 50% would be covered.

However, the program will last only one year, unless Mayor Breed renews it, and importantly, there are still more than 2000 supportive housing units where tenants are paying half or more of their income towards rent. Many of these units are in dilapidated SROs master-leased by the city. One of the biggest offenders is the Tenderloin Housing Clinic (THC), run by known slumlord Randy Shaw, who has benefitted from lucrative contracts from

the city. I live in a building managed by THC and know the challenges within, and it was a hard fight to even get this funding. Given the realities of COVID-19, it will be even harder to get rents for every tenant in supportive housing down to 30% of income.

In late 2014, I came here homeless from Pennsylvania seeking a better life and new opportunities as a disabled transgender woman. I am a "graduate" of the first navigation center, and was placed in a THC building, where I was shell-shocked by bad policies, a dilapidated physical plant, and most of all, high rents. Through organizing around SRO issues, I learned all about the twisted politics of supportive housing and SROs, and how difficult it was to build power.

I eventually was appointed to one of two tenant seats by the Board of Supervisors to the Single Room Occupancy Task Force, an advisory body composed of landlords, Collaboratives, department officials, and two tenants. It was hard to get any truly progressive change there and the rhetoric was really toxic. In early 2019, I introduced a resolution calling for rents in supportive housing to be only 30% of income. Through a sunshine request of the

Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, I was able to calculate that it would cost a total of \$7.5-8 million per year to correct all the rents in supportive housing down to 30% of income. Despite all that, passing the resolution at the Task Force was really difficult.

The landlord representative, Sam Patel, who has sued the City over an ordinance preventing residential hotels from being converted to tourist use, claimed it would harm owners, even though the city would fund the difference. Clifford Gilmore, who represents the Central City SRO Collaborative made comments about how tenants will use the extra money to buy drugs and be irresponsible, which is in line with Randy Shaw's support for Care Not Cash, which took cash away from assistance programs on the theory that tenants will drink and do drugs. Dion Roberts, who has ties to the mayor and who runs the supportive housing site, the Mary Elizabeth Inn, bogged the resolution down in technicalities that were beyond the Task Force's purview, and RJ Sloan, the other tenant rep, who is also employed by the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, would mansplain that the numbers were all in my head. The meetings are all audio-recorded and publicly available on the Department of Building Inspection's YouTube channel.

I was eventually able to win by a very narrow vote in June 2019, but only after I was 14 days in on a hunger strike, which made the Examiner front page. On the day of the vote, another THC tenant gave a blistering public comment supporting the measure and opposing the anti-poor rhetoric of certain members. Later that day was the budget hearing for HSH, and after a question from Supervisor Haney, HSH admitted the issues, and said that all new supportive housing would be at 30%. I

ended my hunger strike after 21 days, when the \$1 million add-back to the budget was announced.

In March of this year, Supervisor Haney announced his intent to introduce legislation to get all rents in supportive housing down to 30% of income. Meanwhile, many months went by without the \$1 million being spent, and with a policy memo in hand, SRO tenants, plus Senior and Disability Action, Tenderloin People's Congress, Democratic Socialist of America, and other organizations protested at the mayor's office. We got a promise from Sean Elsbernd that the \$1 million would be spent, but then, Shelter in Place hit, and our plans were temporarily derailed.

In June, ahead of a meeting between Haney's office and HSH, and after I had gone on another hunger strike the newly formed #30RightNow Coalition penned a letter to the editor in the Examiner concerning the issue, and a few days after, it was announced that the \$1 million would be spent starting in August. It was a long and hard process, but SRO tenants managed to get a major win. Legislation that will get the rents down to 30% across the board will be introduced in the near future, but the city's budget situation could complicate matters.

It is very likely that revenue measures will bring in needed funds, and I hope that you all can vote for the ballot propositions that will fund this needed assistance, and hopefully, we can get the roughly \$8 million to help tenants like us, many of whom are Black, brown, LGBTQ, and disabled. To get plugged further into the campaign and to receive updates when legislation is introducing, please email 3orightnow@gmail.com. ■

A DANGEROUS MESSAGE IN DANGEROUS TIMES: HUD'S TRANSPHOBIC SHELTER BAN

Stella Kunkat

If you are a woman and happen to exhibit facial hair, a certain height or a noticeable Adam's apple and you're looking for a place at a federally funded single-sex or sex-segregated homeless shelter, you may soon be under particular scrutiny by the admissions staff. In other words, discrimination based on gender identity could become legal, especially discrimination that is based on stereotypical gender features – such as the ones listed above. This is according to a new proposal by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, announced in a July 1 press release.

In a nutshell, this proposed rule gives shelters the permission to reject people based on their gender identity and based on stereotypical gender-binary traits, ostensibly in order to protect cisgender people who wouldn't feel comfortable sharing a space with someone who's assigned sex at birth does not align with their gender identity. Essentially, this would allow shelter providers to make their own policies around admission determinations – a free pass for discrimination.

With this rule the Trump administration modifies and quasi nullifies the Obama-era

Equal Access Rule under which trans people had the right to be housed according to their gender identity. Now, trans women might have to fear being placed into a men's shelter, and vice versa.

But, hey, this is for a good cause! As the HUD claims in its press release, this "important update will empower shelter providers to set policies that align with their missions" and "better accommodate religious beliefs of shelter providers." Under the pretext of privacy, comfort, practicality and religious beliefs, HUD is putting the safety of transgender, as well as non-gender-binary homeless individuals at risk.

This is particularly outrageous given that transgender people are already disproportionately suffering from the severities of homelessness. This rule would likely put even more trans – especially trans women – and non-binary folks in danger of harassment and violence. It is also likely that many unhoused trans people would rather choose the street and other unsafe conditions over the potential discrimination, rejection and harassment at a shelter.

But somehow, in the eye of the Trump administration, the safety of vulnerable trans

and non-gender-binary individuals is not on par with the safety of unhoused cisgender people.

According to the HUD press release, specific-sex shelters must provide those rejected "with information about other shelters in the area." In shelters that are not single-sex, people who are concerned about living with people of a different biological sex "must be provided a referral to a facility whose policy is based on biological sex." So, while concerned and uncomfortable cisgender people would be given a referral, those people who are discriminated and rejected because they are not cisgender would merely be given 'information.' Providing a referral translates into safety, security and real responsibility. Providing information does not entail any of that. This difference in treatment between cis- and transgender people written into this proposal is just one obvious way in which this rule is transphobic.

However, even if this rule would go into effect some states' law may override it, such as California's. As a recent San Francisco Chronicle article reports, many federal courts have ruled that the U.S. Fair Housing Act – which includes the prohibition of housing discrimination based

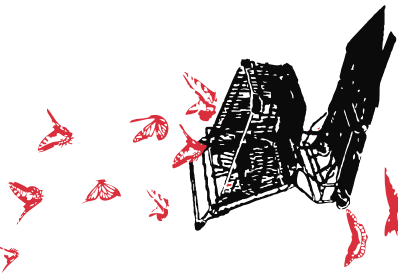
on sex – is applicable to homeless shelters, making shelters in those states immune to the new proposal.

And there is another reason for hope. On July 30, Rep. Jennifer Wexton of Virginia, along with 145 Democratic members of Congress, sent a letter to HUD Secretary Carson voicing their opposition to "this anti-transgender proposal." The letter puts an emphasis on the unfounded nature of the HUD's cited safety concerns. The authors argue that while the Equal Access Rule has been in place for years, in over 20 states, there has not been "any increase in public safety issues," rendering the safety concerns fictitious. Importantly, they mention that this justification "only perpetuates harmful and dangerous stereotypes of transgender people who are seeking safe shelter and other emergency services."

Regardless of whether this rule will go into effect or not, what this proposal suggests is that discrimination based on gender identity is righteous. A dangerous message to be sending out to shelters, especially during these times of crises, as housing insecurity is at an all-time high. ■

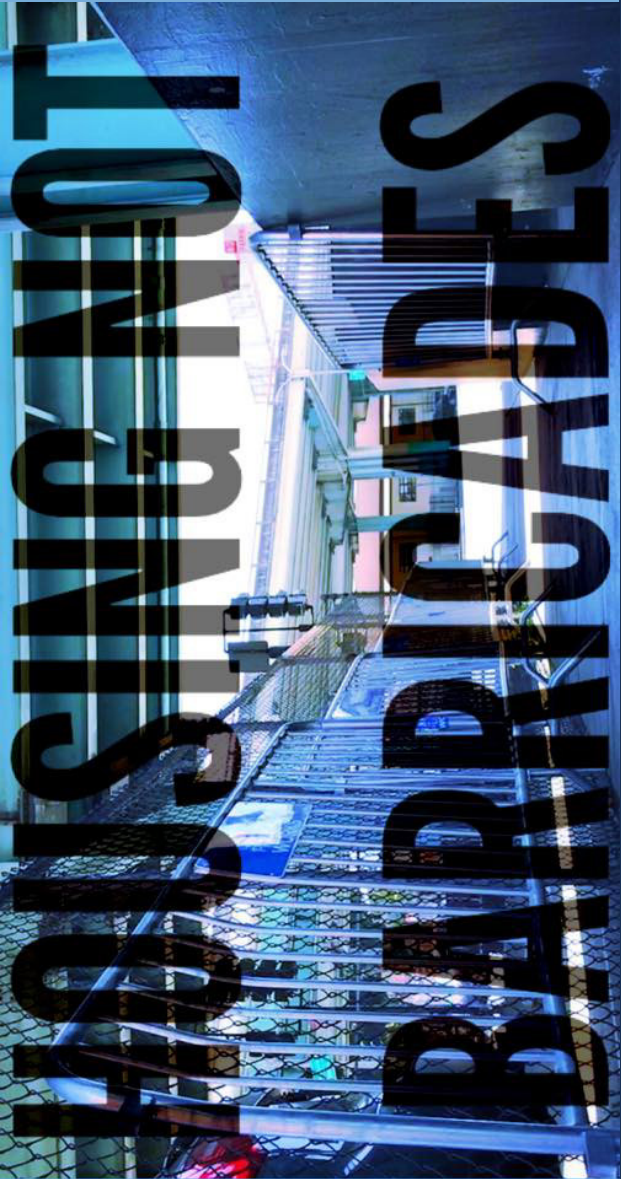
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AUGUST
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In the midst of a deadly pandemic and vicious housing crisis, what is San Francisco offering residents without housing?
Barricades! The racist, classist and ableist lawsuit by UC Hastings lays bare how City officials and San Francisco institutions treat homeless folks: as a “public nuisance” that needs to be forcibly removed. People need housing, not barricades! Join us in a march and rally to say no to these barricades, no to violent sweeps by the cops, and no to racist lawsuits “removing” homeless residents without adequate plans to provide housing.

Meet at 3pm at Turk and Leavenworth.

* MASKS ARE MANDATORY * KEEP YOUR DISTANCE *



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