

INDEPENDENTLY PUBLISHED BY THE COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS SINCE 1989



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STREET SHEET

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REMEMBERING SCOTT NELSON

We are so heartbroken to share the news of another lost Coalition family member. Scott Nelson was the backbone of the Street Sheet vendor program for years, serving as the vendor coordinator on a volunteer basis, getting this paper into the hands of hundreds of vendors who make their living selling it. As a volunteer he also fought for recycling programs to remain in operation across the City, helped countless homeless people navigate the system to get their towed vehicles back and redistributed abandoned transportation devices to people who needed them. He was our Robin Hood, and we will always remember him.

Scott was committed to prison abolition and to redistributing wealth, usually by outsmarting the systems in place to keep people from meeting their needs. He magically distributed discounted transit tickets, rewired private electric bikes and scooters for public use and constantly returned from lost and founds and free piles with gifts—weed, thick wool socks, ice cream, once even a leather jacket—to the delight of those he cared about.

Scott was calm and kind in the face of extreme trauma and adversity, and always had a witty joke or a knowing smile to lighten the mood when things got tough.

Please check back for updates on a memorial for our friend and comrade.

Scott was the king of recycling! He knew the ins and outs of the state program, advocated for change, advocated for access and worked with a lot of different stakeholders to improve recycling in SF. He was also instrumental in working with the Treasurer's Office on their Financial Justice Project to change policies so that fines and fees did not disparately impact impoverished and working class people. He was incredibly thoughtful and had a brilliant policy mind! Such a joy to work with, his wealth of knowledge will be missed, but his contributions to San Francisco will live on!

- Jennifer Friedenbach

Scott Nelson was one of the first people I met when I started The San Francisco Financial Justice Project several years ago. Scott had signed up to be a member of the Fines and Fees Task Force. We met for coffee so I could listen and hear what was on his mind about fines and fees. He told me about what he was seeing with Quality of Life citations and about the ticket clinic he ran at the Coalition on Homelessness.

Scott mentioned something that first day that has always stayed with me. He said "The process is the punishment." That often the processes we set up for people to apply for government resources are incredibly onerous and hard to navigate. Scott's comment and wisdom has stayed with me all these years. He inspired me and so many others to do better.

I'll miss Scott's gentle presence, kind heart, and wise words. I imagine we all do.

- Anne Stuhldreher
Director of the Financial Justice Project

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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 agendas to us.

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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ORGANIZE WITH US

HOUSING JUSTICE WORKING GROUP TUESDAYS @ NOON

The Housing Justice Workgroup is working toward a San Francisco in which every human being can have and maintain decent, habitable, safe, and secure housing. This meeting is in English and Spanish and open to everyone! Email mcarrera@cohsf.org to get involved!

HUMAN RIGHTS WORKING GROUP WEDNESDAYS @12:30

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

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS!

THE OASIS IS A SAFE HAVEN FOR MY FAMILY

YHW

My name is Yaasmeen Williams. I, and my 9 year old sister, are residents at the Oasis Hotel, which is now a family shelter. It isn't a matter of if this property should be permanently purchased, but when. For families like mine, it is the last option and for many, a safe haven making the name "Oasis" very fitting.

My sister and I are former foster youth—members of an oppressed class that makes up the majority of both homeless and imprisoned populations. With that comes increased risks of more traumas such as: self harm, sexual violence, substance abuse, domestic violence, (survival) sex work, mental facility institutionalization, criminality, etc.

As the eldest sister of three, fathered by different men but born to the same alcoholic mother who suffers from mental illness, I'm no stranger to all of the aforementioned experiences. In 2020, I was given the opportunity to make a difference & embarked on what has now been a three-year journey to guardianship of my youngest sister, Assata-Kali.

Assata is a bright child, who loves unicorns and has taken up the violin at her Montessori school. Having private shelter at the Oasis has given

me the safe space to provide that for her. That would've never been possible with our mom or with my paternal family who abandoned us after I stood up to them, speaking against their history of violence toward children, the people who've helped cover it up, and those who attempted to silence victims.

This shelter is one of many first steps toward our liberation from a life destined for many unhoused people and has provided the means to protect us from the people who shielded our abusers. Without this shelter, we'd have nowhere to go and I'm confident that there are thousands who can relate.

Housing is suicide prevention. Housing is harm reduction. The harsh reality we face is that this is life or death for so many people who will never get the chance to sit at the table, to speak directly with those who have a say in their fate. It isn't a matter of if, but when.

I think you and I share a goal of being able to provide solutions to the housing crisis. It has been a lifelong dream of mine to be able to own properties just like this one in order to house many like myself. I realize you currently have that very power to bring that goal to fruition. ■

DEMONSTRATION AT CITY HALL DEMANDS HALT TO CLOSURE

On Tuesday, December 6th, housing and homelessness advocates converged on the steps of San Francisco City Hall to protest the planned closure of the Oasis Family Shelter, which is scheduled for December 15. The demonstrators—many of whom live at the Oasis and are facing imminent displacement—demanded that the City move to acquire the Oasis building, while also calling on the owners of the Oasis building to sell the property to the City or a non-profit.

Attending and in support of of these demands include the Coalition on Homelessness, Oasis Shelter residents, District 2 Supervisor Catherine Stefani, District 5 Supervisor Dean Preston, Homeless Prenatal Program, Hamilton Families, San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium, The Riley Center, GLIDE Memorial Church, Compass Family Services, healthcare providers, public health officials, and advocates for homeless families.

The Oasis Family Shelter is a safe haven for homeless families. The oasis is the only low-barrier emergency family housing available in San Francisco, and provides 25% of the approximately 200 beds available for families to stay together. The Oasis shelter is slated to close on December 15th, because the owners are selling

the property, and the City and County of San Francisco have yet to make an offer to purchase it.

According to Tracey Mixon, Housing Justice Organizer at the Coalition on Homelessness: "It is so vital that families are still able to access the Oasis shelter on an emergency basis. This was a positive step in the right direction at the beginning of the pandemic and should remain the same. Stop unhoused families from falling through the cracks."

Although the City promises to provide alternative shelter for those who will be displaced, families may have to split up to stay housed. Additionally, there are over 70 other pregnant people and families currently on the waitlist for shelter, and the closure would dramatically extend wait times. Advocates are also concerned that not everyone being displaced will qualify for relocation to other shelters — potentially leaving people on the street again.

Unhoused pregnant people are an especially vulnerable population who will suffer greatly from the closure of the Oasis. Significant negative reproductive health effects are associated with housing instability, including decreased prenatal care utilization, increased preterm birth, and increased birth complications. According to Dr. Dominika Seidman, an OB-GYN at UCSF and ZSFG: "The Oasis is an absolutely critical shelter option for pregnant people and families in San Francisco. It is the only low-barrier option for pregnant people, and allows people to enter with partners and pets. It allows people to stabilize in shelter, and access critical support and treatment to transition into longer term housing. There is always a wait list for Oasis rooms and families are turned away daily. The closure of the Oasis will undoubtedly result in more pregnant people and families being unsheltered and on the street in San Francisco. Closing the Oasis is inhumane, unethical, and a tremendous step backwards for the city of San Francisco in caring for its most vulnerable residents." ■



Photo by Jeremy Word, courtesy of El Tecolote

EPISODE 13: WHY IS THE COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS SUING THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO?

Listen to STREET SPEAK, the podcast answering your burning questions about poverty and homelessness in San Francisco. Created by the editors of Street Sheet, this podcast brings you the word on the street. Find the latest episodes on our website and wherever you listen to podcasts.



SCAN ME

TRIBAL SOVREIGNTY AT STAKE IN CHALLENGE TO INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT

ALTERING OR REVERSING ICWA WOULD
DAMAGE TRIBAL SOVREIGNTY, BUT SELECT
STATES MAY OFFER PROTECTION

Melanie Henshaw

*Reprinted from Portland street paper
Street Roots, courtesy of INSP News
Service*

In a case with potentially far-reaching consequences for tribal sovereignty, a divided Supreme Court debated the constitutionality of a 1978 law designed to prevent the separation of Native families and communities – the Indian Child Welfare Act, or ICWA.

ICWA, the result of extensive efforts by Native activists to stop the separation of Native families by the US government, faces a challenge in the closely-watched Brackeen v. Haaland case, in which the state of Texas and three white couples who sought to adopt Indian children seek to overturn the law.

Seven states, including Oregon, have state legislation strengthening ICWA, which legal experts say is the best protection against some challenges to the law.

The fate of ICWA is significant not only regarding the adoption of Indian children, but depending on the specifics of the Brackeen ruling, the decision could upend the fundamental principles of federal Indian law and diminish tribal sovereignty.

A total of 497 federally recognized Native nations, including all nine federally recognized tribes in Oregon, 23 states, 87 members of Congress, and dozens of child welfare advocacy groups filed amicus briefs imploring the Supreme Court to leave ICWA in place.

WHY IS ICWA NECESSARY?

Since the beginning of European colonization, white settlers, and later the US government, targeted the Indigenous children of Turtle Island in genocidal efforts to destroy Native nations.

These multi-pronged efforts include so-called “residential boarding schools,” forced sterilization, high rates of removals of Native children from their families, outright massacres and bounties on the lives of Native peoples.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, a federal policy of forcibly removing Native children from their families and placing them in so-called

“residential boarding schools” existed. School officials stripped Native children of their clothing, names, languages and culture in what is now widely recognized as cultural genocide.

Studies conducted by the Association of American Indian Affairs in 1969 and 1974 showed government agencies removed between 25% and 35% of Native children from their families during the 1950s and 1960s — a period known as the Sixties Scoop.

Approximately 85% of the roughly one-third of Native children government agencies removed from their families were subsequently fostered and adopted by non-Indian families in both government and private adoptions, even when “fit and willing” relatives were available.

Native activists fought hard for ICWA, a law designed to defend against historical and ongoing genocidal efforts by the U.S. government to break up and eliminate Native nations, families and communities to enable land and resource extraction.

Native activists and advocates, including from Oregon, testified before Congress about the devastating nature of United States adoption policies in 1977, influencing Congress to act.

Congress passed ICWA as a partial fix to hundreds of years of efforts to sever ties between Native children and their communities and forcibly assimilate them into white society.

Today, the trauma Native adoptees removed from their families and nations experience is well documented. There are organizations designed around helping Indigenous adoptees reunite with their culture and communities, like the First Nations Repatriation Institute.

Despite the presence of ICWA, agencies under the Department of Human Services still remove Native children from their families at disproportionate rates and place them in non-Native homes. Native advocates say that’s evidence the protections afforded to Indian children through ICWA are still necessary and already lack uniform application.

ICWA, which contains a variety

of provisions states must adhere to in child welfare and adoption proceedings for Indian children, lacks both oversight and enforcement. It wasn’t until 2016 that, for the first time, the Bureau of Indian Affairs issued legally-binding amendments to ICWA to improve state compliance with the law.

ELEMENTS OF ICWA

The law affords special protections and considerations for any child who is a citizen or eligible to be a citizen of a federally recognized tribe.

Under ICWA, the state must comply with certain placement provisions for an Indian child. ICWA requires the state involved in a child custody proceeding involving an Indian child to notify the appropriate tribe of the proceedings and allow them to intervene. Even if a tribe does not intervene, ICWA still applies.

The state must make active efforts to place an Indian child with any fit, willing member of the Indian child’s family, other Indian families in the child’s tribe, and other tribes interested before considering placement in a non-Indian home. There are also requirements surrounding placing Indian foster children in foster homes of the tribe’s choice.

Further, caseworkers must provide active efforts to reunite the family, identify an ICWA-compliant placement, notify the child’s tribe and parents about the custody proceedings and actively include the tribe and the child’s parents in the court proceedings.

Many child welfare advocates consider the protections afforded to children under ICWA the “gold standard” in child welfare despite lacking oversight, which some tribal advocates have partially remedied through the creation of state-specific ICWA legislation, like in Oregon.

CREATING ORICWA

In 2020, tribal attorneys helped design a state-specific version of the ICWA, known as ORICWA, to improve compliance with ICWA, clarify the responsibilities of state agencies and tailor the legislation specifically for the nine tribes. It passed in Oregon later that year.

The legislation, which the Oregon Legislature expanded in 2021 to include private agencies, came after some tribal attorneys were concerned with how the state and private agencies complied with ICWA.

Brent Leonhard, attorney and former ICWA officer for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla, was instrumental in creating ORICWA.

Leonhard said before ORICWA’s implementation in 2020, the state of Oregon regularly failed to comply with ICWA obligations.

One of ICWA’s requirements is the state sends a certified letter of notice to an ICWA-designated agent regarding the presence of a child custody case.

“We would often get notices sent to the wrong place,” Leonhard said. “Sometimes they fall through the cracks. Sometimes they get to me. When the notices did get to me, often they didn’t have the information we needed to make a determination whether a child is a member or eligible for membership.”

Leonhard would then reach out for the additional information needed to make a determination on membership eligibility.

“Very often, we never got a response back from them,” Leonhard said. “At that level, they failed very, very frequently. And that’s one of the most important stages in an ICWA case, is notifying the tribe and finding out if the child is eligible.”

Leonhard said these concerns drove him to approach the director of the Oregon Department of Human Services about forming an ICWA compliance group within the child welfare unit of the Oregon DHS.

Leonhard headed a subcommittee within the compliance group responsible for creating state-specific ICWA legislation.

Working with other tribal attorneys for over a year, Leonhard and the subcommittee presented the legislation to Oregon State Rep. Tawna Sanchez, D-43, for consideration. The efforts were successful after a lengthy development, integration and implementation process, ultimately culminating in House Bill 4214.

Leonhard said the issue of failing to notify tribes properly was a focus in the development of ORICWA, which he says did a great deal to fix that particular problem, as the legislation is now “very clear” on the state’s obligations to notify.

Overall, Leonhard characterizes ORICWA as a success, saying state agencies took the concerns of tribal advocates very seriously and implemented real changes to address them.

“They did a lot of internal management to ensure compliance and some restructuring, and a lot of education for child welfare workers, and ensuring there are people who are ICWA experts in various regions,” Leonhard said. “So a lot of the bulk of the compliance I really think we see comes from those efforts, in addition to the law, but actually implementing changes on the ground is what matters, and what works, and they did a phenomenal job of that.”

Despite a nearly 40-year history of helping keep Native families together, three non-Indian couples in Brackeen seek to strike the law down.

MEET THE PLAINTIFFS

Despite ICWA, two couples in Brackeen v. Haaland already succeeded in legal battles to adopt Indian children — the Brackeen family and the Liberetti family. Despite the Brackeens’ successful adoption, the couple seeks to overturn ICWA entirely, arguing it discriminates against them based on their race.

Superpowered law firm Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher — whose past clients include Chevron, Shell, Amazon and Walmart — is representing the Brackeens pro-bono. The firm previously sought to undermine tribal sovereignty in gambling and resource extraction cases. This year in Washington, the firm is arguing laws governing gambling in Washington discriminate against prospective non-Indian casino owners.

Rulings in Brackeen from lower courts, most recently the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, have been mixed. While the Fifth Circuit declined to strike down the law, the ruling was highly-fractured and did not include a majority opinion.

The Brackeens took their case to the Supreme Court.

In granting a review of the Brackeen case, the Supreme Court consolidated several similar cases under Brackeen and took up all questions to ICWA from those cases, which are far-ranging. ICWA is enduring a facial challenge, meaning plaintiffs argue ICWA is completely void and unconstitutional in any application rather than arguing only the specific facts of their cases.

At the core of the plaintiffs’ arguments is the notion that Indian status is solely race-based rather than political, an interpretation of Indian status that ignores precedent.

THE LEGAL MEANING OF INDIAN

ICWA applies solely to citizens of federally recognized tribes — not to all people of Native American descent.

The Supreme Court held Indian status is a political designation, not a race, in the 1974 Morton v. Mancari case.

In the context of federal Indian law, in this case ICWA, the label “Indian” or “Indian child” is a legal distinction, meaning that person is a citizen, or is eligible to be a citizen, of a federally recognized Indian nation, effectively making that person a dual-national. This status affords a person protection under ICWA and makes them eligible for other federal programs such as Indian Health Services.

The US government has codified in the US Constitution, Supreme Court rulings and federal laws that tribes are regarded as sovereign nations.

WIDE-RANGING ARGUMENTS

The plaintiffs in Brackeen presented wide-ranging arguments, primarily challenging ICWA based on questions related to commandeering, Article 1 of the US Constitution and equal protection.

The anti-commandeering doctrine is a part of the 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and essentially dictates the federal government cannot prohibit or require an action by a state government unless it is specified in the Constitution.

Yale Law and Policy Review calls the commandeering challenge to ICWA “a novel threat to the Indian Child Welfare Act and tribal sovereignty” in a recent article, saying the challenges contradict settled Supreme Court doctrine.

“The anti-commandeering challenge to ICWA threatens to upend much of federal Indian law and to disrupt the delicate balance of power among states, tribes, and the federal government,” according to the article.

The plaintiffs in Brackeen are also arguing the law violates the equal protection clause of the 10th Amendment by discriminating against non-Indian families based on race, despite long-established precedent that Indian status is a political classification.

Which arguments the Supreme Court accepts, if any, could impact Indian children, tribal sovereignty and a host of laws governing relationships with Native nations.

The University of California, Los Angeles Native Nations Law and Policy Institute held a debrief after oral arguments in Brackeen featuring legal experts on Indian Country.

Kathryn Fort, professor and director of the Indian Law Clinic at Michigan State University, spoke on the panel about a shared frustration for Indian law experts watching oral arguments.

“(There’s) just this lack of knowledge, where you have the court making very broad prescriptions for Indian Country with very little knowledge of how Indian Country works,” Fort said.

During oral arguments for both Brackeen and Castro-Huerta, Gorsuch expressed clear skepticism of his fellow conservative justices’ interpretations of federal Indian law and their willingness to undercut it.

At the beginning of oral arguments in Brackeen, Gorsuch bluntly questioned whether the plaintiff’s case belonged in the Supreme Court at all.

“Counsel, I’m struggling to understand your argument,” Gorsuch said to the plaintiff’s attorney. “For

the first half of it, I heard policy complaints. It took a while for me to even hear the words ‘equal protection’ or ‘Article 1.’ ... The policy arguments might be better addressed across the street (in Congress).”

Several conservative justices proposed hypothetical situations during arguments which Indian law experts say are not applicable in the real world, particularly concerning a requirement under ICWA to consider families from other tribes before considering a non-Indian family.

In discussing equal protection, Justice Samuel Alito proposed a hypothetical question as to why a tribe in one state (Maine) would have an interest in an Indian child from another tribe in another state (Arizona) and how that helps preserve tribal sovereignty.

Leonhard, along with attorneys for the U.S. Department of Justice, said the situation proposed by Alito has never come up in practice, and the explanation is relatively straightforward.

“Usually, when that might come up, tribes are pretty closely related,” Leonhard said. “So you know, somebody living on the Umatilla Indian reservation may be a tribal member, they may have their own family members who are members of other tribes; husband, kids, whatever. And in that case, somebody who is Indian from another tribe makes perfect sense.

“It still doesn’t seem to be an equal protection issue there because it’s politically based — they’re members of the community, they’re part of the tribal culture, they just happen to be a member of another tribe. They may even reside on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.”

However, if the Supreme Court strikes down ICWA based on the logic that it violates Article 1 of the Constitution or the Equal Protection Clause of the 10th Amendment, the implications of such a ruling would be dire.

Such a ruling would imply Native nations are not sovereign and that tribal citizenship is instead merely a racial classification — potentially jeopardizing Native nations’ very right to exist as sovereign governments. Such a ruling could imperil tribes’ ability to conduct business as sovereign nations and threaten a host of existing federal programs and funding available to Native nations and their citizens.

Native advocates fear such a ruling could impact all laws governing Indian Country and any programs or services reserved for federally-recognized tribes, and the current Supreme Court proved itself willing to undercut tribal sovereignty.

AN UNPREDICTABLE COURT

With the exception of Justice Kentaji Brown Jackson, who ascended to the bench in June, the current Supreme Court has shown a willingness to ignore hundreds of years of precedent in federal Indian law.

Since its inception, a steady parade of lawsuits targeted ICWA. In the most recent challenge to ICWA to reach the Supreme Court, a 2013 case called Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl, a 5-4 conservative majority put some limits on ICWA.

In June, the court issued a controversial 5-4 ruling in Castro-Huerta, expanding state criminal jurisdiction over Indian land where

it previously did not exist. Many tribes and Native advocates saw the ruling as undercutting tribal sovereignty and a negative sign for the upcoming ruling in Brackeen.

While Brackeen challenges ICWA on a federal level, state-specific legislation like ORICWA may be the best protection against some challenges to the law.

STATE-SPECIFIC PROTECTION

Leonhard said state-specific legislation like ORICWA is the best protection for tribes against some of the challenges to ICWA presented in the Brackeen case.

However, whether ORICWA protects against all potential negative outcomes in Brackeen is a complicated question, Leonhard says.

“The questions (about ICWA) are all over the place, so reading what the Supreme Court is going to do is very, very difficult,” Leonhard said.

If the Supreme Court strikes down parts of ICWA, or the entire law, on an anti-commandeering basis, ORICWA would likely remain unchanged, according to Leonhard.

“I think ORICWA solves many of the problems because the state has adopted it as its own and is going to do it independent of what the federal government, federal law is,” Leonhard said. “So I think it’s the best possible thing to do to protect against a potential negative outcome in Brackeen.”

However, the outcome would be dramatically different if the court strikes ICWA down on an equal protection basis.

“So if they strike down the whole of it, or on equal protection grounds, saying somehow Indian is race-based rather than political-based, that’s gonna have an effect everywhere on all laws, not just ICWA,” Leonhard said.

In that case, Leonhard says ORICWA would be “difficult to maintain.”

Leonhard and other Indian law experts are hopeful the court does not rule in that direction, as the consequences would be far-reaching.

DECISION LOOMING LARGE

A decision in Brackeen isn’t expected for some time — perhaps as far away as June 2023. Until then, advocates for tribal sovereignty are raising awareness about what is at stake and encouraging states to pass state-specific ICWA legislation, which could help protect against some challenges to ICWA in the event of an unfavorable ruling in Brackeen.

Seven states, including Oregon, already passed such legislation.

As for what is at risk with ICWA on trial, Leonhard sums up the incredibly high stakes.

“The survival of the nation depends on it,” Leonhard said. “ICWA is incredibly important. Not just for the child, but for the Indian nation itself.” ■

Courtesy of Street Roots / International Network of Street Papers

BECOME A STREET SHEET VENDOR

Earn extra income while also helping elevate the voices of the homeless writers who make this paper so unique, and promoting the vision of a San Francisco where every human being has a home. STREET SHEET is currently recruiting vendors to sell the newspaper around San Francisco. Vendors pick up the papers for free at our office in the Tenderloin and sell them for \$2 apiece at locations across the City. You get to keep all the money they make from sales.

TO SIGN UP, VISIT OUR OFFICE AT 280 TURK ST FROM 10-4 ON MONDAY-THURSDAY AND 10-NOON ON FRIDAY

CITY DEFUNDS SERVICES, INTENSIFIES CRIMINALIZATION IN SHUT-DOWN OF TENDERLOIN LINKAGE CENTER

Ian James

The Tenderloin Center was shut down by city officials on December 4. The center was a low barrier service hub serving over 400 people per day on average. They were provided with meals and connections to services including harm reduction, substance use and housing. The center also served as a safe place for people to use drugs in a supervised environment.

Originally dubbed “The Tenderloin Linkage Center,” the location was created as part of Mayor London Breed’s Tenderloin “State of Emergency” declaration. The declaration was criticized at the time for introducing a plan heavy on police rhetoric but light on details. However, with the help of several service providers, the center soon emerged as a valuable resource to the community.

Indeed, the center got much use in the 11 months it operated. The San Francisco Examiner reported over 99,000 hot meals being served, 8,956 showers provided and 3,493 loads of laundry washed, while 628 people signed up for Medi-Cal. While critics bemoaned drug use in and around the facility, 322 overdoses were reversed with naloxone and no deaths were reported in the center during operating hours.

After news of the closure was announced last June, Mayor Breed’s spokesperson Parisa Safarzadeh told the San Francisco Chronicle that the temporary center was an “immediate intervention to stabilize the community in the short term while the city developed its longer term plans for the Tenderloin.”

For almost six months, City officials have known that the center would close by the end of the year, because Mayor Breed had not included further funding for it in her budget proposal.

The Department of Public Health had initially committed to opening several smaller linkage centers to reinstate services being offered by the original center. No replacement centers have been opened yet, nor have any sites been publicly identified. The Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance calling on the Mayor’s Office and the Public Health Department to continue providing services at the center until a replacement was opened, but the mayor ignored the ordinance.

While the City discontinues the provision of life-saving services, it is doubling down on the criminalization of poor and unhoused people. The Department of Emergency Management announced that, as of December 5, it will close the United Nations Plaza from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. daily. As of publication, the department has not clarified how those hours will be enforced, but the San Francisco Police Department has said that it will increase police presence.

Advocates have criticized the plan to close the plaza, pointing out that San Francisco’s homeless population, which is disproportionately Black and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer, have nowhere else to go. San Francisco’s shelter system is under-resourced, and shelter reservations that were once available through resource centers and the 311 phone system are now only accessible through the Homeless Outreach Team, which is ill equipped to help thousands of San Franciscans connect with appropriate resources. They argue that creating the replacement linkage centers and improving the system for accessing shelter and housing would be a better use of City resources than criminalizing poor people for existing in public space. ■

POOR MAGAZINE TO CALTRANS: STOP SWEEPING OUR PEOPLE AWAY!

Q Watts & Alastair Boone & TJ Johnston

On Tuesday, December 6, community members from around the Bay Area converged on the California Department of Transportation’s (CalTrans) District 4 office in Oakland, chanting “CalTrans: stop sweeping us up!” The action, led by POOR Magazine, was convened in order to deliver a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to District Director Tony Tavares, demanding all the internal communications and budget items relating to encampment sweeps in Oakland, Berkeley and San Francisco. Organizers said CalTrans had illegally ignored their requests for these public records for 14 days—not even sending a boilerplate reply acknowledging their receipt of the documents—creating the imperative to come in person.

The FOIA requests were written by participants of the revolutionary journalism class at POOR Magazine, a grassroots arts and advocacy organization based in Oakland. The class focuses on how to use journalism as a tool to fight oppression, and includes a training on how to write FOIA requests—which require public agencies to release certain documents to the public upon request. As a part of this training, the multi-generational class chose to write a FOIA request to Caltrans after struggling to find information online about the resources they allocate for encampment sweeps. Their goal is to raise awareness about the impact of sweeps on unhoused people all over the Bay Area, many of which are conducted by Caltrans.

Upon arriving at the office, the group of about 20 was directed to the Public Information department. While the department’s office hours were listed as 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and a sign on the door said “please come in,” the door

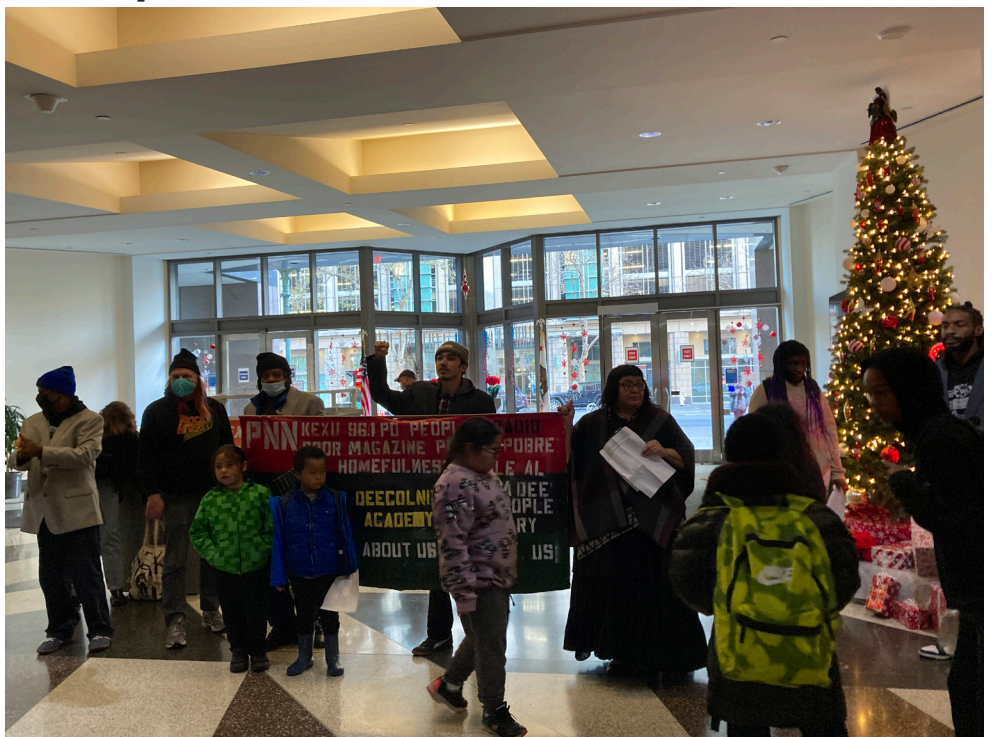
was locked and the group was told that no one was inside. Additionally, an employee told the group that the public information officer has been working remotely because of the pandemic. So instead, organizers brought copies of the FOIA request to the mailroom and addressed copies of the request to CalTrans officials.

The incredibly wide age range of attendees and speakers made for a striking impression against the lobby’s holiday-themed backdrop. Over the cheery Christmas music piped from lobby speakers and the cozy holiday decor, young children and elders alike spoke of the trauma they had experienced and witnessed in encampment sweeps, operations carried out by numerous government agencies, including CalTrans, that displace homeless communities and confiscate gear that’s necessary for survival, as well as the residents’ precious personal belongings.

“Agencies like CalTrans perpetrate sweeps on houseless people, even though they know it never solves homelessness,” said Ziair Hughes, a youth scholar and a reporter with POOR Magazine. “We are launching this investigation which includes our testimony as formerly houseless youth, and delivering these FOIAs to CalTrans to get the numbers on money wasted on throwing our belongings away, harassing us and taking away our tents which often leads to our death, instead of supporting our own solution, like Homefulness.”

Most recently, CalTrans has been in the headlines for conducting an inhumane and devastating sweep

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OUR CITY, OUR HOME

Lots of folks wonder what happened to Proposition C, the initiative entitled Our City Our Home,” that was authored by the Coalition on Homelessness in conjunction with many organizations and unhoused people. The short answer is: a lot.

The long answer is that in 2018 Prop. C, which taxes corporate income at about one-half percent starting from \$50 million, was sued by corporations and held up in court until 2020 when the case was won in favor of San Francisco voters. From there, the funds had to go through the City budget process as required by the charter, and then started hitting the streets.

To date, over \$800 million has been released—over half is to be spent on housing, 29% on treatment, 12% on homelessness prevention and the rest on shelter. The funding has led to the purchase of six buildings that have been turned over to house formerly unhoused people and an increase in subsidies to be used in the private market. This has meant a 25% increase in housing units available to unhoused households, or 2,474 slots. However, there is still a long way to go on spending down the housing funds. There are 600 more housing subsidies and 200 new units for families, youth and adults that have yet to become operational. Over the next year we should see several thousand more folks having the opportunity to exit homelessness.

The treatment investments have led to 132 more treatment beds and seven street outreach teams. Unfortunately, hundreds of additional treatment beds have been slow to roll out as overdose rates—while having decreased slightly—continue to be far too high. Some examples yet to be opened include: therapeutic beds for women, residential

“Are the sweeps doing any good?”

treatment beds and a whole lot of other innovative modalities that meet the diverse needs of unhoused folks with substance use and mental health challenges.

Spending on shelter started after the lawsuit victory. Mayor London Breed, who actively opposed Prop. C, banked on the corporations and business associations winning the lawsuit and started using general funds to expand shelter by adding 1,000 beds. About 500 beds were added, and once the lawsuit won, that funding was used to take over the annual funding of those beds. Another 521 shelter beds were then added post-lawsuit. These include tent villages, tiny homes, safe parking, navigation center beds and hotel rooms.

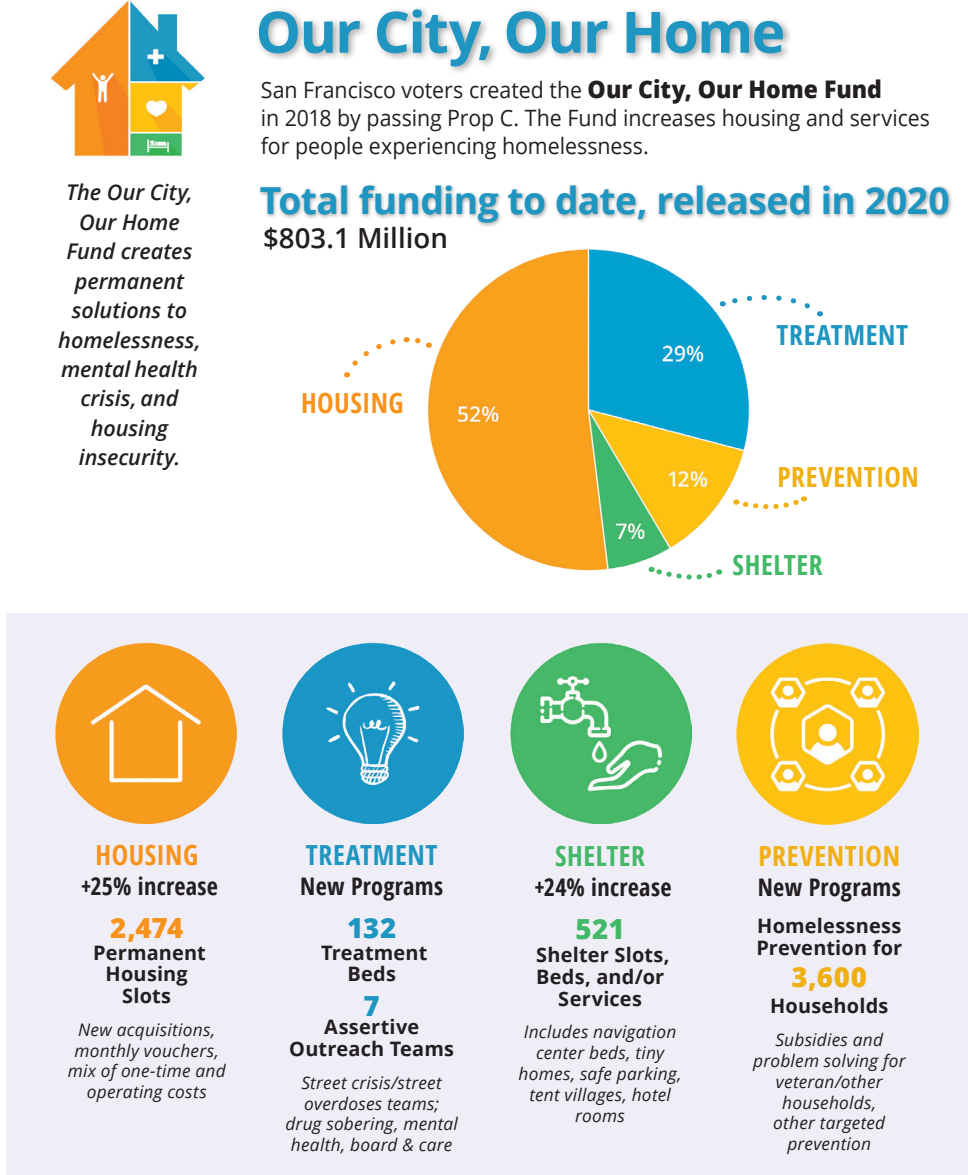
Preventing homelessness is an often overlooked, but critical, intervention in homelessness. Last year, for every one person who got housed, five new people became homeless. Prevention typically includes rental assistance, but can also include other forms of financial assistance such as auto repair or replacement of stolen tools so individuals can continue work. To date, Prop. C dollars have been used to keep 3,600 households from being displaced and becoming homeless.

Not only have these funds meant that many people have the opportunity to leave homelessness behind, but collectively this has meant we have not seen an increase in homelessness in San Francisco. According to the last point-in-time count, conducted in February 2022, San Francisco’s number dropped a tiny bit, in stark contrast with surrounding counties that saw massive jumps in homelessness. But we still have far too many people on the streets, and a long way to go.

Some people who worked in the building gathered in the lobby, filming the action and listening to the speakers share their stories. Several speakers implored them to bring their grievances to their bosses and push for change within the organization, but most did not respond and simply continued filming.

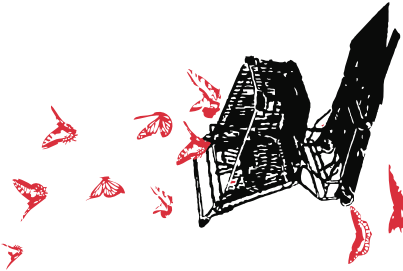
In the San Francisco Bay Area, one of the wealthiest places on Earth, most cities contain more vacant housing units than homeless people. In 2019, San Francisco had nearly five vacant

Unfortunately, San Francisco’s current economic situation means the annual amount of funds coming in through the tax is anticipated by the Controller’s Office to decrease. In the first couple years, about \$340 million came in, and that number is expected to drop to about \$270 million in coming years. This means less funding and reductions to the investment plan. That said, if homelessness is a priority for San Francisco, the City can replace those funds with General Fund dollars to save programs. This city continues to be an affluent one. The Mayor has refused to put any mon-



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LET'S CELEBRATE CHUCHO

After 30+ years of
working as a dedicated
housing justice warrior
and our beloved
volunteer, staff & board
member at the COH,
join us as we celebrate
Jesus's retirement! We
love him so much!



21
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Outdoor area with heat lamps. Elevator available. Contact
sam at samanthalew22@gmail.com with questions.

STOLEN PEOPLE, STOLEN DREAMS

MAKE SURE THAT THE CITY IS
HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE
THEFT & HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS THEY'VE
COMMITTED TO OUR
UNHOUSED NEIGHBORS.



When: Dec, 22 2022 11am
Where: Ronald V. Dellums U.S. Court House 1301
Clay Oakland CA. 94612



Coalition on Homelessness S.F.

Learn how to get involved
Visit www.COHSF.org