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# STREET SHEET

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**SHELTER WAITLIST UPDATE:** AS OF FEBRUARY 1ST THERE ARE 996 SINGLE ADULTS ON THE WAITLIST FOR SHELTER IN SAN FRANCISCO

# NEWSFLASH

## Headlines Affecting Homeless People in San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO, CA -On January 26th the U.S. Department of Justice arrested Mohammed Nuru, director of the San Francisco Department of Public Works, on charges of honest services wire fraud in an alleged bribery scheme involving a member of the City’s Airport Commission. He had also arrested five days earlier for disclosing the investigation and then lying about it to the FBI. Nuru was arraigned and released on a \$2 million bond, and is on administrative leave from his post.

TJ Johnston

The criminal complaint also names Nick James Bovis, a restaurateur who owns Lefty O’Doul’s, the Gold Dust Lounge and The Broadway Grill. It also enumerated five separate schemes involving Nuru and Bovis.

While authorities attention to the case focused on the attempt to bribe an unnamed airport commissioner, the complaint also alleges that Nuru provided Bovis inside information on City projects on portable bathroom trailers and tiny housing units so that contracted would be awarded to Tiny Potties, a business Bovis owns. It details conversations where Nuru urged Bovis and Public Works staff to contact him at his personal email, covering up any contact from public records laws and avoid any real competitive bidding.

Last year, homeless advocates protested outside the department’s storage yard for allowing employees to trash unhoused people’s survival gear and prized possessions during encampment sweeps. Nuru denied that the employees flouted his department’s policy of “bagging and tagging” the property of homeless people. Despite ample recorded evidence of City employees disposing property and disregarding its own rules, the department continues this practice, and Mayor London Breed asserts that the City doesn’t sweep encampments.

Nuru and Bovis’ next court appearance will be on February 6. ■

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

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To learn more about COH workgroup meetings, contact us at : 415-346-3740, or go at : www.cohsf.org

all the sisters are bones & all their bones are swans

A. A. Vincent

The first one asked how do you love bones back to heaven?

Another read a pamphlet: make a heady snap of cartilage to sew the house back together & she rummaged through her bones to thicken the leaving left behind & that one isn’t used to the needles that pock her strength

Of her? She gathers water to feed the air

’bout her? her hands sometimes leave her & leave her limp

She said the feathers molted before the shelter came

The 7th said there are nights when the ground gets up & walks off

One said sometimes the evening drags behind the midday

& she said the house came loose in her wings

Another found tar in her throat & couldn’t breathe right even after they poured an address in

A 3rd says the asphalt is too hot for quick bit of mercy

She swore the state tore the sound from a promise of refuge

A 5th says an eviction notice stains the mattress of her bed

Every nest is overlaid with chalk to mark the wrecking

A 7th dreams of buildings all bellied up with dead swans

& there’s no family left to protect & no one notices the gone bones



# ALL BARK AND NO BITE:

## The Flaws and Failures of Sen. Scott Weiner’s Senate Bill 50

Didi Miller

The U.S. Senate wasn’t the only legislature suffering from an inability to compromise — California had also felt the brunt of unyielding adversaries in the heat of its housing crisis. California State Senator Scott Wiener, San Francisco’s district representative, brought his wildly disputed transit rezoning Senate Bill 50 (SB 50) to the floor on January 6, marking his third attempt at opening up single-family tracts for multi-unit complexes and reigniting fiery debates over whether the bill is a solution to California’s housing crisis, or a harbinger of discrimination, displacement and gentrification. On January 29, the California Senate voted against SB 50, citing the bill’s failure to adequately address low-income housing needs. A second vote the following day also failed.

Wiener’s bill went through a three-fold process of revisions; his first major victory in his transit rezoning initiative was the enactment of Senate Bill 35, in late 2017, which streamlined housing development in cities where mandatory construction had not yet been met. SB 827 followed suit, aiming to centralize land zoning power near high frequency transit stations, but was rejected by the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee in 2018.

Senate Bill 50 was the completion of the three-stepped proposal, essentially an amended version of SB 35. The proposed amendments allegedly addressed concerns expressed by both the powerful real estate

lobbyists in Sacramento as well as housing activists, but many in the latter party feel that SB 50 was just a third failure at taking into consideration the very voices of the people whom the bill will directly affect — low-income communities.

The flexibility clause in the new bill would have provided local governments with up to two years to either accept the proposed changes or to come up with their own plan that will “increase overall feasible housing” in high transit areas. While this helped alleviate some of the Sacramento lobbyists’ complaints, it did little to address the concerns of low-income people.

The primary points of contention over SB 50 brought forward by tenants-rights activists were that the new bill would not only catalyze and streamline gentrification, but also further racially based income disparities and low-income displacement. While the bill might have enabled the override of flagrantly exclusionary municipalities (like Beverly Hills), it also risked pulling low-income and primarily black communities further into the limelight of real estate speculation.

The core of the dispute boiled down to a faith in market trends (favored by Wiener, his constituents and many moderates) versus a wariness and justifiable mistrust of market forces (found in homeless activist and tenants’-rights communities). Because the bill proposed the construction of new, potentially luxury apartments, Leslie Dreyer, an anti-eviction organizer with the Housing

Rights Committee of San Francisco, argued it would only exacerbate the dislocation of low-income, minority, immigrant and senior residents. Dreyer told KPFA’s UpFront, “It’s going to incentivize speculation, which spurs more displacement and more evictions, which leads to more homelessness.”

But SB 50 proponents held that the influx of livable space will help tilt the supply-and-demand crisis of Bay Area housing. The Atlantic writer Annie Lowrey speculated in an article on the bill that SB 50 would “force wealthy suburbs to permit the construction of apartment buildings and duplexes,” making “housing...more plentiful, and thus cheaper.”

This understanding of the housing market, however, neglects the racial and income-based discrimination rampant in the San Francisco real estate market. Even if the production of homes in certain high transit areas were to increase from three apartments per tract to four — which would have theoretically created one more livable space for every three homes — the amount of people being displaced by the market forces festering around the new properties would far outweigh any available housing. Because SB 50 never guaranteed rent control or housing security to low-income people, the ensuing bidding war would have threatened to drive out current tenants who would be unable to keep up with higher rents.

Another disappointing shortcoming of SB 50 was its preservation of the Costa

Hawkins Rental Housing Act of 1995, which both protects landlords’ rights to raise rents to market rates once a tenant moves out as well as preventing municipalities from setting rent limits or establishing rent control on units built after February 1995. By leaving Costa Hawkins activated, SB 50 wouldn’t have provided any real protection against housing harassment; as the California Tenant And Housing Justice coalition pointed out, SB 50 “doesn’t save tenants already on the verge of being priced out.”

The Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco, along with over four-dozen tenants’ rights organization’s signatories (including this paper’s publisher, the Coalition on Homelessness), recently sent a letter to the California Senate and Assembly, and Gov. Gavin Newsom. The letter enumerated a list of grievances that SB 50 failed to address. One of the coalition’s main areas of discontent was the shortsightedness and integrity-lacking proposed amendments: “Wiener’s amendments claiming to give sensitive communities five years and cities two years to make alternative plans to SB 50’s zoning deregulation, which advances a majority of market-rate units, are disingenuous if not accompanied by additional state funds to build a majority of deeply affordable units to suit the true housing needs of these areas.”

While Wiener avoided bringing legislation aiding the low-income and vulnerable to the Senate floor, California’s housing crisis still rages on. Substantive steps toward a statewide housing legislation can only happen by including the needs and voices of directly affected people — not just Big Real Estate. ■

## CALIFORNIA TASKS CITIES WITH LOCAL HOMELESSNESS SOLUTIONS

Inaleigh Johnson

In May 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom announced a

13 member task force on homelessness. This task force is comprised of mayors, mental health specialists, and national policy makers. A goal of the task force is to study the major causes of homelessness, and then create plans at local levels to address these issues. This task force is creating a plan that addresses the recent rise in homelessness throughout the entire state of California. This plan is currently being developed by the task force members in hope of getting the plan to pass the state legislature, and then voted on statewide during the November 2020 election.

The two co-chairs of the task force include, Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg and Mark Ridley-Thomas, a Los Angeles County supervisor. Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf is another local public official who will serve on this task force. Philip Mangano is a leader in national homelessness policy and advocates for housing instead of shelters. Dr. Tom Insel psychiatrist, former director of the National Institute of Mental Health is another official expert on the task force.

From 2018-2019, homelessness in California increased 16%. This means there

are currently 156,000 unhoused people in California. The number of people on the waitlist for temporary shelter has stayed consistently around 1,000 people since 2016. In 2020, there are still over 900 people currently on the waitlist for temporary shelter in San Francisco.

The goal of this 13-member task force is to decrease homelessness statewide through focusing on local solutions. There are many complicated reasons people become homeless, and the task force’s 13 public officials will continue the ongoing work of trying to solve homelessness.

The budget allocated for this plan is \$1 billion. The plan includes increasing funding for both temporary and permanent housing. Some plans include: allocating more money to medical (estimated \$750 million per year), rapid rehousing, building affordable housing, funding permanent supportive housing, hotel conversions to temporary shelters, emergency aid, and an increased focus on local-regional plans. A more recent action executed by Governor Gavin Newsom is a mandate that states unused state land be used for homeless shelters and services. This could provide needed relief for homeless people turned away from shelter, but could have other less positive side effects as well.

The task force members seem to agree that providing support and services to homeless people will be the responsibilities of the individual cities. So much responsibility is placed on cities, that under this task force plan they may face consequences if they do not meet goals. The plan includes the state being able to sue individual cities and counties if agreed upon benchmarks of reducing homelessness are not met.

One aspect of the task force’s original plan that was debated was to force homeless people to stay in a shelter, if a bed is available. This would result in forcing people, who for many reasons do not want to go to a shelter, to stay in a shelter against their will. Given strong pushback from community members and legality issues, the task force shifted gear.

A common theme throughout the task force plan is a tension between voluntary vs. forced (or mandated) actions. The current plan is to create a “Right to Shelter” which would legally mandate city authorities to provide shelter. If the plan is voted on and passes the November 2020 election, the task force requires cities to participate in the plan. The state would sue any city that does not meet the required goals. If the state has the ability to sue cities

because cities are not meeting goals, the cities will definitely feel this pressure. If a city government is pressured over meeting quotas, this will shape how homelessness programs are implemented, enforced, and potentially forced upon people. If there is an intense pressure from a state government to reduce the amount of people that are homeless, this could mean local city governments engaging in more forceful actions like criminalizing individuals who do not accept shelter, increased actions of sweeping away homeless peoples’ belongings in an attempt to force them into city provided services.

The taskforce is well-intentioned, and well-financed, but one question many people have about this plan is “where are homeless people’s opinions?” How will the task force address the complicated, systemic problems that contribute to people becoming homeless? Homeless people’s voices, opinions and knowledge about what they need seems to be missing from the task force plans. The task force officials are still developing the plans, and hopefully with more study and debate, the plan will include more input from homeless people, and less pressure and unfunded mandates from the state. ■

# POLICE COMMISSION ADVISES SF NOT TO TURN TO COPS ON HOMELESSNESS

TJ Johnston

Police should not be the first response to homelessness in San Francisco, the Police Commission decided when it unanimously passed a resolution on January 15.

The seven-member commission approved a measure calling for the City to organize a working group on developing alternatives to a police-centered response to homelessness. The Homelessness, Public Health and other related departments, as well as people with direct experience with homelessness, would collaborate in this group. It's the first time in the U.S. a police commission has made such a recommendation.

Currently, the Police Department is tasked with dispatching thousands of camping and psychiatric crisis calls as the lead of Healthy Streets Operation Center (HSOC), an inter-agency partnership formed two years ago. Though other departments — such as Public Health and its Homeless Outreach Team — are part of HSOC, police resources have ratcheted up in the last year, said Coalition on Homelessness director Jennifer Friedenbach, who wrote the resolution.

Since 2016, “the number of homeless people have skyrocketed, and so has the number of police hours committed to the response to homelessness,” she said, noting that the number of police officers in HSOC grew from 21 to over 80 in the last two years.

“Cities have been turning to the police for this humanitarian catastrophe that continues to exist,” Friedenbach told the commission. “We are relying on police officers to manage what is in essence a social problem. This response is neither effective, nor humane.”

The resolution comes at a critical point where public officials want to strong-arm unhoused people into accepting services, from Donald Trump’s administration calling for forcing them into camps to

Mayor London Breed extolling the practice of “tough love.”

“This resolution represents a stark contrast to those using homeless people as political fodder and calling for forcing homeless people into services,” said Paul Boden, executive director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project. “The problem is not that people are service-resistant — the problem has been that the system has been resistant to ensuring housing for all those that need it. Housing solves homelessness, and that is where our resources should be prioritized.”

A sweep that took place on Willow Street last December illustrates the dearth of services offered to unsheltered San Franciscans: Only six people out of 50 who were displaced were assigned to a navigation center. Typical of such operations, police and Department of Public Works crews took a predominant role.

According to the resolution, the working group should be charged with identifying funding sources and recommending system changes.

“Cities have been turning to the police for this humanitarian catastrophe that continues to exist,” Friedenbach told the commission. “We are relying on police officers to manage what is in essence a social problem. This response is neither effective, nor humane.”

The resolution also suggests that the stakeholders’ group meet with Breed, the Board of Supervisors and other appropriate city commissions with its recommendations.

The motion could be the first step in adopting other models, such as one in Eugene, Oregon, where health and social workers are the first people sent to respond to homeless calls.

That same day, a newly formed Solutions Not Sweeps coalition sent a letter to Breed with their own demands. One of them is replacing a law enforcement approach with “an evidence-based approach aimed at connecting people with their needs.” The Coalition on Homelessness, which publishes Street Sheet, is one of over 20 community organizations and individuals that are members. ■

## SOLUTIONS NOT SWEEPS

The Solutions not Sweeps campaign is calling for:

1. End the illegal confiscation and destruction of unhoused people's personal property.
2. Replace the complaint-driven and law enforcement approach to homelessness with an evidence-based approach aimed at meeting the needs of unhoused people with their needs.
3. End the use of cleaning as a pretext for harassment and establish productive, scheduled, regular, and voluntary sidewalk cleaning where unhoused people reside.
4. End the towing of vehicles that people are using as shelter.

Brian Edwards On any given night in San Francisco, there are over 9,000 unhoused San Francisco residents, and as of Wednesday, January 29th, there were 937 people on the single adult shelter waitlist. Without an indoor option, thousands of San Franciscans are forced to live outside in public spaces. The City increasingly criminalizes their presence in these places, and forcibly removes them with daily (and nightly) sweeps without offering adequate alternative shelter or services.

San Francisco has the most anti-homeless laws of any municipality in California. There are currently over 80 San Francisco police officers tasked with responding to homelessness, and only 40 members of the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing’s Homeless Outreach Team. Our unhoused neighbors are the victims of a public health and housing crisis yet under Mayor London Breed, the City’s response to homelessness — rain or shine — has been overwhelmingly led by law enforcement, with focuses on sweeps and criminalization. These sweeps, coordinated through the Healthy Streets Operation Center and led by SFPD and the Department of Public Works, often result in repeated confiscation and destruction of any and all personal property - including vehicles, tents and other shelter, survival gear, & life-saving medications - as well as citations and arrests.

The City calls these planned sweeps “resolutions,” but with no housing solutions and almost no adequate shelter to offer affected residents, little is being resolved. Police officers aren’t social workers, and DPW sweep crews aren’t service providers. Mayor Breed frequently talks of using ‘tough love’

when addressing homelessness, but life has already been tough enough to anyone forced to live outside, and constantly shuffling them around while repeatedly taking their shelter and possessions doesn’t feel very loving.

Sweeps aren’t services, and resolutions aren’t solutions. They’re cruel, ineffective, expensive, and incredibly harmful. Sweeps destroy communities, and the resulting scattering and isolation increases the risk of overdose or sexual assault for many of those who have been displaced, and make it harder for outreach workers and service providers to have the kind of productive engagements that ease suffering and save lives.

That’s why a broad coalition of unhoused San Franciscans and their allies has come together under the banner of Solutions Not Sweeps to demand that the Mayor cease the daily human rights abuses committed by the City against unhoused San Franciscans, and adopt a response to homelessness that supports our homeless neighbors’ struggle to secure stability and exit from homelessness. The campaign is drawing attention to the inhumanity of the daily encampment sweeps, including the frequent destruction or loss of homeless persons’ belongings, as well as the ineffectiveness and inappropriateness of having police be frontline responders in the City’s coordinated response to homelessness.

Solutions Not Sweeps is coordinated with other West Coast campaigns to end the practices of sweeping encampments and towing vehicles used as housing, and launches on the heels of the San Francisco Police Commission’s unanimous vote to have police officers replaced by social workers on the frontlines of homelessness.



# SOLUTIONS NOT SWEEPS

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s their homes.

The Solutions Not Sweeps coalition includes service providers, homeless and housing rights advocates, neighborhood and community organisations, and noted individuals such as Noam Chomsky and the UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Housing, Leilani Farha. Farha made local headlines in early 2018 by calling out San Francisco’s homeless encampments and the City’s response to them as evidence of flagrant human rights violations, and comparing them to similar settlements in Belgrade, Mumbai, Lisbon, Buenos Aires, Delhi, Mexico City, and Santiago. According to Farha, “The conditions in tent encampments violate human dignity - the foundation of human rights. Cities have an obligation to protect the dignity of all of their residents. This means providing basic services to those living in homelessness including access to adequate sanitation facilities. Sweeping people off the streets and thus forcibly removing them from their homes, whether they live in tents on sidewalks or in their cars, is cruel and inhumane treatment. San Francisco, one of the wealthiest jurisdictions in the world, can certainly do far better than this.”

As part of the campaign launch, a demand letter has been delivered to Mayor London Breed.

Please call your Supervisor and the Mayor’s office and demand an immediate end to the daily harassment and displacement of our unhoused neighbors, and that the City remove law enforcement as its primary response to homelessness.

For a complete list of Solutions Not Sweeps members and to add your name to the campaign, visit the website <https://solutionsnotsweeps.org/> ■

# TAKING BACK OAKLAND:

Quiver Watts

## MOMS 4 HOUSING WIN BIG THROUGH HOUSING TAKEOVER

An armored vehicle was parked outside the house on Magnolia Street in Oakland when a SWAT team dressed in what looked like military fatigues broke down the door. Deputies from the Alameda County Sheriff’s Department swarmed in to carry away their targets. So what threat was the police force sent in to pacify? What danger warranted all the police, the guns, the fatigues, the vehicle meant to respond to terrorism threats?

Mothers.

Inside the small, unassuming house on Magnolia Street known as “Mom’s House” a collective of Black homeless mothers and their young children had created a home. For nearly two months they had lived and organized in the space, fighting for their right to be housed in their city. This was the threat that brought the Sheriff’s Department to the doorstep. Before sunrise on January 14th, two mothers were led away in handcuffs as a growing crowd of protesters shouted “mothers and babies, mothers and babies!” in the faces of riot police.

The night before hundreds of neighbors and community organizers

had gathered to show support for the occupation of a vacant investment property, legally owned by Wedgewood, a real estate investment firm based in Southern California. The firm left the property vacant for two years before four Black homeless mothers and their children decided to fight back against the gentrification that had displaced their families and reclaim housing for themselves.

Addressing the crowd the night before their violent eviction, one of the mothers said “I want everyone here to know we are not suicidal,” lifting up the name and story of Sandra Bland, a Black woman whose death by hanging in a Texas prison was ruled suicide, despite public outcry and accusations that she was killed by police.

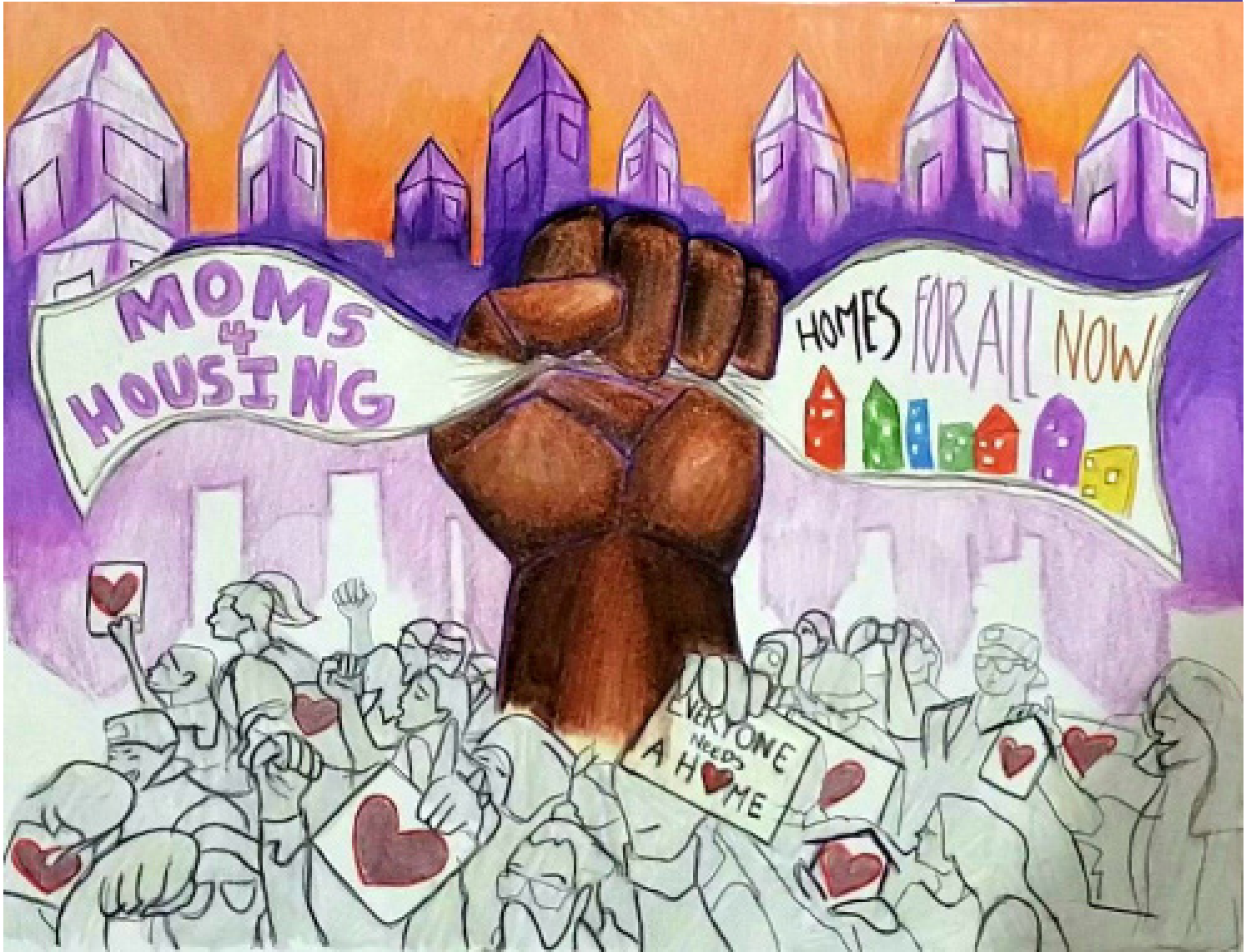
That there are four vacant housing units for every homeless person in Oakland, a figure derived from city statistics, has been the central argument made by the group known as Moms 4 Housing. They argue that it is unfair for real estate speculators and banks to keep units vacant while people, especially Black people, from Oakland are unable

to keep up with skyrocketing rents and are being forced out of town or onto the streets.

This certainly is not the first time squatters have moved into vacant units in the Bay Area, but the Moms 4 Housing campaign garnered the support of the nation as they spoke out against the injustices of poverty and homelessness they face in Oakland. After the extreme response of the Alameda County Sheriff’s Department and the outpouring of public support for the moms, Wedgewood announced in a joint statement with the mayor and the moms that they would sell the house to the Oakland Land Trust, which will move the displaced families back into their new and contested home.

“This is what happens when we organize, when people come together to build the beloved community,” Dominique Walker of Moms 4 Housing said in a statement at a press conference on MLK Day. “Today we honor Dr. King’s radical legacy by taking Oakland back from banks and corporations.” ■

art by Rani Chor



# SAFE PARKING SITE OPENS:

## COMMUNITY RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION

Ben Baczkowski

On December 11, 202019, San Francisco city officials officially announced the opening of the Vehicle Triage Center (VTC) located on San Jose Avenue near Balboa Park BART station. The yearlong pilot program will provide a secure parking location and targeted services for folks living in their vehicles, and is the first safe parking facility of its kind in San Francisco's history. The site includes up to 30 parking spaces with mobile blackwater pumping services, access to shower facilities, bathrooms and electricity and will operate for one year, after which the location is slated for an affordable housing development.

According to the most recent point-in-time count, the unsheltered population in San Francisco rose by 17% in 2019, with a significant part of that increase comprised of individuals residing in vehicles or RV's. And as vehicular homelessness has become more visible to housed neighbors, the official response from the city has been to "sweep" the unhoused community from one street to the next, neighborhood to neighborhood, through a combination of parking bans and police harassment. Though the city continues to deny that it conducts sweeps, during Mayor London Breed's inauguration speech on January 8, she conveyed a message of "tough love" towards the unhoused community, signaling an even more aggressive approach to dealing with people living on the streets.

Over the summer District 11 Supervisor Asha Safai's office held two community meetings at Balboa High School to present the VTC program to the neighborhood and solicit feedback. Several vocal opponents of the center gave public comment and claimed that it would bring

crime and additional unhoused people to the traditionally working class immigrant neighborhood. Captain Jack Hart from the San Francisco Police Department repeatedly countered that narrative with the fact that crime has been steadily decreasing in San Francisco, and that there is no such evidence to support the idea that homelessness is connected with a rise in criminality. In fact, City data has recently demonstrated that crime rates have actually decreased around the Navigation Centers which, unlike traditional homeless shelters allow 24/7 access to temporary residence. Many D11 residents showed support for the program, citing the need to help our fellow neighbors get back on their feet, many of whom were previously housed in the community.

Currently the VTC is 60% occupied and is home to 12 RVs and eight cars with a total of 28 residents. However, details on the success of the City's outreach efforts have been scarce to non-existent. According to Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) officials, the VTC pilot program is narrowly focused on single adults that are identified by HSH assessment to be "high priority" for housing, which means that they have been homeless for over 10 years, combined with other factors which make them highly vulnerable — although not much is known publicly about the methodology.

HSH's Vehicle Encampment Resolution Team (VERT) has been tasked with conducting the outreach and mobile coordinated entry assessments for the VTC which began in December 2019. During that process city workers evaluate people through Coordinated Entry, the starting point for

access to San Francisco's Homelessness Response System, at which time the person(s) are given a score which identifies them either as "priority" for permanent supportive housing, or candidates for "problem solving" services reserved for people who are assessed to be less vulnerable people according to HSH.

But there have been calls from members of the D11 community for greater transparency from the City, specifically about how it is conducting outreach for the parking center and whether the program will ultimately be able to achieve its stated goal of getting folks into permanent housing. There is very little clarity about how individuals are prioritized for access to the VTC, and to community members the process appears to be inflexible. Furthermore, several members of both the housed and unhoused community have criticized the City's outreach efforts as being minimal, and that referrals to VERT and HSH from the community have gone unaddressed. The local D11 business and neighborhood communities have been tentatively supportive of the program, but many have articulated that they want to see a greater sustained effort on the part of the City at getting people connected with permanently affordable housing. At a recent Vehicle Triage Center Work Group meeting, neighbors asked why several groupings of vehicles had not been reached by City workers, to which HSH replied that "we are soliciting advice for outreach opportunities from community."

The vehicularly housed community has similarly pointed to major sweeps of vehicle encampments in the Bayview and Potrero Hill neighborhoods and ask "why

weren't people from those communities offered spots at the VTC?" The official response from HSH is that all members of those communities were offered services during the "resolution" of that encampment. However Sophia Thibadeaux is one such former resident who disagrees with the official response. She alleges that their community on Jerrold Avenue and Rankin Street was unceremoniously removed from their location during the January 8 sweep of the encampment with a backhoe, and also alleges that community members were never offered space in the VTC, nor other services from City outreach workers. The fact is that there are very limited resources available to city outreach workers, and even if there are shelter beds available on any given day, there is not enough permanent supportive housing on the other side of the pipeline to effectively deal with the volume of people in crisis.

Whether the Vehicle Triage Center will succeed in getting folks connected to stable permanent housing isn't yet clear. However there is no doubt that there is a rapidly growing need for additional safe parking spaces in San Francisco for people displaced by gentrification. The core of the homelessness crisis continues to be the lack of affordable housing caused by financial speculation, and the massive wave of evictions that accompanied skyrocketing housing and rental costs; however it will take concerted political pressure to enact policies which will wrest control of housing policy away from the real estate industry. In the meantime, the Vehicle Triage Center is a very limited effort to mitigate the crisis and offer at least some response to the rise in vehicular homelessness.

# When Mental Illness is Environmental

David Spero

*Reprinted from The Inn by the Healing Path*

Everyone knows about environmental illnesses, caused by pollution or unhealthy working conditions. But mental health problems can be environmental too, unavoidable reactions to difficult life situations. Changing the environment can change a person's thoughts and emotions, as it has for my friend Jessie.

I've known Jessie since her 30s, when we played in a band together, and she's always struggled keeping things together. A small African-American single mother, with her hair in a short natural, she has moved in and out of a long series of part-time jobs. She mostly supported herself doing hairstyling, supplemented with food stamps. She shared a two-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment with five other people.

I would not have called Jessie mentally ill, but she was usually anxious and depressed, and sometimes seemed confused. Her problems could have been called psychological, and they could have been and sometimes were medicalized with anti-

depressants. She was hospitalized at least once.

Lately, we've only been seeing each other once a year, and maybe talking on the phone twice a year. I called her last week just to check in and was impressed with how good she sounded, much happier and more confident than I remembered her being. I asked what had changed. Was she on some new medication? Had she found some helpful therapy?

"I moved," she replied. "I'm in Alameda now. Instead of living in an unheated walk-in closet with a bunch of sketchy people, I have my own apartment at a rate I can afford. Subsidized senior housing. You can't believe what a difference that makes!" She talked about going out in her neighborhood, the places to eat and shop. I asked about visiting her and she told me what buses to take.

It wasn't easy for Jessie to make this move. She applied for a series of senior housing buildings in Oakland over the years to no avail. "You have to win a lottery even to get on a waiting list," she said,

"which could be ten years long." She said her breakthrough moment was gaining the courage to look beyond Oakland, her lifelong home. This flexibility opened up new possibilities, and she got on a waitlist for Alameda that turned out only a two-year wait.

"It's so nice here," she told me. "I've made friends; they tell me about activities in the neighborhood. There are two community gardens, and I help friends with their plots. This Spring maybe I'll get my own." Her daughter is now on her own and supporting herself as a musician, a career path of which Jessie approves. Life is good.

Looking back, no health intervention helped Jessie much: not therapy, not medication, not hospitalization. What she needed was a decent place to live. How often does that happen with individuals or with whole communities, pathologized for behaviors that are perfectly normal responses to unhealthy conditions of life?

People, especially young people are often jailed or drugged for things that they wouldn't do in healthier circumstances. If

kids are doing badly in school or getting into trouble, either they will be blamed or their parents will, when actually, they're figuratively 'living in an unheated walk-in closet with a bunch of sketchy people' like Jessie was. Even if their environments are physically OK, they may be long on drama and danger, short on love and structure. There may be constant anxiety over money and sadness of not being able to afford things.

Environmental stressors can mentally damage whole communities. Bad conditions don't excuse bad things people do, but acknowledging those environmental causes might lead to finding better solutions. The same is true for individuals, and not just low-income people. In my own life, in all our lives, some self-compassion might come from realizing how our behaviors and emotions are shaped by our environment and our past environments. Sometimes, as with a smoker getting rid of all their ashtrays to help them quit, changing our environment is the best way to change ourselves.



# SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

FEB  
6

## BEDS 4 BAYVIEW COALITION MEETING

**WHERE:** BAYVIEW/LINDA BROOKS-BURTON  
BRANCH LIBRARY @6-7:30PM

Let's meet and catch up on the latest developments with the United Council of Human Services, and help us discuss and plan how we can best support the community's demands for beds in the Bayview neighborhood.

**ACCESS:** This library location is ADA accessible.

FEB  
7

## BACK TO COURT: IMPACT CDCR'S RESENTENCING

**WHERE:** ELLA BAKER CENTER FOR HUMAN  
RIGHTS -1419 34TH AVENUE, OAKLAND @5:30-  
7:30PM

Help us get people back to court for resentencing and get people free! Come learn about CDCR's re-sentencing process, and prepare comments and live testimony. We have 45 days to make public comments and testify at CDCR's hearing.

**ACCESS:** The space is ADA compliant and accessible by elevator. The building is at the end of the plaza at Fruitvale BART

FEB  
8

## 9TH ANNUAL TWO- SPIRIT POWWOW

**WHERE:** FESTIVAL PAVILION AT FORT MASON  
38 FORT MASON @11AM-6PM

Join Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits (BAAITS) for the 9th Annual Two-Spirit Powwow in Yelamu (San Francisco), the traditional homelands of the Ohlone peoples. Powwows are traditional, Inter-tribal events that promote community togetherness, healing, and wellness. The Two-Spirit powwow is held each year to help decolonize our communities and realign with Native traditions of togetherness, seeing strength in our differences, and accepting all genders and sexualities.

FEB  
23

## SALSA SUNDAY

**WHERE:** EL RIO - 3158 MISSION ST @3-8PM  
Our annual #SalsaSunday fundraiser is coming up next month! Just tell the folks at the door that you are there for the benefit for the Coalition on Homelessness, It's always a hoot, hope to see you there.

**ACCESS:** While the club and back deck is wheelchair accessible, the yard where the event is located is not. There are also high lips on doorways out to patio. Bathrooms are not wheelchair accessible without assistance. More details at [www.elriosf.com/about/](http://www.elriosf.com/about/)

THE COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS

CELEBRATES...

BLACK HISTORY MONTH!



JOIN US FOR SOUL FOOD AND TO SHARE YOUR STORIES OF EVICTION AND HOMELESSNESS, WHICH DESTROY OUR COMMUNITIES. WE CAN MAKE THE CITY DO BETTER BY AFRICAN AMERICANS.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH

MEET AT 11AM AT THE COALITION  
(280 TURK ST.)

MORE INFO? CALL: 415-346-3740

Social media  
is bad for  
people (me).

by: Chandarany + Jason  
a Politically Pop comic

Asian  
Art  
Museum

I spend seven  
hours a day  
on my phone,  
and 18 hours  
a week on  
social media.

OMG! LOOK AT HER HOT GIRL SUMMER

I need to change  
my ways to  
prevent being  
hypocritical. Social  
media is not real  
life; it is a facade.

-Chandarany

YEAH...  
SOCIAL  
MEDIA IS  
BAD

YEAH...

My name is Jason, and I like chatting  
with my neighbors near and far  
about their beliefs and values. I've  
even turned one into this comic.  
I hope it inspires you to chat up yours.  
I've developed some resources that  
can help you explore the origins and  
representations of your  
beliefs. Check out my artist  
website for more info  
and upcoming events:  
[www.jasonwymann.com](http://www.jasonwymann.com)  
POLITICALLY POP



# Meet Your Vendor: Carolyn J. Cool

Carolyn has been a vendor for the past 10 years. When she first moved to San Francisco she met a really cool guy who told her about the project, and so she started selling papers over at UN Plaza BART. She has been selling there ever since. For her, it's not so much the donations she receives but the importance of spreading the facts on homelessness for the city of San Francisco.

"The Street Sheet has factual information directly from the homeless people, including myself," Cool said, "It really is factual. I read an article in the Chronicle? They have no idea. They have not gone on the street and talked to people."

Before becoming homeless, Cool had worked in large, high profile companies. She retired from Microsoft Corp after a little over 5 years of service and became the founder & CEO of Cool Concepts, Inc, a professional service business taking care of high profile individuals and families. The company offered professional services like event planning, personal assistance, executive assistance, private chef, and translation services to clients.

Then in 2007, she experienced a traumatic life event, which eventually

led to homelessness. She went from the glass ceiling to living in the woods and sleeping under a freeway with rats.

"I lost everything," she said. "I owned my company, so if I didn't work, I didn't get paid. Everything just fell apart."

When she became homeless she met Kevin Fortman, who taught her how to survive in the worst of climates and situations. Together, they She from San Mateo County to San Francisco in search of shelter beds. She lived in the shelters here for a year before finally getting a place in a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel.

She gritted her teeth for 10 years and much to her surprise her Section 8 came up just before her 60th birthday. She now lives in Pacific Heights in a full apartment living with her best friend, Nikki, her dog.

"When I moved to my apartment, my doctor said I needed responsibility. So I adopted Nikki," said Cool. "I found her in the shelter and after a few minutes with her I could tell she just wanted to get out of that cage. We developed a relationship, and she is awesome with people."

Today Carolyn J Cool has come up with a solution to decrease homelessness

and stop mass shootings. She wants to open a liberal arts school for kids as an after school program. The faculty for the program would be made up of homeless individuals who have a gift to teach the children. "No computers, let's go back to writing, storytelling, that sort of thing," she says. This is her inspiration.

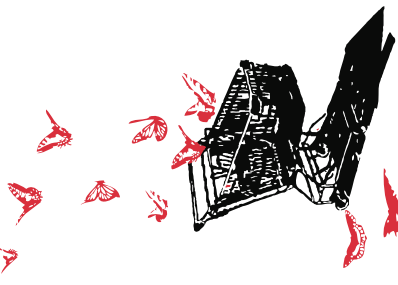
Carolyn J Cool continues to represent the homeless community. If you wish to donate online you can give through venmo @Street-Sheet and write "Carolyn J Cool #124" in the "what's it for?" field. Thank you for your support to assist the homeless and low-income individuals. ■



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streetsheetsf@gmail.com

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Coalition on  
Homelessness  
San Francisco

## Please DONATE!

I'm raising money for a super geographically relevant issue for us as Bay Area residents and a cause that is striving to address the unequivocal human right of shelter and home. I'm hoping to raise \$12,500 to cover the cost of materials for a tiny home -- a fully insulated, heated, windowed, and furnished 8'x10' single unit home. By next summer, this house will be donated to a currently homeless youth. This is not a theoretical, slow-moving, far-off-in-the-future foggy goal: this is an immediate, personal, and achievable solution to youth homelessness in our communities, and of paramount relevance in our area. Youth homelessness is a tragedy and requires an immediate solution, and this is the individual step that we can take.

I am working with Youth Spirit Artworks (YSA) on this project and when it is completed it will be added to YSAs Tiny Home Village that is scheduled to launch in July.

All donations are 100% TAX DEDUCTIBLE. Visit <http://bit.ly/tinyhomeYSA> or scan to donate

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SCAN ME

