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STREET SHEET



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CELEBRATING 35 YEARS OF STREET SHEET	2
MOMS NEED HOMES	3
SWEEPING DECISION	4
TENANT POWER	7
SELF-RELIANCE OR SOLITUDE?	7

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

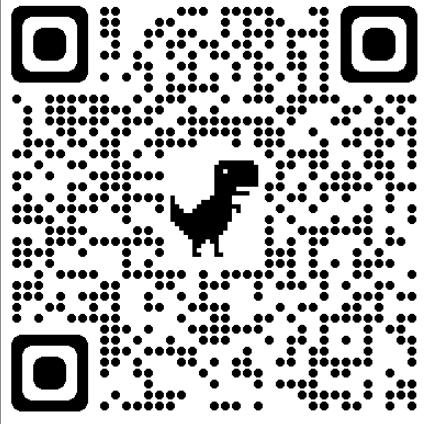
EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS!



Street Sheet is published and distributed on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples. We recognize and honor the ongoing presence and stewardship of the original people of this land. We recognize that homelessness can not truly be ended until this land is returned to its original stewards.



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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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CELEBRATE 35 YEARS OF STREET SHEET

This year marks the 35th anniversary of Street Sheet, the longest continuously running street newspaper in the United States! In celebration, we are holding a year-long fundraising campaign with a goal of \$90,000, enough cover the cost of printing Street Sheet for the next 3 years! Street Sheet has been an integral part of the Coalition on Homelessness's history, and a crucial platform for unhoused authors and artists to share their experiences. Please donate to celebrate its monumental legacy, and help us continue Street Sheet for years to come!

CITY BUDGET WOES: NO MOTHER SHOULD ROAM, WE ALL DESERVE A HOME

After effects of a global pandemic are causing fallout for San Francisco’s budget. A deficit of over \$780 million—a combination of falling business tax revenue caused by remote work, and tourism that hasn’t reached pre-pandemic levels—could fall on the backs of the poorest San Franciscans. Meanwhile, San Francisco is trapped in a “doom loop” media cycle furthered by tech doomer billionaires like Garry Tan and aligned elected officials. Their push for an austerity budget will place the rising cost of housing, child care, education and living expenses on residents while increasing policing, surveillance and corporate write-offs. Meanwhile, the City pays for proactive change, such as investing in housing by robbing other needy groups.

The San Francisco City budget process for the 2024-25 fiscal year has begun. The Board of Supervisors must finalize the budget and the mayor has to sign it by July 2024. A coalition made up of labor and non-governmental organizations called the People’s Budget Coalition is joining together to advocate for a balanced, holistic approach to housing and economic justice while combating specific anticipated budget cuts from the City.

Here at Street Sheet, which the Coalition on Homelessness publishes, we hold out hope for the future for all San Franciscans who call this city home. The diversity and vibrancy of San Francisco is what makes our city special. After all, who is the city for? Is it only for the wealthy or is it for everyone? It is critical that at this crossroads we align our values and San Francisco’s history and make the right choices. After all, we have two different San Franciscos: one in which some of our residents are choosing

between five different kinds of milk for their latte, and another where others must choose between paying the rent and food on the table.

Indeed, the City is facing tremendous problems: an untreated overdose crisis, skyrocketing family homelessness and critical workforce shortfalls, to name a few. At the same time, we need to take a proactive approach in ensuring that San Franciscans have stable housing. We shouldn’t cut programs keeping residents off the streets or in safe, liveable housing, but that is exactly what is being proposed.

The City is asking to slash up to \$23 million in back-rent support for San Franciscans at risk of homelessness and displacement. This is state money that is going away, and for those 1,500 households still in need of assistance, it will spell disaster. The last thing we need is a huge surge in homelessness.

There has been tremendous media coverage as of late on the current surge in family homelessness, with over 442 families on the waitlist for emergency shelter and hotel vouchers. The number of homeless families has increased 36% between 2019 and 2023. Many of the families are newly unhoused, while many other families have been stuck in shelter for months or years. Every night, we have children sleeping in parks, in cars and on buses. With one hand, the City is proposing to cut funding for Proposition C family and youth housing, which amounts to \$5 million to family housing and \$5.9 million to youth housing. This money must be restored. With the other hand, the City suggests cutting another \$10 million from youth housing to pay for more hotel vouchers and subsidies for families—

in other words hurting homeless youth to pay for homeless families.

On May 9, many of the hundreds of families experiencing homelessness in San Francisco gathered at City Hall to celebrate Mother’s Day and to deliver handcrafted miniature felt houses and letters to the Board of Supervisors and Mayor London Breed with the message “No mother should roam—we all deserve a home.” Many speakers explained how homelessness has devastated their lives and those of their children, and the pain mothers feel living through this trauma.

“The purpose of this Mother’s Day action is to honor and celebrate mothers from all backgrounds while advocating for housing justice for families in San Francisco,” said Solinna Ven, organizing director at the Coalition on Homelessness. “By commemorating Mother’s Day, we recognize the invaluable contributions of mothers to our communities and acknowledge the challenges they face, particularly concerning housing insecurity. This action raised awareness about the urgent need for preventative, supportive, and permanent solutions to homelessness that will provide affordable and stable housing for all families.”

We absolutely need additional investments in family subsidies and hotel vouchers. We also need to put in place a safe parking site for families and individuals living in RV’s. However, this cannot and should not be paid for by taking more funds away from homeless people.

Despite the City facing such a large deficit, it still has choices in spending. For example, the Mayor is proposing to increase police and

security funding. That’s money that could be allocated elsewhere. Also, City Hall says that the key to building a stronger local economy is to bring back restaurants and businesses to San Francisco. The City’s own analysis points to the need to identify more service workers—yet the City does nothing to ensure that working people are able to afford to live and thrive in SF, which it could do by ensuring safe streets, lively restaurants and cafes, clean parks, and more.

The City’s own departments predict that budget cuts will worsen the homelessness crisis, and they advise against further cuts. San Francisco’s budget has grown to historic highs in the billions. Two years ago, our City had a massive surplus—but we haven’t seen the City hiring more workers to provide key services such as cleaning streets and parks nor building the amount of affordable housing we sorely need. Instead, police officers are depicted in this “doom loop” narrative as the only tool needed to tackle complex social problems and are being overburdened in playing this role. We need the right tools for the right jobs.

After all, cops can’t staff food banks, provide job training to help secure employment opportunities for residents or navigate social services to get folks housed. The San Francisco Police Department is not a Swiss Army knife able to solve all problems. We can and must prioritize organizations with a proven track record of preventing and solving homelessness, while also advocating for increased economic opportunities for our people.

SO I’M HOMELESS IN
SACRAMENTO, NOW WHAT?
ISIDORE MIKA SZÉKELY MANES-DRAGAN

Here’s an all-too common scenario: You just lost your job, your landlord has evicted you from your own bedroom apartment, and now you’re on the streets. Whatever your story may be, you ask yourself this question: What’s my next step?

You want to be housed again, but before that, you need to find stability. That means food and water, shelter, and hopefully facilities with running water. Services in Sacramento are incredibly sparse, and the waiting list for what little is available is incredibly long. But no worries, they say! Getting set up is just as easy as calling 2-1-1: How convenient, right? Well, although calling might be as easy as dialing a three-digit number, the rest isn’t so simple.

Sacramento voters passed Measure O in 2022. Measure O requires that the city offer adequate shelter to homeless people under threat of being displaced by sweeps, but according to Crystal Sanchez of the Sacramento Homeless Union, the city often considers a referral to the 211 service an adequate alternative to shelter. But it isn’t.

There are 2,500 people on the waitlist for shelters in Sacramento, and the Sacramento Coordinated Access System reports that over 32,000 of the calls they receive each year are about shelter, she said. Many callers don’t even make it on the waitlist.

So let’s say you get the waitlist but you still need additional help in the meantime. Food and safety are provided by day at the Loaves & Fishes compound. Loaves & Fishes provides a men’s wash house, breakfast and lunch, as well as counseling and health services within Friendship Park, starting at 7 a.m. every day. Also located within Friendship Park is the office of the Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee (SHOC), which runs a vendor program where unhoused community members can pick up copies of Street Sheet to sell for \$2 each. The vendors keep all of the money. The SHOC office is open from 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. every day. The Homeless Union also maintains a regular list of open food pantries from which the community can freely take, which can be viewed on its website and social media. In addition to the services provided within Friendship Park, Loaves & Fishes also provides a kennel to take care of guests’ pets, the “Mustard Seed” schooling program for children ages 3 to 15, and legal/jail services.

In front of Sacramento City Hall every Saturday at 12 p.m., Punks With Lunch Sacramento provides meals, feminine products and harm reduction tools for the benefit of the homeless community. The group takes requests for items such as clothing, tents and health care items.

Camp Resolution is a unique feature in

Sacramento’s homeless landscape. Famous for retaking land promised by the state when it failed to deliver on a promise of housing, Camp Resolution provides shelter to 50 vehicularly housed guests. The RVs on site do not have running water, but they are better than staying out on the streets. Camp Resolution fights for the homeless community of Sacramento, and is currently in a legal battle with the city over housing opportunities that the city offered in the residents’ leases.

Camp Resolution has a waitlist. People who progress to this stage and apply for a spot there meet with encampment council members for an interview. Then the community members vote on whether to admit the applicant. Those who are allowed entry can look forward to a community full of art, understanding and communal strength.

Despite the continued threat of sweeps, Sacramento’s unhoused residents have until recently had no alternative to shelter that the city and state provided. As long as this crisis continues, the city might never see an end to homelessness. If so, it’s up to the community to provide relief.

For more resources not listed here, check the Sacramento Homeless Union’s list of citywide resources for health care, legal defense, human trafficking resources and more at <https://bit.ly/SHUStreetSheetCS>

SWEEPING

AS THE U.S. SUPREME COURT CONSIDERS TO DO TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

Cassy Leach woke up early on April 22, the day the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in *Grants Pass v. Johnson* across the country in Washington, D.C.

That morning, Leach, Mobile Integrative Navigation Team, or MINT, cofounder, a Grants Pass service provider for people living in parks, tuned into the livestream while helping a 62-year-old homeless woman look for her cat, Sylvester. The cat had gone missing in Fruitdale Park when Grants Pass police forced the woman, who is blind in one eye, to move her tent and belongings two miles away to Tussing Park.

A Grants Pass city ordinance requires homeless residents living in vehicles to move every 72 hours, and police require anyone living in parks to move as often as is allowed by state law, which is also every 72 hours. City code bars anyone from sleeping in public spaces or using sleeping materials for the purpose of maintaining a temporary place to live under threat of criminal and civil penalty.

Later that day, Leach drove another homeless resident to a doctor's appointment, dropped off wound supplies in local parks and transported an elderly, deaf homeless resident to an orthopedist appointment.

The Supreme Court's decision in the case out of southern Oregon, expected in June, will broadly impact how local governments write homelessness policy in the United States.

Since the Supreme Court took up the case in January, Democrat and Republican governments, district attorneys and business associations submitted amicus briefs arguing a 2022 Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals injunction removes necessary tools for enforcing laws against homeless resi-

dents sleeping on public property.

A host of organizations submitted amicus briefs in support of counsel representing homeless residents, saying laws punishing individuals for being homeless are cruel and unusual. The briefs also argued the laws do nothing to solve the homelessness crisis and will likely exacerbate the issue.

Leach said most Grants Pass residents are well aware of the case before the Supreme Court. Some hope the justices will uphold the ordinance, and others generally support efforts to solve the housing crisis, regardless of the court's decision. While there are fundamental disagreements on how to treat homeless residents in Grants Pass, Leach said the community can agree to come together and create a safe place for people so they don't have to live in the parks.

"We still need to do something, so let's just do it," Leach said.

"YOU DON'T ARREST BABIES WHO HAVE BLANKETS"

The Supreme Court is a lavish theater for a case deciding whether cities can punish people for sleeping when they have nowhere else to go.

Court staff ushered some 400 guests, lawyers, journalists and family members across the Grand Hall and into the courtroom through bronze gates flanked by marble pillars on the morning of arguments. Dark, wine-red drapery framed the chambers on all sides. Above the curtains, friezes of prophets, owls and allegorical figures looked on just beneath a high red and blue-checkered ceiling with white and gold-trimmed rosettes as court aides paced across the bench between two American flags.

For over two and a half hours, the justices questioned counsel for each side, as well as Edwin Kneedler, U.S. Justice Department deputy solicitor general. A central theme was where the line should be drawn between the involuntary status of being homeless and the conduct associated with being homeless.

That question of status and conduct arises from a 1962 Supreme Court decision in *Robinson v. California*. Justices ruled it is cruel and unusual for the state to punish a person for a status — in that case, the status of being addicted to narcotics — and therefore violated the Eighth Amendment. However, in a case six years later, *Powell v. Texas*, justices decided the state can punish a person for the conduct of using substances, creating a legal distinction between status and conduct.

The justices presented a range of hypotheticals meant to clarify the question: Addiction is to drug use as sleeping is to what? And where is the line between a universal need and punishable behavior?

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson helped differentiate between the conduct of drug use as a consequence of the status of having an addiction and the conduct of using a blanket for the universal status of needing to sleep. She said drug use is punishable because it is not a universal need, despite some people having an addiction to drugs. However, people cannot be held criminally liable for universally necessary acts that are in and of themselves not criminal, like using a blanket to sleep.

"Not only is it something that everybody engages in, but it's something that everybody has to engage in to be alive," Kneedler responded.

In this case, counsel for homeless residents argued the city of Grants Pass punished the status of being homeless by creating ordinances making it impossible for homeless people to be anywhere in the city without receiving constant fines or jail time — a violation of the Eighth Amendment.

Early before arguments began at the Supreme Court, demonstrators set up signs for a "Housing Not Handcuffs" rally, which drew more than 600 people.

Jackson asked whether the same ordinance could apply to eating in public spaces. Justice Neil Gorsuch extended the question to whether other biological necessities, like urination and defecation, would be considered status or conduct. Chief Justice John Roberts went so far as to ask if being a bank robber is considered a status, while Justices Samuel Alito and Gorsuch tested whether a person could steal food if they were hungry without being punished.

In an early, fiery exchange, Justice Sonia Sotomayor asked Theane Evangelis, Grants Pass' counsel, if the city enforced the ordinance against the general public or exclusively against people who have no other place to go.

"If a stargazer wants to take a blanket or a sleeping bag out at night to watch the stars and falls asleep, you don't arrest them," Sotomayor said. "You don't arrest babies who have blankets over them. You don't arrest people who are sleeping on the beach."

Evangelis said the laws apply to everyone.

"Yeah, that's what you want to say," Sotomayor said.

Sotomayor referenced an amicus brief filed by a group of criminal law and punishment scholars, which included testimony from a police officer saying that someone would "violate the ordinance if he did not 'have another home to go to,'" and "laying on a blanket enjoying the park" would not violate the ordinance. In other words, sleeping in public is a crime for homeless individuals, but not for those who have a home.

Evangelis said one example exists of a person in Grants Pass receiving a citation despite having a home address.

"There's nothing in the law that criminalizes homelessness," Evangelis said.

'ENDING HOMELESSNESS IS POSSIBLE'

Early on the cool April morning in Washington, D.C., before oral arguments began, a crowd gathered outside the Supreme Court. In the clear sky, the sun rose behind the building, forming a corona around its roof.

The National Homelessness Law Center, or NHL, organized a rally for "Housing Not Handcuffs," a national campaign advocating for housing as a human right and demanding an end to the criminalization of homelessness.

Over 600 people showed up for the event, which included homelessness advocates from across the country giving speeches.

Jesse Rabinowitz, NHL campaign and communications manager, said the court's decision to hear the case indicates how politicized homelessness has become.



DECISION:

JEREMIAH HAYDEN

GRANTS PASS V. JOHNSON, THERE'S WORK
TO DO, REGARDLESS OF OUTCOME

“It’s also a reflection on the fact that we do have a homelessness crisis in this country and our elected officials are not doing what they need to do to make sure everyone has housing that meets their needs,” Rabinowitz said.

Rabinowitz said it is a catalyzing moment for homeless advocacy across the nation.

“We know that ending homelessness is possible, but it’s going to take building power and getting our elected officials to do their jobs,” he said.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition’s 2023 “Out of Reach” report shows a person needs 1.6 full-time jobs at minimum wage, or must make at least \$22.44 per hour to afford a two-bedroom at fair market rent in Grants Pass.

As the justices debated the constitution some 3,000 miles away, Leach saw a similar demonstration as she drove past the Josephine County Courthouse. Roughly a dozen homeless residents held signs reading “Stop Sweeps” and “If everyone can’t pay the rent, they shouldn’t fucking take our tent.”

‘OBJECTIVELY REASONABLE’

The Oregon Legislature passed ORS 195.530 in 2021, which dictates laws regulating sitting, lying, sleeping or keeping warm and dry outdoors on public property “must be objectively reasonable with regards to people experiencing homelessness.” The statute is somewhat vague, and cities like Portland — Oregon’s largest city — have battled in court to determine what is “objectively reasonable.”

Lawmakers intended to codify the 9th Circuit’s 2018 *Martin v. Boise* decision into the state statute, which ruled 9th Circuit jurisdictions, including Oregon, have the authority to regulate when and where people can or cannot stay but cannot punish people when shelter is unavailable.

Martin v. Boise served as the backdrop for the Grants Pass case when it arrived at the 9th Circuit, and governments leaning toward both sides of the aisle argue the two 9th Circuit decisions hamstringing them from solving the homelessness crisis.

Referring to the state law, Jackson asked about “constitutional avoidance,” a legal doctrine that would allow the Supreme Court to decline to render a decision on the constitutionality of the Grants Pass ordinance. Roberts appeared to also question the court’s responsibility, asking why “these nine people are the best people to judge and weigh those policy judgements.”

The lower court’s decision will stand if the court decides not to issue a ruling as a matter of constitutional avoidance. Kelsi Corkran, Georgetown Law Supreme Court director and counsel for the class of homeless resi-

dents, told the court she would have no issues with that outcome.

If the court determined the ordinance does not violate the Eighth Amendment because Oregon has a necessity defense, the burden of proof would fall on each homeless individual to show a court they were sleeping outside for a reason, each time they received a citation.

Ed Johnson, Oregon Law Center director of litigation, initially filed the suit against Grants Pass in 2018. On the sidewalk below the steps of the high court, he said in a city with zero available emergency shelter, the status and conduct of homelessness are two sides of the same coin.

“Living outside and trying to stay warm with a blanket is literally the definition of what it means to be homeless when you don’t have anywhere else,” Johnson said.

“HOMELESSNESS IS A CHOICE MADE BY OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS”

On April 17, just five days before the case arrived at the Supreme Court, Grants Pass City Council unanimously approved a new MINT property just off Redwood Highway. Leach said people who initially opposed MINT’s tactics showed up to testify in support of its efforts.

One Grants Pass resident previously testified in a contentious May 17, 2023, City Council meeting, saying the community needed to “get aggressive” and “take their parks back,” calling on neighbors to “make them feel uncomfortable.” Less than a year later, he told City Council the new MINT shelter is a “win-win” because “abracadabra” won’t fix the issue regardless of the Supreme Court’s decision.

A local “park watch group” organizer recently volunteered to install flooring in the new MINT building.

“I get emotional just thinking about it,” Leach said. “When you’re doing something good and right, people come along.”

Rabinowitz said in the places most successful in reducing homelessness — like Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Houston, Texas — everyone comes to the table to address the root causes.

“Ending homelessness requires collaboration and buy-in,” Rabinowitz said. “That cannot happen when the government is focused on throwing away people’s stuff and throwing folks in jail.”

Tickets can impact credit scores, making it more difficult for people to be accepted into housing, and a criminal history

also creates significant barriers.

“All of these things break connections and displace people from their chosen communities,” Rabinowitz said. “They all make homelessness worse.”

There is a broad range for what the Supreme Court could ultimately decide, Rabinowitz said. It could uphold the 9th Circuit’s decision saying civil and criminal punishments against homeless residents for being homeless are cruel and unusual. It could say people can be fined but not arrested, or it could overturn *Martin v. Boise*. While there appeared to be little appetite for it in the courtroom, the court could go so far as to say it has wrongly interpreted the Eighth Amendment in cases like 1962’s *Robinson v. California*. That could make way for laws criminalizing other involuntary statuses.

Rabinowitz said in the best-case scenario, the Supreme Court will set a bar — albeit a low bar — saying homelessness cannot be criminalized. People still need a place to go, regard-

less of the court’s decision. Until the support systems are in place to keep people from becoming homeless, the crisis will continue, according to Rabinowitz.

“Homelessness is a choice made by our elected officials every day when they fail to fund housing,” he said.

Leach, MINT volunteers and the coalition of organizers in Grants Pass are trying to address their community’s short- and long-term needs. Whether providing emergency shelter, health care and harm reduction tools or reuniting Sylvester the cat with his owner in the park, Leach said she believes Grants Pass will make national news again, “but for how we worked to fix homelessness and housing.”

Despite philosophical clashes and frustrations in the local community, Leach remains hopeful as the national spotlight shines on the city.

“There’s a weird unification that’s happening,” she said. “And it’s beautiful.”



The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in Grants Pass v. Johnson on April 22, an Oregon case on whether punishing homeless residents violates the Eighth Amendment.

TENANTS SHOW THEIR POWER AT STATE CAPITOL

“WITHOUT MASS INVESTMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT TO FUND AFFORDABLE HOUSING AT SCALE, MORE CALIFORNIANS LIVING ONE PAYCHECK AWAY FROM HOMELESSNESS WILL END UP ON THE STREETS WITH NO AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPTIONS AVAILABLE.” – HOUSING NOW!

CATHLEEN WILLIAMS, HOMEWARD STREET JOURNAL

On a bright and breezy spring day in Sacramento, hundreds of outraged families traveled from across the state in the midst of California’s housing crisis to meet with the lawmakers who shape housing and homelessness policy. Their objective was to build—and display tenant power.

A collective of renters and advocates representing 150 organizations converged on the Capitol for Lobby Day on April 29. This coalition, called Housing Now!, includes members of the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), Inner City Law Center, the Los Angeles Tenants Union and Tenants Together, among others.

Suzanne Ansell, a social services worker with the state, joined ACCE’s Sacramento delegation. “Believe it or not I feel like I’m on the edge, too, one paycheck away from homelessness,” she said. Out of her monthly take-home pay of \$4,500, Ansell pays \$3,600 for rent and utilities. That leaves her with only \$900 for food, transportation and medical visits and co-pays.

Ansell pointed out that other state workers—especially those who were recently hired—have lost their apartments and moved out to their cars when their salaries are cut to balance the budget.

“I have no protection from increased rent,” she added. “I want to see people live with dignity. Housing is being bought up and built for profit-making companies—this is a big reason for the crisis.”

The reality is that the government at every level shapes the crisis in housing and makes homelessness inevitable, like a game of musical chairs in which hundreds of thousands are left standing because there just aren’t seats for all. Vulnerable individuals—families and seniors, people dealing with racial oppression and its legacies, those who are disabled or ill—are at the greatest risk. California has one of the highest poverty rates in the U.S. when balancing family resources against housing costs and other basic needs, like food and clothing. Californians are among the most severely cost-burdened tenants in the nation: 1 in 4 households pay 50% or more of their income in rent, according to the California Budget & Policy Center.

WHAT’S BEHIND THE HOUSING CRISIS AND THE RISE OF HOMELESSNESS?

The housing crisis goes deeper than housing. Start with the digital transformation of the economy. To make a long story short, the digital revolution—including robotization, automation and AI—drives the process of eliminating living-wage jobs and searching the world for cheap labor. Financial speculation, or “financialization,” has become more and more attractive as compared to production and manufacturing. Privatization of every public institution and service has become the rule rather than the exception.

This process of increasing speculation and investment has accelerated the commodification of housing, according to the Urban Institute. The Washington, D.C.-based think tank noted that speculators have changed the focus from providing a place for people to live to creating a profitable investment. It also observed other key trends in government policy that have supported increased commodification.

“The most potent example is Blackstone—the world’s largest private equity firm with nearly \$500 billion in assets under management—which bought more than 50,000 foreclosed homes from banks in the wake of the 2008 crisis, using government aid,” the institute wrote.

First, multiple government programs made possible the development of suburbs surrounding the “inner city,” exploiting and increasing segregation, inequality and the racial “wealth gap,” which abandoned Black, Latinx and other people of color to poverty.

At every level, governments provided subsidies to wealthier homeowners, including the annual \$26 billion mortgage interest deduction. These subsidies led to the use of homeownership as an investment strategy for millions, linking housing to financial markets.

Second, governments—especially the federal government—cut support for public and subsidized housing that was always inadequate, demolishing and converting hundreds of thousands of apartments since the 1970s.

As a result, real estate interests with their copious funds were able to exert political influence to control and corrupt the political process and good governance that focuses on society’s basic needs.

MARCHING TO THE CAPITOL

Holding banners and wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the logos of dozens of housing organizations, the tenants came in their hundreds to the Capitol. They focused on key legislative bills to address the housing crisis, build power, and publicize the narrative that we don’t have to stand by helplessly as millions of renters slip further into crisis and the numbers of homeless people multiply. Housing Now! advocated these specific bills:

- Place Assembly Constitutional Amendment 10 on the ballot, so that voters can declare housing to be a fundamental right, and give the state a new legal tool to create and ensure housing for all.
- Reject the currently proposed \$1.2 billion in cuts and delays and maintain funding levels for affordable housing levels in the state budget as well as funding for the needs of the unhoused community;
- Place Assembly Bill 1657, the \$10 billion Affordable Housing Bond Act of 2024, on the ballot, and actively support its passage, to fund construction of affordable housing; supportive housing for unhoused people; farmworker and tribal housing; and preservation of existing affordable housing.
- Pass AB 2584, to ban financial and investor corporations that own more than 1,000 single family homes from purchasing additional properties and converting them into rentals.
- Pass AB 2616 to repeal California’s Mortgage Interest Deduction on second homes, and direct the income saved from closing this tax break (\$250 million annually in 2016) to state programs
- Pass AB 1333 to ban developers from selling single family homes in bulk to big institutional investors (who then offer them for profitable rents).

While these bills by themselves might not be the cure-all for the housing crisis, the tenant power behind the legislation could signal the direction of future housing advocacy.



WHEN SELF RELIANCE LEADS TO SOLITUDE

JACK BRAGEN

My support system includes a mental health agency and my family, yet mostly I am in charge of meeting my essential needs. I'm proud of this independence—but at the same time, I find it frightening and lonely. .

My level of independence is unusual for mental health consumers with a serious condition, as people who have disabilities like mine are not known for doing what I do. Most adults who have chronic psychiatric issues need a lot of help. Some don't live to my age—I'm 59 as of this writing—or even make it past 50. Others develop dementia or other long-term impairments.

Having the ambition to attempt a return to the workforce at my age has to be unusual. Still, I recognize the challenges I face living alone and with a disability.

To avoid homelessness, I must budget my pittance of an income, pay my bills, and make sure that I don't get overdrawn. This is challenging, but I've learned some strategies, and as long as you're above board with your

government benefits, you'll be OK.

As I manage my finances, I think of some of the unhoused people I have seen alone and deteriorating. It scares me to think, "What if that happens to me?" .

In the movies, people are often shown living alone. It looks very glamorous onscreen. I presume that living alone works better when you have a lot of money. I would feel better if I had a lot of money, and I wouldn't dislike that kind of glamor, if it actually exists.

Loneliness can make you very sick. It increases vulnerability to numerous diseases, and it can negatively affect mental and physical health. But there are a few bits of silver lining to the dark clouds of being alone. Whether or not these make it worthwhile is a good question, and it can only be answered by an individual considering how they feel, and whether they would be happier with more contact with people.

When you are alone, you have to be good enough company. I've spent a lot of time alone. Sometimes it really sucks eggs. But other times, it is just the right thing. Every person needs times of solitude. If you can't get any of that with people always in your face, you are prevented from the essential activity of being able to reflect. If you are inundated with other people's needs, their issues, or their harassment, it blocks you from being able to process well enough.

I thought I wanted to be alone when I left my wife last year after 27 years of marriage. It may have been one of my classic mistakes—one that will affect me for the rest of my life. Being with people can be very good.

I believed it was my last chance to get out, and that I should jump on it. If your significant other is excessively unkind, then maybe solitude is better.

Now I am in a situation where, to an extent, I am struggling to survive, hoping that I can climb the economic ladder, improve my conditions and not always be so damned afraid.

I've done some of my best or most

productive work while alone. I've accomplished this with physical labor in my youth, as well as with my writing. I believe that if I'm unable to feel the pain of loneliness—and I should feel it—something is likely wrong.

In the place where I now live, people have formed a vibrant community. We are all jammed together in the same building, yet each one of us has their own little room.

By nature, people need to form bonds, but they need themselves, too. When your housing is contingent on pleasing or getting along with others, compromise is necessary.

By nature, people need to form bonds, but they need themselves, too. When your housing is contingent on pleasing or getting along with others, compromise is necessary.

The word "dysfunctional" might be trendy, but at least you have less opportunity to be "dysfunctional" when alone. Maybe, that word should not be applied when you're with other people.

Life and all of the things in life are temporary. Sometimes we must all look in the mirror and get to know the person we are looking at. We don't necessarily need to be defined by someone else—or at least not when we judge ourselves.

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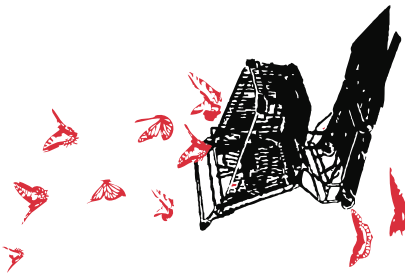
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