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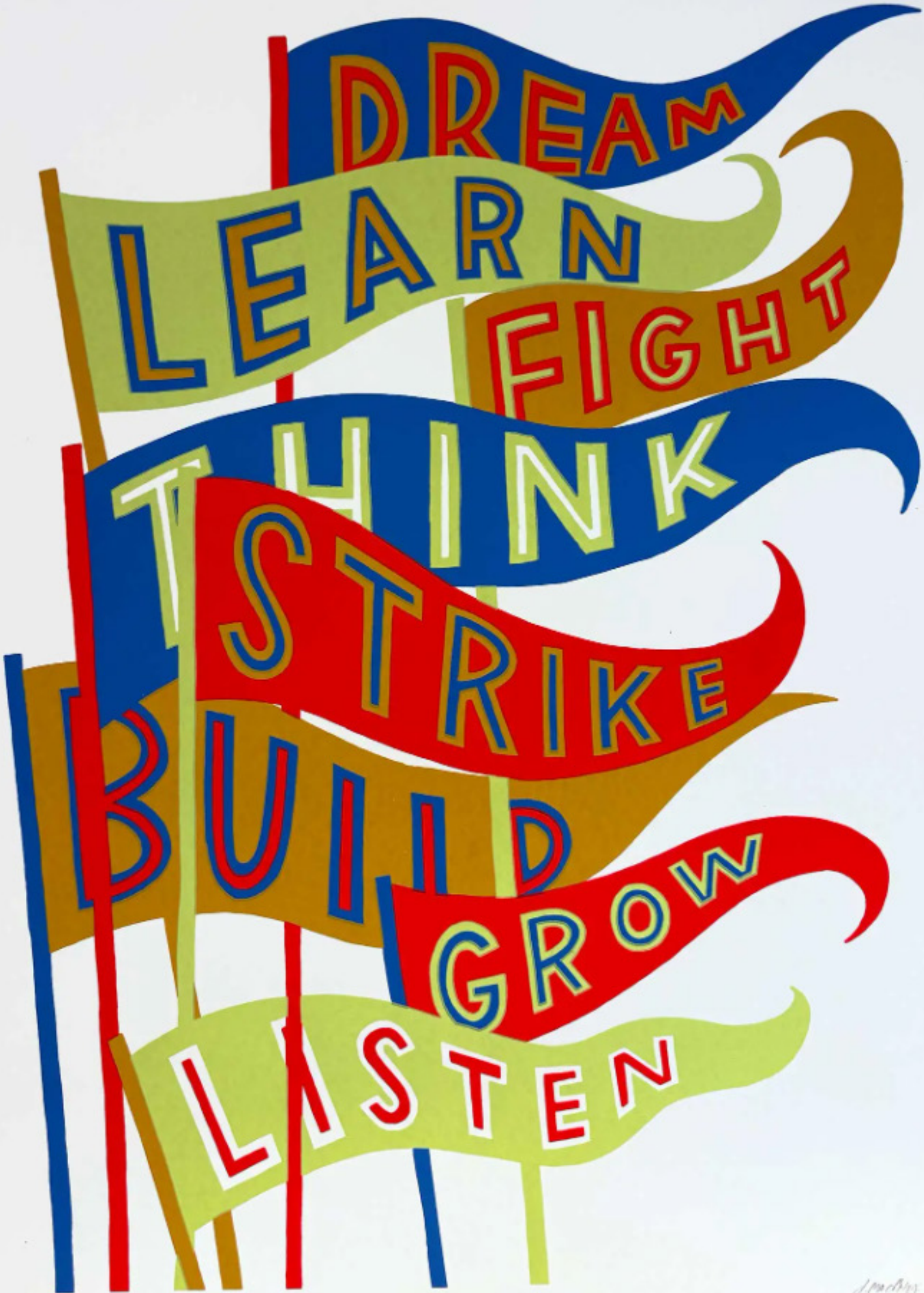
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# STREET SHEET



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MAY DAY 2026



FLAWS IN RV PROGRAM

2

COMMUNITY CAN STOP THE SWEEPS + PERSONAL STORY

4

ALL HOUSING IS RECOVERY HOUSING

6

GIVING UNHOUSE PEOPLE \$... MAKES THINGS BETTER

7

19/44

June 2026

# RV PERMIT PROGRAM FLAWS LAID BARE UNDER LOOMING DEADLINE

**ZACH BOLLINGER**

Four out of 10 San Francisco RV residents are at risk of losing their homes when their six-month parking permits lapse on April 30.

Of the 225 RVer's who still need to renew their Large Vehicle Refuge Permit, 88 have yet to renew as of April 14, the final scheduled in-person renewal session on the City's schedule. This is just the latest example of a pattern of a hastily implemented plan, according to residents and advocates.

First, a bit of background. In October 2025, the City began permitting qualified RVs which would exempt them from the new two-hour parking limit on vehicles taller than 7 feet or longer than 22 feet. The permit also enrolled RV residents into a program that would work to find them housing, work with them on financial stabilization, including forgiving debt to the city, and to find work. As of April 24, 2026, 114 vehicular households were connected to housing or shelter,

In order to qualify for the new permit, RVer's had to prove they

were present in San Francisco prior to a City-made count during the last week of May 2025. This police-led count showed some 500 RVs parked in the City. If an RVer was among these 500 counted, they did not have to present much documentation: just an ID and proof of insurance, registration card, or title or something else which showed they were attached to the counted RV or trailer. Fortunately for myself, an RVer, I was already in the count and getting my permit was quick and easy. This was not necessarily so easy for those who were not included in the count.

If they were NOT in the count, they could appeal and had to show the aforementioned documentation as well as prove that they were in San Francisco prior to the end of May 2025. For example, an up-to-date registration beginning in December 2024 at a San Francisco address would satisfy this requirement. Also, the RVer could provide parking tickets, tow receipts or mechanic receipts as proof of San Francisco residency

**CONTINUES ON PAGE 3...**

# STREET SHEET CONTRIBUTORS

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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**COALITION ON  
HOMELESSNESS**

**HELP KEEP  
STREET SHEET  
IN PRINT!**

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.



[coalition.networkforgood.com](http://coalition.networkforgood.com)

## BECOME A VENDOR MAKE MONEY AND HELP END HOMELESSNESS!

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 you make from sales! Sign up to 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.

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

*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.*

## 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 Miguel Carrera, [mcarrera@cohsf.org](mailto: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 Shakema Straker, [sstraker@cohsf.org](mailto:sstraker@cohsf.org)

**EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS!**

# AS RV PERMIT RENEWAL DEADLINE LOOMS, PROGRAM FLAWS ARE LAID BARE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2...

pre-May 2025. Other kinds of proof of residency were accepted on a case-by-case basis, subject to review.

Unfortunately, RVers who should have qualified for a permit were denied for having inadmissible proof—for example, a child’s attendance in the San Francisco Unified School District did not qualify. Then, halfway through this process, the City changed the rules and constricted its requirements to proof of residency to only between January 2025 and May 2025, instead of any time prior to May 2025. When this happened, some RVers whose permits would have been approved in the first half of October were denied in the latter half of the month. For example, an RVer who got parking tickets before January 2025, but not since, would have been approved in the first half of October, but denied in the second half of the month.

Of the 500 RVers that the City counted, 216 got their permit right away. Of the 126 RVers who were initially denied but filed an appeal, 111 were granted a permit. While it’s generous for the City to issue permits to such a high number of RVers who weren’t in the count, it reveals that it did a poor job of counting RVs—it’s not hard to miss well over 100 large vehicles! During this time, many volunteers worked to inform RVers of the new law and permit program—largely because less than half of those counted received a permit and since many people were completely uninformed about the law and program even as the program was in action. In several cases, it wasn’t until volunteers reached out to them, even on the same day as the permitting session was taking place right around the corner from their parking space. All of this gives off the stink that

the City is subtly trying to squeeze or scare poor people in precarious living situations out of San Francisco.

While the program’s initial rollout was rocky, to say the least, RVers expected some future reassurance of a clear process and clear communication from the City. However, post-permitting, RVers continued experiencing problems with the LVRP program, now in their dealings with case workers—usually by either being coercive or non-responsive. Lack of response from case workers caused anxiety in people who were already anxious to access housing. RVers worried over losing their permits simply because their caseworkers hadn’t contacted them yet. Further, this lack of responsiveness caused worry that they would lose their permit for lack of contact, which, in this case, was not their fault!

A few RVers who were unpermitted were approached by City workers with the threat of, “Buy this permit from me for hundreds of dollars, or else face a tow.” Some also endured the horror of their permitted RVs being towed because of lack of current vehicle registration, resulting in these people falling into street homelessness.

For RVers who had not, or who had not yet, experienced these problems, but witnessed or heard of these goings-on, anxieties began to mount. Among other concerns, they began asking when and how they would renew their permit only three months into the original six month permit period.

Many RVers and homeless organizations expected renewals to be automatic, given the words of supervisors at public meetings, but that did not turn out to be the



case. A mere three weeks before the original permit period ended, PDFs mysteriously appeared on the Department of Emergency Management’s website that all but confirmed that repermitting must be done in person. RVers began to wonder if they would still be able to qualify for a renewal. Given issues in the original permitting period, homeless advocates wondered if all permitted RVers would be able to get their renewal and continue to stave off the risk of the City towing their homes.

The list, locations and times of pop up meetings at various sites for the repermitting process was not made to RVers until the week before, and only to a small group on one street. The game this time was that the city was holding a total of five in-person repermitting table sessions over a two-week period—half the number as before over the same amount of time. At least this time, the only documentation required was an ID. Otherwise, the RVer’s case worker—or a new case worker, if the RVer had not been assigned one—would reach out to the RVer to schedule a time and date to replace their original permit. Or if no case worker reached out to an RVer, they could email the program. This email mode was highly suspect, because of a lack of email response during the original process.

For several people, it wasn’t until April’s meeting of the Homeless Oversight Commission—after the repermitting process began—to address the late notification and unresponsiveness to RVers emails that the City finally began improvements. Too little, too late? While it’s nice that City agencies can sometimes respond positively to poor performance, reactive adjustments continue to signal that the needs of RVers are not being proactively addressed by advance criticisms from homelessness organizations and, more importantly, homeless people themselves. AGAIN, to compensate for lack of city efforts, volunteers had to show up to help RVers stay informed of the permit renewal process, sessions, and deadline.

As of this writing, the program outcomes dashboard of the Department of Emergency Management shows that 135 large vehicles have been towed that were not part of the City’s RV buyback program. Now, with only one week before the renewal period ends, it is still considering having one, maybe two, more table events to help renew the permits of the remaining 88 out of 225 RVs. Let’s see if they can make good by RVers on this problem and prevent even more people losing their homes. Better yet why not have an office folks can go to get a permit. Fingers crossed! ■

# FIGHTING SWEEPS BY BUILDING COMMUNITY

WESTERN REGIONAL ADVOCACY PROJECT

Everyone is familiar with a sweep, be it by definition, bearing witness to somebody being displaced or even coming across a familiar place and noticing people who used to live there are suddenly gone. Sweeps happen every day in our communities. Yet despite new policies, rhetoric and media portrayals of sweeps and city government's asinine excuses for doing them (i.e. health or drug issues), the underlying reality of what sweeps are and the impact they have on people's lives stays the same. Sweeps are dehumanizing, violent and in no way connected to services or housing at all, they are simply criminalizing people who can't afford a decent place to live. So, we fight back against them.

Community-based outreach will always be the principal factor in identifying the priorities and direction of campaigns for both WRAP and our members. WRAP member orgs have been fighting sweeps locally from day one. In 2019 when we launched our House Keys Not Sweeps Campaign, we knew we had to fight hard and rep what's real, so we also launched a WRAP-wide sweeps street outreach initiative. Through documentation, discussion and constant feedback, the campaign reflects the impacts of sweeps that are intentionally overlooked and receive little to no coverage.

As of today, 300 outreach forms have been compiled by organizers going into the community and documenting people's experiences. This outreach reflects the communities of six cities, and the universal trends among them affirm what has been clear from the beginning: sweeps displace people from their community, much like Anti-Okie and Sundown Town Laws were back in their day. People have a right to exist! People have a right to decency and respect!

People's lives get violently and abruptly interrupted. They're treated at best as some nuisance, but (typically) at worst as some pest that must be rid of. The number one reason people were given for why a sweep was happening was simply no reason at all. When it came to their personal property, a staggering 85% weren't offered a place to store their belongings, and 74% had their personal property trashed.

Sweeps do not solve homelessness, they simply push people further into the outskirts of the public eye. And the truly scary thing is we are seeing more and more sweeps as the

numbers of unhoused people keep growing under the Big Fascist Bill (HB 1).

In our outreach, 78% of the agencies that conducted the sweeps were police usually threatening arrest, citations, warrant checks and being verbally abusive. Sweeps are an extension of the criminalization unhoused communities face simply for being unhoused.

The widespread misconception that homeless people continue to refuse services gets called out for the BS it is when 88% of people were not offered any type of service at all. Displacing people from where they are living, under false pretense and in a violent manner, disregards a person's humanity. It is at this point now that when asked what is important for the community to understand about sweeps, the number one answer was simply "we are human." Sweeps were never meant to be a viable solution to addressing homelessness. As the federal government decimated funding for public housing, they absolved themselves of responsibility by decentralizing the efforts to states and cities.

When homelessness emerged in the early '80s it was mislabeled as a short-term, one-time crisis. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) began to prop up emergency shelters to address this "disaster." This calamity was not going to be solved with a single rollout of shelters: they couldn't guarantee a bed for everyone, due to bureaucratic labyrinths and the often racist/anti-immigrant intake criteria to qualify for eligibility people were forced to navigate.

This hollow thinking of, "If a bed, cot or mat in a shelter was being offered then people had no reason to be in the streets," is the basis for pushing people around and, in turn, criminalizing them. Sweeps are rampant and a first-choice punishment, making criminalization a tenet of the strategy to address the housing crisis in this country.

As homelessness continues to expand, so do

the opportunities for financial and political gain. Businesses and city officials alike utilize local law enforcement to enforce the hostile removal of unhoused individuals from public spaces. Other extensions of law enforcement are private security and sanitation firms, who have secured contracts and deals that easily line their pockets off the continued dehumanization of poor people.

Access to legal counsel and legal resources remain an additional barrier that prevents unhoused communities from breaking free of the criminalization they face. In spite of the fact that 78% of sweeps are carried out by pigs and 95% say they're unable to access legal support, community organizers have taken it upon themselves to think creatively about how to bridge the gap between what is needed and what is available. For 20 years, organizers at Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN) in Skid Row have partnered with lawyers to fight criminalization there. WRAP and our friends at the National Homelessness Law Center created a manual for Legal Defense Clinics, an initiative that re-oriens lawyers to form relationships with local organizers to better provide legal counsel. Groups in San Jose and Sacramento have already adopted similar models. In Seattle, organizers have developed relationships with law students to develop a method of tracking property loss which has resulted in campaigns against the police department for property destruction of unhoused communities.

Our efforts to ensure people's right to exist in



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**STOP****ME****SWEEPS**

is still faced with a fixed system interested in undoing itself. There is no solution being offered for households. 3% were given stay away orders from their neighborhood. There is no easy access to counseling or resources. Temporary shelters do not get to the root of the underlying issues of homelessness and shelters come with their own issues, including lack of privacy, not allowing family members to stay, and punitive exits just to avoid these short term “solutions” from coming back again, yet it is unhoused people who have to face the consequences of these policies through criminalization and

fatalities are vast and widespread. Policies are in place to make homelessness a permanent condition for those who are alive and well!

Homelessness is a man-made problem. It is easier for those in power to create caricatures of people who simply “won’t work” or who “refuse help” than to take accountability and solve the problem. Mainstream reporting on homelessness in this country is just an additional tool of disinformation meant to

absolve the state of any accountability. This wack “journalism” is more interested in fueling the dehumanization of a community rather than uplifting its humanity.

Targets on the backs of our communities have been magnified as a means to justify the intensified attacks we’re subjected to. We can not ignore the hostilities against poor, Black, Brown, immigrant, disabled, queer or any other intentionally marginalized community. We are left with no other viable choice but to band together and fight back as if our asses depend on it...’cause they do!

40 years of policy changes, punitive measures, and divestment from housing, food, healthcare and income support is proof that America’s neoliberal approach to fiscal and social policy is, by far, the number one reason homelessness continues to massively grow today.

Sweeps won’t fix this, only a total re-evaluation of how our government cares for and respects all people being governed will. The alarm has been sounding off, and we must answer the call. The only way through the current fascistic hellscape is together! ■

# THE FOURTH BLOCK

**RIVER**

For years, the rhythm of my life was measured in losses. Two to four times a month, I would lose everything. My bedrolls, my clothes, my toiletries—stolen by others on the street or swept away by the Department of Public Health. Each loss pushed me deeper into the cycle of addiction, a blur of panhandling, washing windshields, and calling cabs outside the theater for tips just to find the next drink or the next hit.

The addiction was a heavy, demanding ghost. It took my money, my dignity, and eventually, my shoes. That was the saddest part of the “drop.” I had a high tolerance, fueled by cheap vodka and crack, and I would run until I physically collapsed. Without fail, I would wake up from a three-day binge to find that someone had slipped the shoes right off my feet while I was unconscious.

One particular three-day weekend, I woke up to a world that felt completely desolate. It was a holiday; the downtown business crowds were gone, and the streets were cold and empty. I had no money, no drugs, no pride—and, true to form, no shoes.

Hunger isn’t just a feeling when you’re in that state; it’s a physical weight. I started walking up Van Ness Avenue, my bare feet hitting the cold pavement, heading toward the Burger King. It was a famous spot for us—a place where we’d fight for the right to stand by the drive-thru line to beg for a spare burger or a few coins. But when I arrived, the gates were locked. It was closed.

I kept walking. I felt a loneliness so profound it was almost cinematic. With no one left to talk to, I did something I rarely did: I started talking to God. I usually figured God was too busy for me; surely there were people with more “worthy” problems than a shoeless addict coming off a binge. But the silence of the city emboldened me.

On the first block, I whispered, “Oh God, I’m so hungry. I wish I had a slice of pizza.” In my mind, I wasn’t picturing a gourmet pie. I was picturing the cheese pizza we used to get in the grade school

cafeteria on Fridays. It was simple, but in my memory, it was the best thing I’d ever tasted.

I walked another block. The cold was biting now. “Oh God,” I said again, “I’m so hungry. I wish I had an apple fritter.”

By the third block, the absurdity of my situation hit me. I tried to think of a third thing to ask for, but I couldn’t. I started laughing out loud, a dirty, shoeless man talking to the air. If anyone had seen me, they would have thought I’d finally lost my mind.

On the fourth block, I fell silent. I just walked.

About halfway up the street, I saw it: a white paper bag, slightly larger than a lunch bag, sitting on the sidewalk. A voice in my mind, clear as a bell, said, Look in the bag.

I walked over, picked it up, and opened it. My breath caught. Inside the bag were two slices of cheese pizza and exactly one-half of an apple fritter.

I stood there on Van Ness, stunned into a different kind of silence. I love apple fritters, but they are so sweet that I can only ever eat half at a time. This wasn’t just a discarded meal; it was a specific, tailored response to a conversation I thought I was having with myself.

There is a verse in the Bible, Psalms 139:8, where David addresses God, that reads: “If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.” I had made my bed in hell for a long time. I had lived in the fire of addiction and the cold of the streets, believing I was beyond notice. But that day, on a desolate sidewalk, I learned that no matter how deep the pit you dig for yourself, you are never out of reach.

People can tell me many things about the world, about science, or about luck. But there is nothing anyone could ever say to make me believe that there is not a God who hears a shoeless man on the fourth block. ■

Originally published in The Tenderloin Voice.

# ALL HOUSING IS RECOVERY HOUSING

JORDAN WASILEWSKI

A long time ago, when I was on the SRO Task Force, one older commissioner told me after a meeting one day “please don’t push your own agenda.”

The only agenda I ever pushed was the tenant agenda. However, “pushing one’s own agenda” seems to be common in City Hall. One example of this is District 6 Supervisor Matt Dorsey, who is pushing legislation to end all funding for new site-based permanent supportive housing unless it is drug-free.

Since the proposal was revived last month, activists have been coming together to promote solutions to turn the legislation into something that could unite people and could help those seeking a sober environment. Advocacy organizations, such as Treatment on Demand, Delivering Innovation in Supportive Housing and the Coalition on Homelessness, coalesced around five points of unity in amending the legislation. These points are:

- 1) Removing stigmatizing language: specifically renaming “drug-tolerant housing” to “low-barrier housing” and “drug-free housing” to “recovery-based housing,”
- 2) Instituting two model pilot programs: one for recovery-based transitional housing and another for recovery-based permanent housing,
- 3) Eliminating the provision that bars new funding of low-barrier permanent supportive housing,
- 4) Promulgating safeguards against eviction for relapse, and allowing a just transition back to low-barrier housing for those who can no longer be in recovery, and
- 5) Allowing for medication-assisted treatment and medication for opioid use disorder in all types of housing.

If anything, these are reasonable suggestions that will help to create recovery-based options for those tenants who wish to seek recovery. However, Dorsey is pushing his own agenda and that of recovery grifters who pal around with RFK Jr. in the White House. They claim that progressives aren’t being “pragmatic,” when it is organizations that are associated with progressives that are proposing pragmatic solutions that allow for recovery options to exist alongside low-barrier housing. Dorsey and his ilk are the extremists here.

This process has been triggering for me as a permanent supportive housing tenant. I have seen people get wheeled out of my hotel in body bags, so I want constructive solutions to the issues around overdoses. But I cannot deal with people who have never lived our lives parachuting into them.

On April 23, one month after the legislation was reintroduced, and three days after the Youth Commission desired not to support the bill as written, the legislation was heard in the Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee. This was also before there was a chance for the public to weigh in during the monthly meeting of Homelessness Oversight Commission.

Dorsey staged a rally on the steps in front of City Hall before the 10 a.m. committee meeting. Even though the crowd filled up the whole stairwell outside the entrance, less than half of the attendees actually entered the chambers, and fewer of them actually spoke before the committee. In contrast, public comment was mixed, leaning more towards opposition unless it gets amended. There was consensus in the room that there is a need for more recovery housing, but there was a skepticism of the legislation’s necessity, especially among other permanent supportive housing tenants.

But the committee passed the legislation without amendment, though co-sponsor Danny Sauter hinted towards a need to amend. It is scheduled for a vote on May 5 at the full board, where it is likely to be passed. No public comment will be heard that day, but we are hoping against all hope that the Treatment On Demand’s amendments are worked into the legislation, or at the very least, the permanent prohibition on new low-barrier permanent supportive housing is stripped out. When it comes to permanent supportive housing tenants, our success is the City’s success, and we must expand recovery housing without subtracting from low-barrier housing. We must have solutions for all. ■

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*Jordan Wasilewski (she/they) is a long-term permanent supportive housing and SRO tenant advocate, former commissioner and affordability activist. You may follow her at @sfpsrsro on Instagram.*

**BOCCE BALL FUNDRAISER**

## SAVE THE DATE!

Roll out the good times, it's Bocce Ball Season this May at the Coalition!  
**When: Saturday, May 30th**  
**Time: 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM**  
**Where: Aquatic Park Bocce Courts**  
 Bring the whole family for fun, food, and drinks!

Tournament entry is \$25 per person or \$100 for a team of four. The winning team will take home a COH merch bundle!  
 Register here: 

Looking forward to seeing you on the courts!

**COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS**  
 MBULLOCK@COHSF.ORG (415)346-3740

**BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

## 2nd Annual OVERDOSE PREVENTION SUMMIT

**THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2026**  
**9:00 AM - 4:00 PM**  
**100 LARKIN STREET (SAN FRANCISCO MAIN LIBRARY)**

Leaders from the Black community are hosting a day-long summit on topics related to overdose prevention, including on topics related to overdose prevention, including workshops, guest speakers, and community panelists. The goal of this summit is to discuss culturally driven strategies to reduce overdose disparities in the Black community.

**WORKSHOPS**

- Residential Treatment & Peer Support
- Black Healing & Culturally Responsive Approaches
- Family & Loved Ones Support
- Structural Drivers & Policy Solutions
- Seniors, Overdose & Social Isolation
- Sustaining the Workforce: Trauma, Burnout & Retention
- Youth Innovation Lab

Presented by Code Tenderloin in partnership with Tenderloin Housing Clinic

**COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTORS**

RAMS · UCSF · Rafiki Coalition · Booker T Washington CSC · Brothers for Change · HealthRIGHT 360 · Glide Foundation · C.A.R.E. San Francisco · Marin Community Clinic · Brothers Against Drug Deaths · 3rd Street Youth Center and Clinic · Westside Community Services · Homeless Children's Network · Recovery Education Coalition

**Deadline extended to May 15th!**

## Submit to Street Sheet for the PRIDE Issue!

Send your stories, artwork, etc. on the shared struggles of queer identity and housing insecurity.

Drop off at 280 Turk St. in SF or email [tjohnston@cohsf.org](mailto:tjohnston@cohsf.org)

# GETTING \$750 A MONTH DIDN'T END HOMELESSNESS – BUT OUR STUDY SHOWS IT STILL IMPROVED THE LIVES OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

**BENJAMIN F.  
HENWOOD**

Can giving homeless people US\$750 a month to use any way they choose help them move into long-term housing?

I am the director of the University of Southern California Homelessness Policy Research Institute. My research team, in partnership with Miracle Messages, a San Francisco social services nonprofit, set out to answer that question in a study that will be published in an upcoming peer-reviewed issue of Social Work Research.

In one of the first randomized studies of basic income for homeless people in the U.S., 103 homeless people living in California received \$750 payments every month for a year. Then we compared their housing situations with people who were homeless but did not receive this money. All study participants met the federal definition of literal homelessness. That basically means they either stayed in a homeless shelter or lived on the streets.

In 2022, when we began this study, we expected the answer to our question would be “yes.”

Read news based on evidence, not tweets or TikToks

## **BEGINNING WITH OPTIMISTIC EXPECTATIONS**

A similar experiment in Canada with 50 homeless participants showed that providing 7,500 Canadian dollars in cash as a lump sum resulted in 99 fewer days homeless over a one-year period.

In addition, Miracle Messages had already completed a similar but smaller pilot in which six of its nine participants moved into long-term housing after receiving \$500 monthly for six months.

But the results of pilots with so few participants can be misleading because the people who got money may have found housing anyway. What's more, an experiment conducted in Canada may

not directly translate to the United States – which has a weaker safety net than its northern neighbor.

## **HOMELESSNESS IS OFTEN SHORT-TERM FOR EVERYONE**

After receiving monthly payments for a year, nearly half of the participants in our study were no longer homeless.

But almost the same share of people who didn't receive the payments had also found housing.

This points to an important reality: For many Americans, homelessness – while highly destabilizing – is often temporary. And, most people who are living on the street are actively trying to become housed.

Because the payments did not substantially change the rate at which participants obtained housing, we found ourselves asking another question: If the money didn't alter housing outcomes, what did it change?

## **HOW PEOPLE SPENT THE MONEY**

Basic income programs typically let people decide how to use the funds they get. Critics of giving people money with no strings attached often worry that they will spend it, or even squander it, on so-called “temptation goods,” such as alcohol and illegal drugs.

That isn't what we observed.

The people taking part in this study overwhelmingly spent this money on basic needs, such as food, housing-related expenses, transportation and health care. Spending on alcohol, cigarettes and illegal drugs accounted for 5% of the money.

But those expenditures only tell part of the story. Cash also allowed people to meet their own immediate and personal needs.

One participant used this money to keep his car running – both for transportation to work and

as the place where he slept at night. Another bought birthday and holiday presents for his relatives. One sent money to aging parents. Another donated to a charity because it restored a sense of contribution.

Another paid down credit card debt that had been a source of stress.

While we found no evidence that the basic income payments reduced homelessness, other aspects of the participants' lives appeared to become more stable. We found no evidence that the money caused them any harm.

## **WHY THIS RESULT MAKES SENSE**

The distribution of cash assistance has been evaluated in many places, usually targeting a specific kind of community, such as unemployed individuals or families living in poverty. Studies consistently find that people spend the money on necessities and end up better off.

Homelessness presents a different challenge. Housing requires access to an available and affordable unit. In most U.S. housing markets, a \$750 monthly payment doesn't cover that month's rent. Nationally, rent for a typical one-bedroom apartment was about twice that amount in February 2026.

Programs tied directly to housing, such as rent vouchers or subsidies, may therefore have a more immediate effect on housing status.

Moving forward, I believe our results suggest that for a basic income approach to help counter homelessness, monthly payments would have to be larger, continue over a longer period – or both. The payments should, that is, be closer to covering the full cost of a month's rent in the local area. ■

*Benjamin F. Henwood is a professor of social policy and health at the University of Southern California. This piece was originally published in The Conversation under a Creative Commons license.*

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