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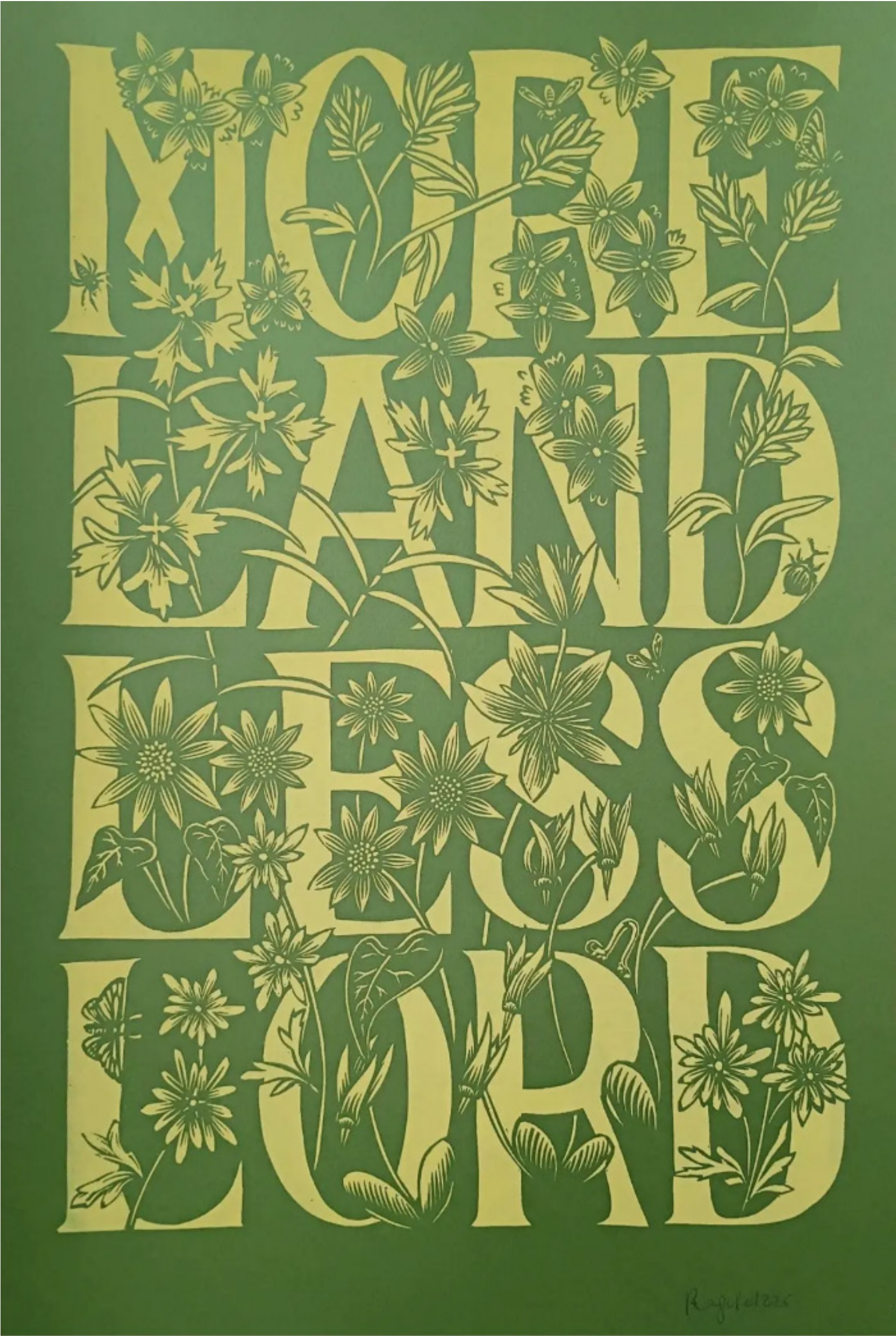
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# STREET



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|                                          |   |                                        |   |                                                                                |   |                                                               |   |                                                      |   |
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FREE CITY  
BY SABRINA K HALL



They want to audit the ambition of the block,  
Put a price tag on the pivot, put a padlock on the clock.  
They see “Free City” on a ledger line, a budget line to bleed,  
But don’t see the holy water that it pours upon the seed.  
They calculate the pennies but they never count the cost  
Of the brilliance we awaken and the spirits that get lost.

Look at me.  
They wrote the script to keep me in a cage,  
Bound by steel, then bound by stigma, trapped inside a page.  
A student-parent fighting just to keep the demons back,  
In recovery, rebuilding everything they claim we lack.  
The system said my story ended right there in the dirt,  
Just another statistic wrapped in generational hurt.  
But you can’t box in the spirit when it’s ready for the flight—  
Now I’m walking through the Ocean Campus, heavy with the light.

I don’t just take up space; I’m the one who holds the line.  
An honors student shining, making up for stolen time.  
Serving the collective, standing bold and talking back,  
Leading at the SSCCC, putting power on the track.  
From the cellblock to the senate, yeah, the glow up is profound,  
I’m a testament to what happens when you let us clear the ground.  
And the sweetest part of victory, the piece that heals the split?  
Two of my five babies are right here at CCSF with me, getting it.  
We walking the same hallways, changing history in real-time,  
Breaking every curse they laid upon our bloodline.

But now the Mayor wants to come and tamper with the well?  
Cut the funding for the people who survived the fire and hell?  
They want to balance city budgets on the backs of those who strive,  
To make it harder for a working-class community to thrive.  
If you pull the plug on Free City, let me tell you what you do:  
You aren’t just cutting dollars; you are cutting futures too.

It’s an eviction of the mind, a systematic gentrification  
Of the one place left in SF built for transformation.  
Without that free tuition, the classrooms will go cold,  
The stories of the resilient will go unshared and untold.  
You strangle out the lifeline for the worker and the dream,  
You turn a bridge of hope into a corporate, cold regime.  
The single mother trying to pivot has to put her dreams on pause,  
The brother coming home gets locked outside without a cause.  
You’ll take the ladder that we climbed and break the bottom rung,  
And silence all the anthems that our ancestors have sung.

If CCSF ain’t free, then San Francisco ain’t secure—  
You’re telling every hustler that they’re forced to stay poor.  
You tell the block its brilliance doesn’t matter if it’s broke,  
And turn a city’s promise into nothing but a joke.

We are the backbone of this county, we’re the culture, we’re the grit,  
We took the broken pieces and we resurrected it.  
Free City is the sanctuary, the catalyst, the spark,  
The thing that keeps our people moving forward through the dark.  
It belong to every elder, every youth, and every hood,  
It’s the institutional proof that our survival is good.

So tell ‘em leave the funds alone, protect the sacred space,  
Keep the doors wide open for the ones who set the pace.  
‘Cause Free City isn’t charity, it’s not a handout or a grace—  
It’s the equity we earned, and how we win the race.

Sabrina Hall in front of San Francisco City Hall at a People’s Budget action on June 18, 2026. Funding for Free City College, the program that ensures residents free tuition, was endangered until supervisors restored funding in last-minute negotiations. Photo by Zach Bollinger.

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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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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 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!



# USE YOUR EMPATHY TO FIGHT SWEEPS

APPLE CRONK

*The following is a call to action the author gave in a speech in front of San Francisco City Hall on June 9, 2026. It was part of an action against the City's practices of sweeping people who live on the streets or in vehicles because they have nowhere else to be. This piece had been edited as lightly as possible.*

So I came out of it homelessness understanding something that a lot of people in power desperately do not want the public to recognize: There is absolutely a war on the poor in this City.

I'm not speaking on that as some abstract political concept. I'm here to talk about what that actually means and the effect it has on the human beings who are targeted in this war, because I've been there, and I'll tell you this: I barely made it out alive.

So I'll do my best to describe this experience to you so you FEEL it.

And if you've never been homeless, I want you to put yourself in the shoes of a homeless person for a moment, to really FEEL in your body the desperation, the exhaustion, the fear, and then realize how fortunate you are that you aren't actually THERE, that you aren't stuck in that experience every single day. You'll be OK, I promise.

And for those of you who HAVE lived through it, I know how tempting it is to separate yourself from that part of your life once you finally make it out. There's this instinct to bury it so deep you never have to emotionally touch it again.

But right now we cannot afford to disconnect ourselves from that humanity. Because surviving the streets actually equips you with a kind of empathy that can only be carved into someone through lived experience and trauma.

But you can forget about that for a second.

Because right now what I want you to do is fully immerse yourself in imagining having to sleep outside on the cold, sometimes damp concrete every single goddamn night.

You just spent the entire day lugging around every material thing you have in life—maybe 40 or 50 pounds—all over the city trying to keep appointments, find food and access resources, all the while trying to avoid being harassed by all kinds of people: cops, people who want to rob you, assault you, or who think your existence is disgusting simply because you are visibly poor.

All while searching for somewhere safe and out of the way enough that you might be able to actually rest for a bit tonight before someone fucks with you, threatens you, or demands that you move.

You are existing in a state of prolonged exhaustion where your body never fully rests because your nervous system knows you are not safe and you must stay on high alert.

When night comes, literally ALL you want is a place where you can close your eyes for a few fucking hours without being fucked with.

Then finally you think you found somewhere relatively safe and hidden where maybe you can actually rest.

Then, before the sun even comes up, you're jolted awake by flashlights in your face and cops yelling at you to move while city workers are already grabbing your stuff.

If you're lucky, they tell you that you have ten minutes before it all gets thrown away. You just woke up. You don't even get to take a piss because if you can't get everything you have out of that spot in 10 minutes, Say goodbye, because it will be taken. Doesn't matter what it is: Your tent, clothes, blankets, ID, meds, the ashes of someone you lost.

Ten minutes.

If you think that's a lot of time, allow me to explain something to people who have never had to sleep outside in freezing temperatures: when your body has been exposed to cold all night, your hands don't just magically start functioning the second you wake up. Your fingers are stiff. Your joints ache. Your muscles lock up. Your body temperature drops while you sleep so you wake up shivering and disoriented and still freezing cold.

None of that matters during a sweep.

It doesn't matter if you're disabled, elderly, pregnant, mentally ill, injured, sick, sleep deprived, traumatized, or running on pure survival instinct after months or years outside.

You have 10 minutes till everything reduced to "debris" and thrown into the back of a fucking trash truck. This is violence. It is inhumane.

For me, it literally took being four months pregnant, soaked by rain, and shivering under a single piece of plastic stripped of everything I had before outreach offered me emergency shelter that day. And that was three years ago. Things are even worse now.



Many of the emergency hotel programs are gone. Shelter capacity has been cut. Harm reduction programs are being gutted. Permanent supportive housing is under attack. Sweeps are escalating. RV bans are escalating. People are being pushed further and further into instability while the city pours more money into policing and criminalization.

And then politicians stand in front of cameras bragging about it like they solved something.

They brag about "cleaning up the streets." Cleaning up what— human beings?

Let's be honest about what this really is: this City is not trying to end homelessness. It is trying to erase visible poverty from wealthy neighborhoods and business corridors so rich people feel more comfortable.

This entire strategy revolves around optics, around appeasing the wealthy, developers, business owners and political interests that want poor people removed from public view, by any means necessary.

So when I leave here today, I do not want people walking away feeling sad for homeless people.

I want people to be angry.

I want people paying attention.

I want people to be organizing.

Fight the sweeps. Fight the RV ban. Fight the rollback of harm reduction. Fight the criminalization of unhoused people. Demand actual housing. Demand dignity and policies rooted in care instead of punishment.

Remember that empathy I was talking about? Use it.



# THE BREAKING POINT: HOW SAN FRANCISCO REDUCED VISIBLE HOMELESSNESS WHILE MORE PEOPLE ARE DRIVEN INTO A JAIL SYSTEM CRISIS

MALIK WASHINGTON

San Francisco wants credit for reducing visible homelessness.

Its own records suggest the city may also need blame for helping fill a jail system now described by a Civil Grand Jury as overcrowded, understaffed, deteriorating, and near a “breaking point.” That is the contradiction at the heart of the city’s current public-safety narrative.

In May 2026, Mayor Daniel Lurie stood before cameras and celebrated preliminary Point-in-Time Count results showing unsheltered homelessness at its lowest level in fifteen years. City officials said encampments had fallen 44 percent compared with 2024 and that nearly 1,000 fewer people were sleeping outdoors. Those numbers generated headlines about momentum, improvement, and order restored.

What those headlines did not answer was the most obvious question.

Where did the people go?

That question is no longer rhetorical. A growing body of public records suggests that San Francisco did not merely reduce the visibility of poverty. It intensified the machinery used to move poor people out of public view: anti-camping enforcement, illegal-lodging arrests, drug-market sweeps, repeated displacement, and custodial detention. At the same time, the county jail system absorbing that pressure was itself entering crisis.

This article is not an argument against public order.

It is an argument for factual honesty.

A city that clears tents without providing enough housing, enough shelter, enough treatment, or enough long-term care has not solved homelessness. A city that removes visible suffering while increasing police contact and jail exposure has not ended a crisis. It has relocated one.

The 2026 San Francisco Civil Grand Jury found that the city’s homelessness response suffers from a profound oversight and accountability failure: the Homelessness Oversight Commission has left much of its authority unused, contracts have emphasized fiscal compliance over safety and real housing outcomes, and fragmented data systems prevent the city from tracking client needs, provider performance, or whether interventions actually lead to stability. In that vacuum, San Francisco has been able to measure activity without proving success—and to clear encampments without demonstrating that displaced people were meaningfully connected to the homelessness system the city itself created. Read alongside the Civil Grand Jury’s separate findings on the jail crisis, the result is a disturbing institutional pattern: when oversight is weak and accountability is diffuse, the city can move people out of public view and into another bureaucracy altogether, shifting homelessness from streets and sidewalks into the San Francisco County Jail rather than through

a functioning, transparent continuum of shelter, treatment, and housing.

The Street-level Optic

There is a now-familiar choreography to removal in San Francisco. A block is deemed intolerable. City crews arrive. Deputies stand nearby. Tents are cleared. Shopping carts disappear. Medications, identification, blankets, and family keepsakes are treated as disposable debris or tagged property. Traffic resumes. The block looks cleaner. The political system records the result as progress.

The city has been warned for years that this approach does not eliminate homelessness. It disperses it.

That warning did not come only from advocates resisting sweeps. It came from the internal logic of the policy itself. If San Francisco still

lacks sufficient affordable housing, still lacks adequate shelter capacity, and still struggles to provide durable treatment for addiction and severe mental illness, then fewer visible encampments can only mean a combination of displacement, concealment, institutionalization, or some combination of all three.

That is why criticism of “tent count politics” matters.

As Davis Vanguard reported during the release of the 2026 homelessness figures, Coalition on Homelessness Executive Director Jennifer Friedenbach challenged the city’s emphasis on encampment counts by noting that a tent is a piece of fabric, not a human being. That distinction is more than rhetorical. A government can reduce objects from view faster than it can stabilize the lives attached to them. It can count absence without proving recovery.

That is exactly why San Francisco’s claims of success require closer scrutiny.

The Legal Shift That Changed the Terms

The city’s enforcement turn accelerated after the U.S. Supreme Court’s June 2024 ruling in *Grants Pass v. Johnson*. The decision gave municipalities broader authority to prohibit camping on public property even where shelter access remained inadequate. It did not invent anti-homeless enforcement. It removed an important legal barrier to

expanding it. For cities already under political pressure to clear encampments, the ruling functioned as permission.

San Francisco responded accordingly.

According to data analyzed by CalMatters and later cited in city homelessness reporting, arrests and citations for illegal lodging rose from 71 in the six months before Grants Pass to 427 in the six months after it — roughly a 500 percent increase. Over the following year, more than 1,000 homeless people were arrested in San Francisco for living in public spaces.

Those numbers should have changed the entire debate.

Because once arrests and citations rise that sharply, the question is no longer whether the city is “managing public space.” The question becomes what system those arrests feed into, and at what human cost.

National research already points to the answer. In December 2025, Davis Vanguard reported on a Bail Project analysis finding that unhoused people are jailed in the United States at extraordinary rates: roughly 205,000 annually. The report found that unhoused defendants spend a median of 14 days in jail — about three times longer than the general population — and that 40 percent are booked multiple times in a single year. Jail, in other words, is not interrupting homelessness. It is often entrenching it.

San Francisco’s post-Grants Pass trajectory fits that national pattern with disturbing precision.

The Enforcement Pipeline Widens

Encampment enforcement alone does not explain the mounting strain on San Francisco’s jails.

Another major driver was the city’s intensifying drug-market crackdown.

In May 2023, officials launched the Drug Market Agency Coordination Center, or DMACC, to target open-air narcotics markets in the Tenderloin and South of Market. The public case for intervention was straightforward: fentanyl was killing people, visible drug activity had become politically combustible, and elected officials wanted results. But enforcement does not end with arrest statistics. It ends with booking, classification, medical intake, court transport, psychiatric evaluation, housing assignment, overtime, and

custody.

The Civil Grand Jury report documented what followed. Widespread overcrowding intensified as the county jail population grew by more than 30 percent since the reopening of the County Jail Annex in 2023. A jury later concluded the Annex was “increasingly overwhelmed,” now entering a “crisis.” It also found that the use of narcotics arrests had increased from 184 in 2022 to 427 in 2025. By January 2026, the system generated 600 bookings in a single year.

Those figures are not consistent with care. They do not describe the conditions they likely create for dealers, people in addiction, and people living with mental health issues and people with substance use disorders. The street survival crisis has become insurmountable. But while the city’s narrative describes the institution as increasingly overwhelmed after arrest, the county jail system is

That matter is San Francisco’s responsibility. A neutral commission to absorb new data has already determined

The Institution

On June 9, 2026, the San Francisco County Jail issued a 50-page report describing a “crisis” in visible distress

Its findings are stark. The jury documented overcrowded facilities, deteriorating infrastructure, understaffing, and reliance on overtime. It noted that, in some areas, and as with increased health and mental health needs, it found that since custody opened to 30 percent levels for years, averaging 20 per week. A spending has risen from \$29 million to more than \$40 million in FY25.

The human population

By late 2025, 1,000 incarcerated people were in open mental health care. Thirty-seven psychiatric admissions in April 2026, the jail population

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ion had reached

1,281, with roughly 85 percent held pretrial. Mission Local, reporting on the Grand Jury’s findings, described the intake operation as buckling under constant use as a detox facility while documenting crowding, infrastructure failures, and a detention system increasingly unable to meet its own legal obligations.

This is the point city leaders cannot avoid.

A surge in arrests does not disappear into paperwork. It lands somewhere. In San Francisco, it landed in an institution already described by the city’s own jurors as neglected and overburdened.

The Budget Tells the Truth

If political rhetoric obscures the consequences of enforcement, budgets often expose them. In March 2026, Mission Local reported that the Sheriff’s Department was on track to spend \$60.2 million on overtime in fiscal year 2025-26 — 46 percent above the \$41.2 million approved by the Board of Supervisors, a projected overrun of \$19 million. The Controller warned that even leaving vacancies unfilled and drawing from reserves would not be enough to close the gap. The Sheriff’s Department said it would pursue reappropriations, cost reductions, and staffing adjustments, but also acknowledged the likely consequences: slower response times, reduced access to incarcerated people, and fewer services to the community.

That is not a side detail.

It is the financial fingerprint of the policy choice.

A city willing to spend tens of millions above budget to keep an overstressed jail system functioning cannot credibly claim surprise when enforcement-driven population growth produces institutional breakdown. Nor can it claim that public order comes cheaply. The cost is simply being moved off the sidewalk and onto the books of the Sheriff’s Department.

What the Clty Counted—and What It Didn’t

San Francisco counted fewer tents.

It also counted more arrests.

It counted more citations.

It counted more people moving through booking.

It counted more people with psychiatric needs inside county

custody.

It counted more overtime.

It counted more evidence that the jail system was straining under pressures the city was helping create.

What it did not count with equal candor was the relationship between those numbers. That omission is not trivial. It is the center of the story.

San Francisco’s current narrative asks the public to evaluate homelessness policy by looking at what is no longer visible in public space. But any serious evaluation must also examine what became more visible inside public institutions — especially the institutions charged with confinement. Once that lens is applied, the city’s success story becomes much harder to sustain.

The Question That Can’t Be Evaded

A government that clears encampments while still lacking sufficient

housing cannot call the result resolution.

A government that arrests more unhoused people while its jail system

sinks deeper into crisis cannot call the result efficiency.

A government that measures cleaner sidewalks while ignoring the

downstream burden placed on overcrowded, understaffed, deteriorating

detention facilities is not telling the public the whole story.

Mayor Daniel Lurie can point to declining encampment figures.

Sheriff Paul Miyamoto can point to a jail system under extraordinary pressure.

The public should understand that those may not be separate facts. They may be part of the same policy sequence. San Francisco did not make poverty disappear. It changed where the city expected the public to stop looking.

*Malik Washington is a San Francisco-based journalist and co-founder of Destination Freedom Media Group, an independent nonprofit newsroom dedicated to accountability reporting at the intersection of civil rights, public integrity, disability justice, structural accountability within American institutions, and community survival. This piece originally appeared in the Davis Vanguard.*

# 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**

## CONTRIBUTE TO STREET SHEET

**WRITING:** Write about your experience of homelessness in San Francisco, about policies you think the City should put in place or change, your opinion on local issues, or about something newsworthy happening in your neighborhood!

**ARTWORK:** Help transform ART into ACTION by designing artwork for STREET SHEET! We especially love art that uplifts homeless people, celebrates the power of community organizing, or calls out abuses of power!

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Have a keen eye for beauty? Love capturing powerful moments at events? Have a photo of a Street Sheet vendor you’d like to share? We would love to run your photos in Street Sheet!

**VISIT [WWW.STREETSHEET.ORG/](http://WWW.STREETSHEET.ORG/) SUBMIT-YOUR-WRITING/ OR BRING SUBMISSIONS TO 280 TURK STREET**

**\*PIECES ASSIGNED BY THE EDITOR MAY OFFER PAYMENT, ASK FOR DETAILS!\***



# REMEMBERING TERRY MESSMAN

a lifelong advocate for peace, justice and the people whose voices are often left unheard

STREET SPIRIT STAFF

Terry Messman, the founding editor of Street Spirit, passed away on May 10, 2026 at the age of 74. His family and friends are planning a celebration of life for him later this year. We will share details when a date is confirmed.

Terry created the first issue of Street Spirit in six weeks. It was mid-January 1995 when Sally Hindman—a Quaker and homeless advocate in Oakland—approached him with the idea of using his gifts as a writer to create a street newspaper for the East Bay. The need felt urgent.

“Nearly every homeless advocate in the Bay Area was running into the same brick wall, namely the anti-homeless bias of the mainstream media,” he later wrote.

By March 1995, the inaugural issue had hit the streets, and the first cohort of Street Spirit vendors began selling it to commuters and community members across the East Bay.

Terry spent the next 23 years as Editor-in-Chief, producing at least 278 issues that covered a vast range of social and political problems. He interviewed local artists and civil rights leaders—among them Country Joe McDonald, Reverend Phil Lawson and David Hartsough. He published artwork and poetry by countless unhoused people whose work had never before been shared. And his extensive investigative reporting on malpractice at East Bay Hospital, a psychiatric facility in Richmond,

forced the hospital to close its doors in 1997.

It is impossible to fully summarize Terry’s work, or to quantify his impact on the readers and contributors of Street Spirit. It is equally hard to imagine how he sustained more than two decades of filling this newspaper every month, largely as a one-man operation. But central to Terry’s legacy is his spirit. Terry was a prophetic voice in the world of homeless journalism. He was deeply guided by faith, and possessed a clarity of thought that made his writing sharp enough to get under your skin and stay a while.

“It always seemed extraordinarily strange that simply advocating for mercy and food and decent housing for the poor had become such a radical notion in America,” he wrote. “During my Street Spirit years, the Beatitudes constantly echoed in my mind. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice. The Beatitudes were the blueprint for my activism.”

In the years since Terry retired, many of his own words have echoed in our minds and allowed us to carry the torch of hope that has sustained this project now for 31 years.

“Blessed are the acts of mercy, solidarity and resistance,” he wrote. Blessed are those who give a damn about their brothers and sisters on the street.”



# ONE MEAL A DAY

## CALIFORNIA’S UNSPOKEN FOOD CRISIS

KENYOTA

Living on a fixed income in one of the many Single Room Occupancies (SROs), Senior Assisted Living Units, or in a navigation center can prove challenging. At no time has that challenge become more manifest than recently with passage of H.R. 1—Donald Trump’s “One Big, Beautiful Act.” That act contained wording that eliminated the federal government’s responsibility for providing 100% of the costs for CalFresh recipients. As of June 1, 2026, the federal government reduced its monthly allotment to single CalFresh recipients from \$298 to \$146—slightly less than half from before. And for those individuals who depend on CalFresh—particularly, seniors, children, unemployed and homeless people—they must survive on less than \$5 per day.

This raises so many questions. Why does the passage of a federal budget bill so greatly affect my ability to provide enough food to live on? Why would anyone reasonably believe that such a reduction would be for the greater good? Why are so many unaware of such a widespread crisis? And more importantly, what steps should our elected officials take to solve this problem? As a CalFresh recipient dependent on its assistance, these questions have tremendous importance and it is my hope that this article will ignite the curiosity of others receiving CalFresh assistance and become a sounding bell for a call to action to become active in addressing their elected officials that the need for action is immediately imperative.

After more than a decade of chronic homelessness throughout the Bay Area, I have used City resources to obtain and maintain stable housing in San Francisco. After being housed for more than three years, I’ve accomplished goals which would have been both daunting and improbable while unhoused. Disability has made me unable to work, so I survive on CalFresh benefits and General Assistance. When I heard about H.R. 1 moving through Congress, I went to a community meeting and immediately became concerned about its provisions. The work

requirements, the elimination of exemptions to previously protected recipients, and the possibility of the state being unable to make up for the shortfall prompted me to inform people of the ramifications of H.R. 1 becoming law.

Shortly thereafter, Congress passed the bill after several weeks of a government shutdown and Donald Trump’s threats to starve Californians by withholding federal funds to Democrat-led states. San Francisco lawmakers took this threat seriously enough to allow distribution of gift cards in the amount of one month’s worth of CalFresh benefits. However, no one said a thing about the amount of benefits being reduced. The media stayed quiet on the issue; officeholders and political candidates never mentioned it, leaving thousands of people shocked when two-thirds of our benefits disappeared overnight. After working out the math, I found that I need to survive on \$5 a day. My inability to work added to this crisis, and what a crisis it has become!

Since my benefits were slashed, I have had to live on approximately one prepared meal a day. To make things worse, Trump’s trade tariffs caused such a spike in food prices that my \$146 was swallowed in one trip to the store. This food shortage has lowered my energy levels and left me vulnerable to health problems. It also left me believing that politicians are avoiding the issue: I haven’t heard candidates say anything in gubernatorial primary debates on how the state could address the needs of CalFresh recipients. The state legislature has also been slow to act.

This should not be! A 50% reduction in benefits reducing people to just one meal a day is outrageous and un-American. Contact your local electeds and pressure them to enact legislation that will put more food on the table for California families. At the same time, let’s urge them to create a platform for solutions to end this food crisis—and prevent future crises from recurring.



# THE COST OF HOMELESSNESS: SUBSIDIES AND SOCIAL HOUSING

ZACH BOLINGER

In the final two weeks of June, organizations, nonprofits, activists and concerned citizens assembled at City Hall, largely under the banner of The People's Budget Coalition, to demand, well, a budget for the people, not a budget for the billionaires, speculators, and landlords. This coalition lobbied for a variety of interests, including funding for arts programs, women's safety and rights organizations, maintaining Free City College, and disabled and senior citizen services. Mine was in housing and homeless services and programs—particular subsidy programs that house homeless people and keep them housed.

It is well-documented that homelessness is primarily driven up by the cost of living, debunking “haters” claims of mental illness and drug addiction. The corporate YIMBYs would have us believe a housing shortage is the culprit, and that if we “just build more housing” through deregulation and dezoning—does that sound like Ronald Reagan?—market rates can fall as much as a WHOPPING 15%.

Well, let's look at some simple math: According to Zillow.com, as of July 5, 2026, Average 2-bedroom apartment cost per month: \$5,261/month  
Per year -  $\$5,261 \times 12 = \$63,132/\text{year}$

Suppose we have mother of two children in need of a two-bedroom apartment, working at San Francisco's minimum wage:  
Annual pre-tax income:  $\$19.61 \times 40 \text{ hours} \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$40,788/\text{year}$   
Monthly, that is:  $\$3,399/\text{month}$

Before taxes, she'll come up short by \$1,862 per month just for rent! Now, consider other expenses and bills which she definitely has. An average rent reduction of UP TO 15% is not going to be nearly enough, no matter what the YIMBYs say.

Using the 30% of income measure that landlords demand to lease a unit, the rent would need to come down to \$1019.70 per month—an 81% reduction—or else her earnings would need to increase to \$109.61 per hour! So, despite their good-sounding intentions, the corporate YIMBYs are wrong, too.

The cost of living isn't just expensive for so many workers; it is unafford-

able. No wonder we see such a large rise in people “choosing” to live in RVs and cars.

Turning back to the City budget, San Francisco is in a shortfall yet in this year's budget have included 800 rental subsidies. However, all of these are only short-term, not long-term. They gave us more than the 500 subsidies we originally asked for, but less in terms of quality.

The Large Vehicle Program in San Francisco, which is dedicated to people who dwell in RVs, has Rapid Rehousing (RRH) as a crucial element. RRH is a form of a short-term, two-year rental subsidy which starts the RVer at zero or very low out-of-pocket cost for rent and increases over the two-year duration to terminate with the RVer paying the full rent price.

Given the math above, this is a problem many RVers instinctively and immediately recognize: This is a very large goal that would be difficult to achieve. Science bears this out.

Researchers at Vanderbilt University compared families who navigated the homelessness system on their own with those who received long-term rental subsidies, short-term subsidies and transitional housing. Between those who navigated the system on their own, used a short-term subsidy, or entered into transitional housing, researchers found little differences in instances of domestic violence and family separation. The study's financial calculations show that long-term subsidies cost 9% more than a person navigating on their own and 20% more than short-term subsidies and transitional housing.

However, two outcomes massively improved for families with long-term housing subsidies. Compared with the other three methods, long-term subsidies are over 200% more effective for housing stability and reduction in instances of domestic violence. The study shows that at least 42% of people with a short-term subsidy return to homelessness in some form.

How do costs for shelter and/or re-entry into a short-term program or a resident's unsubsidized approach pencil out in

a City budget when people fall back into homelessness for not meeting a short-term program's requirements on time? What does that say about the elected officials' stated goals?

While we can conclude that we should be using long-term subsidies to get people out of homelessness and into stability, one method can permanently achieve this objective: Social housing.

Shanti Singh, legislative director at the statewide renters' advocacy organization Tenants Together, and who has worked to pass legislation on social housing, such as Senate Bill 555 in 2023, defines social housing as housing that is “permanently affordable, permanently decommodified [i.e. free from speculation], accessible to all, especially to those who need it most, and with meaningful tenant governance.”

In other words, we can make housing cheaper and accessible for everyone if we remove the financial incentive and give control over housing to tenants and the general population rather than to landlords and private developers. People can remain housed in social housing because one way it can be structured is with rents being charged based on a person's ability to pay, i.e., as a percentage of income, rather than a flat price set by a landlord that a tenant has to qualify for.

It's a difficult goal to achieve, Singh noted. “Decision-makers are resistant to make any moves to add or implement social housing even when a city like San Francisco has funds in store for that use,” she told Street Sheet.

“Whenever anything like this comes up, whether in city councils or on the ballot, the real estate industry leaps in to curb it and stop it,” Singh added. “They don't want any competition.”

In 2020, San Francisco passed Proposition I, which is a modest tax of 5.5% or 6% on real estate sales of over \$10 million with the intent—but not dedication, Singh added—to pay for affordable housing and housing stability. So far, out of the \$500 million that has been raised, only \$64 million was spent. In order to get these funds spent the way they're supposed to, Singh said, “We need leadership to build out a system and we need to dedicate those funds to social housing ... People don't trust the government, and we need organization to hold it accountable.”

So, maybe what we can do is organize similarly to the successful Prop. C campaign in 2018, which enacted taxes on large-revenue businesses and top executive pay, and dedicated those funds to housing and services for homeless people. We could have a similar dedication of money for social housing.

We could take some cues from The People's Budget Coalition on holding the government accountable to its constituents. Hundreds of people showed up at City Hall to protest against proposed cuts to important services and projects and succeeded in restoring most of the funding they demanded. Consider the unity and turnout we can form around an issue that directly impacts each and every one of us on a daily basis.

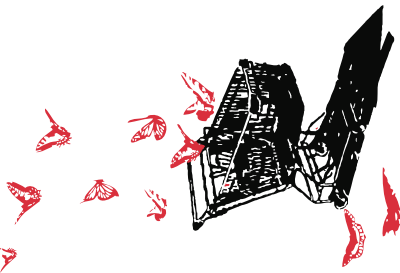
Unidos vencimos. United, we win!





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TAKE OUR SURVEY

# FIGHT FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

SOMCAN wants to hear from immigrants, people of color, and low-income residents about their housing needs. Take our survey to help guide *truly* affordable housing solutions in San Francisco.



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