



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES
OF CALIFORNIA

February 4, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, First Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Proposed 2020-21 State Budget Item on Homelessness

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), an association of thirty-seven rural California counties, I write to you to express our appreciation for your Administration's focus on the crisis of homelessness in California. Your January proposed Budget, along with your executive actions, demonstrate a commitment to tackling this issue, and we would like to engage with your office regarding the next steps. We recognize that addressing the homeless crisis in California is a state and local government shared responsibility. It should be noted that while homelessness is most often thought of in context of California largest metropolitan areas, it affects all regions of the state. For example, 20 percent of public-school students in Calaveras County are experiencing homelessness, as compared to 4 percent of public-school students experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County. An effective plan to address homelessness must be sensitive to the differing needs of disparate communities, but must not leave any part of the state behind.

Your proposal to dedicate \$750 million in flexible funds to proactively prevent homelessness by keeping at-risk Californians housed is truly innovative. Although the administrative details for these funds remain to be worked out, the approach of using flexible funds to provide critical and timely aid to a large number of people offers to change the conversation regarding real, scalable solutions to this crisis. Additionally, you have recommended that the Mental Health Service Act (MHSA) be updated to reflect the changing needs of Californians experiencing mental health challenges. MHSA funding is integral to county behavioral health operations, allowing jurisdictions to provide needed services to individuals struggling with mental illness, many of which are at-risk for becoming homeless. RCRC supports modernizing MHSA to empower counties to address the specific challenges of their respective communities through greater local flexibility, while continuing appropriate, and reliable funding to counties. RCRC stands

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ready to assist your newly-established Behavioral Health Task Force in discussing viable options to meet these goals.

Lastly, in addition to the work your Administration has commenced on homelessness, your Council of Regional Homeless Advisors (Council) has released a report with recommendations aimed at reducing the number of unsheltered individuals. The Council's report includes suggestions we believe deserve further discussion, such as the California Environmental Quality Act streamlining for specific types of development projects, new affordable housing funding options, expanding eligibility for existing intervention programs, and an enforceable state and local government obligation to reduce homelessness. Further, in order to address challenges housing individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, we support a dialog around substantive reforms to the Lanterman-Petris-Short Act, as well as expanding availability of inpatient psychiatric beds and easing placement requirements.

RCRC appreciates the holistic approach in any conversation on homelessness along with your willingness to include all the stakeholders in constructing a strategic plan to end the homeless crisis throughout the state. We believe that the remedy to homelessness is not one grand solution, but a strategy leveraging a variety of tools aimed at short, intermediate, and long-term goals – many of which can be targeted to the appropriate regions of the state. Most of all, each strategy and tool must be made possible through coordination of state and local efforts. RCRC welcomes an opportunity to further discuss how rural counties can be part of the Administration's strategy to address this crisis.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



TRACY RHINE
Legislative Advocate

cc: Jason Elliott, Senior Counselor to the Governor for Housing & Homelessness,
Office of the Governor
Mark Tollefson, Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Office of the Governor
Anthony Williams, Legislative Affairs Secretary, Office of the Governor
Keely Martin Bosler, Director, California Department of Finance
Mark Ghaly MD, MPH, Secretary, California Health & Human Services Agency

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James Hacker, Consultant, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
Christopher Woods, Budget Director, Office of Senate President Pro Tempore
Joe Parra, Policy Consultant, Office of Senate Republican Caucus
Jason Sisney, Consultant, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
Nicole Vazquez, Consultant, Office of Assembly Budget Committee
Cyndi Hillery, Budget Director, Office of Assembly Republican Caucus