

ATTACHMENT

For Item

#15

Tuesday,
AUGUST 27, 2024

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION RECEIVED BY THE
CLERK OF THE BOARD



August 1, 2024

County of San Diego Board of Supervisors
County Administration Center
1600 Pacific Highway, Room 335
Third Floor, Board of Supervisors
San Diego, CA 92101

Subject: Call to Respond to Grants Pass Ruling, Governor's Executive Order N-1-24

Dear County of San Diego Board of Supervisors:

The Coalition for Equitable Development (CED) condemns Gov. Newsom's executive order, which adds to the inhumanity of the Supreme Court *Grants Pass v. Johnson* ruling, which bans encampments and makes it even more difficult for state and local agencies to effectively connect our unhoused residents with shelter, homes, and services. Rather than criminalizing unhoused residents, Gov. Newsom should reverse the executive order and focus on partnering with unhoused residents to ensure that jurisdictions plan for their fair share of housing, incentivize and fund the development and preservation of affordable homes, and expand access to supportive services. Today, CED calls on you to recommit to the evidence-based solutions outlined in the draft County of San Diego Homeless Solutions and Prevention Action Plan, which result in upstream homelessness prevention, permanent homes, supportive services, and the full inclusion of unhoused residents in our community.

Like you, we often hear from community members who are uncomfortable seeing people living in poverty on the streets. Many hold misinformed beliefs that we can ticket, fine, arrest, and institutionalize our way out of homelessness, although research routinely shows that criminalizing homelessness is ineffective and costly because it exacerbates the trauma and physical and mental health conditions people experience while doing nothing to alleviate poverty

or produce affordable homes. We applaud the draft County plan for acknowledging that homelessness is “primarily a systemic issue” and for advocating population health, cross-system solutions, such as permanent housing, low-barrier emergency housing and shelter, and person-centered, trauma-informed approaches that respond to upstream factors and prevent homelessness.

Moving forward, CED will measure your leadership based on your record of rejecting attempts to further displace and segregate people experiencing poverty and homelessness from community life and voting instead for evidence-based solutions that respect the dignity of our unhoused neighbors and allow all residents to be healthy, safe and thriving.

Establish a Regional Housing Pipeline

As property values have skyrocketed, San Diegans with limited financial resources have been displaced from once affordable homes and neighborhoods into their vehicles or onto the streets. At the same time, our elected leaders have consistently failed to appropriately plan, fund, and build an adequate supply of affordable homes, emergency shelters and transitional housing, supportive housing, or recovery residences to address these losses. CED calls on you to take the following actions to respond to the diverse housing needs of San Diegans experiencing homelessness:

- Establish a regional system for tracking the development of different types of temporary and permanent housing to understand how well San Diego policies work to address housing demand.
- Set development targets for the equitable siting of affordable and permanent supportive housing in each community planning area.
- Proactively plan for housing needs in the unincorporated County by establishing a long-term land banking strategy coupled with dedicated funding sources to create a sustainable public housing pipeline.

Redirect Funding to Housing and Services

As elected leaders, you have an obligation to educate residents that they should not blame and stigmatize people experiencing homelessness for meeting their basic needs via unsafe, unhealthy and undignified means. For more than a decade, elected leaders have failed to work together to provide a sufficient number of publicly accessible drinking water, toilets, handwashing facilities and other basic resources to support basic hygiene. CED calls on you to take the following actions to provide safe, dignified spaces for people experiencing homelessness to meet their most basic human needs:

- Increase 24/7 public access to basic sanitation, especially in high population areas.
- Designate centrally-located, sanitary, and accessible 24/7 safe camping and safe parking sites in each jurisdiction with adequate capacity for people experiencing homelessness to safely live and store their belongings. Sites should include electric hookups, adequate lighting, drinking water, flush toilets, showers and shade structures.

- Reallocate funding and responsibility for all homelessness outreach and services from law enforcement to an office of homeless solutions staffed with case management professionals with training and experience in low-barrier, trauma-informed, harm reduction approaches.
- Prioritize the development of innovative emergency shelter and permanent housing solutions that reflect best practices in lower-cost, sustainable, climate-resilient construction and make effective use of limited financial resources.

Repeal Local Ordinances that Criminalize Poverty

With severely limited options for shelter and homes, unhoused San Diegans are more likely to come into contact with law enforcement, where many report being treated with disrespect. When they decline shelter—even for valid reasons—they are at risk of enforcement action, which further erodes trust. CED calls on you to prioritize individual dignity and safety by repealing quality of life ordinances and eliminating unnecessary contact with law enforcement as is the norm with San Diegans who are housed:

- Eliminate local ordinances that undermine the AB 1418 prohibition on adopting or implementing crime-free housing programs, which discriminate against individuals with a history of law enforcement contact even if they have not been convicted and found to present a risk to the property or other tenants.
- Unless and until an adequate supply of homes is available, allow unhoused San Diegans to protect themselves from the elements and secure their belongings without exacerbating trauma or criminalizing encroachment, camping or sitting/sleeping in public, or vehicle habitation.

By choosing to join the Grants Pass’ case, you undermined the draft County plan and signaled that San Diegans experiencing homelessness do not have a right to be treated as respected members of our community. You have a choice. You can double down on the harmful and coercive use of law enforcement, or you can invest in long-term, evidence-based solutions that address previous leadership failures, which forced thousands of San Diegans to live in their cars and on our streets. CED is prepared to support any elected leader who prioritizes affordable homes, services, and basic sanitation for our unhoused neighbors so that you can restore the quality of life for all San Diegans.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

Erin Tsurumoto Grassi, Associate Director
Alliance San Diego

Ramla Sahid, Executive Director
Partnership for the Advancement of New
Americans

Merlynn Watanabe, Director of Community
Engagement and Communications
Think Dignity

Melissa Peterman, Executive Director
Townspeople

Tama Becker-Varano, Lead Organizer
Change Begins With ME (Indivisible)

Dinora Reyna-Gutierrez, Executive Director
San Diego Organizing Project

Roslyn Cassidy, National Organizing
Director
AF3IRM

Ricardo Flores, Executive Director
LISC

Rosa Olascoaga, Vice President of
Community Development and Policy
City Heights Community Development

jean-huy tran, Executive Director
Viet Voices

Susan Baldwin, AICP
Retired City/Regional Planner, Affordable
Housing Advocate

Miguel-Angel Mendez M., Organizer/Union
Rep.
SD Tenants Union

The Coalition for Equitable Development (CED) represents diverse organizations from good government, civil rights, ethnic-based direct service, and social justice advocacy groups. We are committed to pursuing bold action to advance policy solutions and public investments that center environmentally sustainable, equitable development and the creation and preservation of socioeconomically and culturally diverse communities.