March 22, 2019

Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson
Chair, Senate Committee on Judiciary
State Capitol, Room 2187
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for Senate Bill 329 (Mitchell)

Dear Chair Jackson,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, we write in strong support of Senate Bill 329 (SB 329), which would prohibit discrimination by landlords based on tenants’ source of income for rental payments. The passage of SB 329 would ensure that critical tools to combat housing insecurity and homelessness, such as federally-funded Housing Choice Vouchers or Rapid Re-Housing vouchers, are as effective as possible.

LAHSA is a joint-powers authority of the City and County of Los Angeles and serves as the lead agency in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care (LA CoC). LAHSA is responsible for funding a significant portion of the interim housing, permanent housing, and supportive services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County.

On any given night, 52,765 people experience homelessness in Los Angeles County, while the State of California is home to approximately 130,000 people experiencing homelessness. Rental subsidies are a key tool to combatting homelessness and providing stability to families that would otherwise be vulnerable to or at-risk of falling into homelessness.

Programs like the federally-funded Housing Choice Voucher program (Section 8), administered by local housing authorities, provides stability to approximately 90,000 households across Los Angeles County. In addition, LAHSA administers Rapid Re-Housing programs, which pair time-limited financial assistance with intensive case management; this program is currently assisting about 8,000 households currently experiencing homelessness to find and retain stable housing.

The effectiveness of these resources is strained by a competitive housing market. The utilization rate for new Section 8 vouchers in Los Angeles County has fallen to about 52%, meaning many households are unable to find landlords or units that are willing to accept this resource. In addition, many households with Rapid Re-Housing assistance are facing long wait times in order to utilize this assistance; families waited a mean number of 92 days between enrolling in a Rapid Re-Housing program and entering housing in the third quarter of FY 18 in Los Angeles County. Non-profit service providers report that landlords rejecting Rapid Re-Housing or other subsidies is a common problem curtailing the ability to effectively use these tools.

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For these reasons, LAHSA’s Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness, which recently analyzed the causes of racial inequity in the homeless services delivery system and issued a series of policy recommendations, strongly recommended pursuit of source of income discrimination protections as a needed step to address homelessness in Los Angeles County.

A recent study found that local source of income discrimination ordinances are an effective tool to boost voucher and subsidy utilization.\(^2\) For this reason, a number of California jurisdictions have taken the step to implement these ordinances, including the cities of Berkeley, San Diego, and Woodland, among others. Numerous states, including Massachusetts, Oklahoma, and Oregon have implemented statewide source of income ordinances to increase utilization of vouchers and subsidies. The City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles are both in the process of developing ordinances to address this issue.

Source of income discrimination remains a widespread challenge throughout the state. Instead of creating a patchwork of cities where vouchers and subsidies can be used without discrimination, the state should advance SB 329, and ensure that subsidies and vouchers can be deployed effectively throughout California. This would not only assist Californians at risk of and experiencing homelessness, but better leverage federal resources, including Section 8 and federally-funded Rapid Re-Housing to do so.

As the Legislature moves forward with an ordinance to address source of income discrimination, we recommend considering the need for strong enforcement of such an ordinance. Local jurisdictions will need additional administrative capacity to ensure landlords do not continue such discrimination, and mechanisms for enforcement that are sufficiently well-calibrated to ensure broad compliance throughout the state.

We appreciate the legislature’s leadership on this issue and would welcome the opportunity to work together to implement SB 329 to ensure that all Californians have access to safe and affordable housing.

Sincerely,

Kelli Bernard
Chair, LAHSA Commission

Peter Lynn
Executive Director

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