March 22, 2019

Senator Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Committee on Public Safety
State Capitol, Room 2059
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for Senate Bill 282 (Beall)

Dear Chair Skinner,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), we write in support of Senate Bill (SB) 282, which would create a Supportive Housing program for people on parole with mental illness experiencing or at-risk of homelessness upon re-entry. 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.

LAHSA’s mission is to combat homelessness and ensure everyone in the LA CoC has access to safe and stable housing. As such, we support legislation that recognizes the inextricable link between housing instability, homelessness, and recidivism. Following release from incarceration, people on parole typically experience complications accessing housing – making employment, sobriety, and improved health difficult to attain. As a result, people on parole are nearly 10 times more likely than the general public to experience homelessness.\(^1\) Additionally, homeless people on parole are seven times more likely to recidivate than those who are housed, creating a revolving door of homelessness and incarceration that is difficult to end. When people on parole suffer from a persistent mental illness, which currently affects about one in three inmates in the Los Angeles County jails,\(^2\) the results are even more dire.

SB 282 recognizes this and responds by proposing to repeal the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s (CDCR) Integrated Services for Mentally Ill Parolees (ISMIP) program and in its place, enact the Supportive Housing Program for Persons on Parole (Program). Currently, funds have been allocated to ISMIP for supportive-transitional housing and mental health supportive services but at present, ISMIP uses less than 10% of its funding on housing.\(^3\) Recent research has found that the ISMIP program was not significantly reducing recidivism.\(^4\)

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As a result of the California Public Safety Realignment Act and Propositions 47 and 57, California is seeing higher numbers of low-level offenders existing prison annually, many of them into Los Angeles County. According to data from the 2018 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, 60% of the individuals experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County have had some type of system involvement in their lifetime, while 20% have experienced both mental health system and justice system involvement. Consequently, it is imperative that our systems of care are equipped with the proper resources to support successful reintegration. SB 282 moves us closer to this goal by transferring ISMIP funds and ensuring those funds support permanent supportive housing and wraparound services for those that would benefit from these services. Permanent supportive housing is an essential tool for successful reentry, as it has been previously correlated with significant reductions in recidivism.\(^5\)

This new program would require grant applicants to use a Housing First approach, which has been associated with enabling individuals with a mental illness experiencing homelessness to find and maintain stable housing for an extended amount of time.\(^6\) It would also more effectively use State funds by leveraging existing Medi-Cal programs to pay for mental and behavioral health treatment for eligible participants, thereby providing more State funding (about 50% to 90% more) for housing and housing services. These housing services may include rental assistance, landlord incentives, permanent supportive housing navigation, and services to promote housing stability. Homeless service providers will provide services that are easily accessible to participants and may include case management, discharge planning, linkages to workforce development programs, and transportation assistance.

We thank you for leadership surrounding homelessness and housing needs in our communities as well as for looking at creative ways to ensure successful reintegration for those who are formerly incarcerated. We look forward to continuing to work with the Legislature on fixes to address homelessness in California.

Sincerely,

Kelli Bernard
Chair, LAHSA Commission

Peter Lynn
Executive Director
