April 26, 2019

The Honorable Maxine Waters
Chair, House Financial Services Committee
2221 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Support for H.R. 1856 – Waters (CA-43)

Dear Chair Waters,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), we write in support of H.R. 1856, a bill which would invest more than $13 billion over five years to combat homelessness. 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 and works to ensure safe and stable housing for all. On any given night, there are over 550,000 individuals experiencing homelessness in the United States,¹ and Los Angeles County alone is home to almost 10% of that population.²

H.R. 1856 recognizes the importance of housing in ending homelessness. In Los Angeles County, renters need to earn $46.15 per hour to afford the median monthly asking rent of $2,400, which is more than four times the local minimum wage.³ With the increasing amount of cost-burdened and severely cost-burdened households in Los Angeles County, along with the deficit of over 568,000 affordable units,⁴ there is a clear need for federally funded safety-net resources to prevent very low- and extremely low-income households from falling into homelessness.

H.R. 1856 would provide funding to public housing agencies, based on need, for additional tenant-based housing vouchers which can only be used for people or households who are experiencing homelessness. Housing vouchers have long been used to protect families, children, and adults from homelessness and housing instability. The bill would also invest $1 billion every year in the Housing Trust Fund, which is the only federal housing program exclusively focused on providing states with resources targeted to serve the lowest-income families and is used to help build, preserve, rehabilitate, and operate affordable housing.

This bill would provide funding for permanent supportive housing (PSH), an evidence-based intervention for people with high acuity needs that pairs a long-term affordable unit with wraparound supportive services. PSH is associated with positive health impacts for those

experiencing chronic homelessness, especially for those with a mental health and/or substance use diagnoses. PSH is also correlated with significant reductions in recidivism for persons experiencing homelessness who are exiting the justice system. Few investments make our communities safer and more stable than PSH, which brings a long-term housing solution for those with the greatest needs.

Robust investments now will be both beneficial and cost-effective for our nation over the long-term. Reducing the number of individuals experiencing homelessness will result in lower public costs for shelter, justice and child welfare system involvement, physical health care, emergency room visits, and behavioral health care. According to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, one permanent supportive housing unit saves the public around $20,000 to $30,000 annually per person. By providing more supportive housing units using evidence-based interventions, H.R. 1856 is legislation that would support not only the people who are experiencing homelessness, but the surrounding community as well.

H.R. 1856 addresses key structural determinants of homelessness and as such, robust and quality administrative support is needed. For this reason, we recommend increasing the 5% administrative cap to 10% to match other federal funding streams, such as the Continuum of Care program. A low administrative cap hinders the effectiveness of administrative agencies to carry out this work, especially small agencies that do not have additional resources to draw upon.

We support H.R. 1856 as it is a comprehensive approach to addressing the most pressing needs in the homeless services system, including supporting chronically homeless individuals, increasing funding for affordable housing, and focusing on outreach and care coordination. We thank you for considering this bold response to the homelessness crisis.

Sincerely,

Kelli Bernard
Chair, LAHSA Commission

Peter Lynn
Executive Director

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