May 24, 2019

Senate President pro Tempore Toni Atkins
State Capitol, Room 205
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SUPPORT for Senate Bill 369 (Hertzberg)

Dear President pro Tempore Atkins,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), we write in support of Senate Bill 369 (Hertzberg), which defines safe parking in California and eases access to the state’s repair assistance program for vehicle owners participating in safe parking.

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.

As Californians struggle to find affordable housing, more people, including families with children, are turning to their cars for shelter. On any given night, close to 16,000 people live in their cars, vans, campers, and RVs throughout the Los Angeles Continuum of Care. Many cars are saddled with fines and fees that compound the longer they stay on the street; nearly all face high risks of citations and vehicle tows that can push them deeper into homelessness. Very few have places where they can safely stay the night.

In response, Los Angeles County and communities statewide have launched safe parking programs, which give people a place to safely and legally park their vehicles overnight and an opportunity to access services that assist in resolving their homelessness. As these programs gain traction, SB 369 begins the process of standardizing safe parking as a homelessness intervention and additionally, eases program access for vehicle owners that are otherwise barred due to repair or smog check needs.

The costs of owning a vehicle can be high for people experiencing homelessness who may lack a stable source of income. A routine smog check can have a potentially devastating downstream effect for these vehicle owners. The failure to clear an emissions test prevents a vehicle owner from renewing or remedying a lapsed vehicle registration, which in turn, makes those experiencing homelessness ineligible to participate in safe parking. While state assistance programs can off-load some of these maintenance costs, vehicle owners seeking homeless services are often ineligible due to vehicle registration requirements. SB 369 would mitigate some of these costs by removing select requirements for repair assistance for safe parking participants, enabling them to access the program and remedy violations that can jeopardize their ability to keep their vehicle.

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1 Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. (2018.) “Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count.”
SB 369 recognizes that safe parking programs are a valuable service pathway for the large number of Californians living in their vehicles, all of whom face distinct barriers that can further prolong their homelessness. As cities and municipalities increasingly explore safe parking models, it is critical that programs that can potentially reduce barriers for people living in their vehicles are available for those who need it the most as they work toward the goal of permanent housing. We appreciate your leadership on this issue and look forward to continuing to work with the State Legislature to reduce and end homelessness in California.

Sincerely,

Sarah Dusseault
Vice Chair, LAHSA Commission

Peter Lynn
Executive Director