June 11, 2019

The Honorable Janice Hahn
Chair, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
Hall of Administration
500 W. Temple Street, Room 822
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Support for Item No. 43, June 11, 2019 Agenda: “Source of Income Protection” Ordinance

Dear Chair Hahn,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), we write to you in strong support of the Los Angeles County Development Authority’s (LACDA) proposed “Source of Income Protection” ordinance, as presented in Item No. 43, June 11, 2019 Agenda. LAHSA’s mission is to combat homelessness and ensure everyone in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care has access to safe and stable housing. As such, we support this ordinance as it would provide needed protections for critical housing interventions, such as Housing Choice Vouchers and Rapid Re-Housing Vouchers.

On any given night, Los Angeles County is home to over 58,000 people experiencing homelessness, an increase of about 12% from 2018. Though Los Angeles County’s homeless response system is housing more people than ever before, more people are falling into homelessness due to the severe affordability crisis in our County.\(^1\) In 2018, the homeless services system was able to connect 21,631 individuals with various housing placements, yet the overall number of people experiencing homelessness continued to rise.\(^2\) To make real progress in reducing homelessness, we must prevent homelessness before people reach the street. Programs such as the federally-funded Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program are essential in helping catch these individuals before they fall. In Los Angeles County, HCVs administered by a number of different public housing authorities bring stability to around 90,000 very low-income families by providing a subsidy to find market-rate housing.

Subsidized rents are also critical in lifting people experiencing homelessness into housing. Programs such as Rapid Re-Housing pair time-limited financial assistance with intensive case management, currently assisting about 8,000 households experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County.

Both of these programs are essential in assisting people who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. Unfortunately, utilization of new HCVs in Los Angeles County has become more challenging than ever before. For example, in 2018, overall voucher utilization through the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles dropped to about 53%, meaning over half of their federally-funded vouchers went unused. Further, according to a 2018 study by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), landlords in Los Angeles

\(^2\) Ibid.
County denied applicants seeking to utilize their HCVs at a high rate, with 76% of applications with a voucher being denied. Moreover, landlords were more likely to deny vouchers in low-poverty areas than in high-poverty areas, limiting the effectiveness of vouchers in accomplishing the goal of deconcentrating poverty and segregation and giving low-income households the chance to live in opportunity-rich neighborhoods.³

Many using Rapid Re-Housing assistance are facing long wait times in order to make use of their assistance – waiting on average 92 days during the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2018 between enrollment in a Rapid Re-Housing program and entering housing in Los Angeles County. Non-profit service providers frequently report that landlords are rejecting Rapid Re-Housing vouchers or other subsidies, making it very difficult for their clients to find stable housing.

The expansion of source of income discrimination protections was one of the recommendations born out of LAHSA’s Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness. Discrimination based on one’s source of income was seen by the Committee as a major barrier to housing for those experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, especially Black and African American individuals.

Passing a strong source of income protection ordinance would not be a panacea for the affordable housing or homelessness crisis in Los Angeles County, but it would substantially help in ensuring Los Angeles County is leveraging both federal and local resources to the greatest extent possible. A recent study from HUD indicated that enacting a source of income protection ordinance boosts voucher or subsidy acceptance significantly.⁴ Numerous jurisdictions across California have implemented similar ordinances as well, such as the cities of Berkeley, San Diego, and Santa Monica. States including Oklahoma and Oregon have also recognized the importance of protections to increase the utilization of vouchers and subsidies and have also begun implementation of source of income laws.

We applaud the Board of Supervisors for their attention to this pressing matter and for looking to alternative solutions to increasing the utilization of subsidized housing and homelessness interventions. For these reasons, we strongly encourage passage of this “Source of Income Protection” ordinance.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Peter Lynn
Executive Director

⁴ Ibid.