September 12, 2019

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for Senate Bill 575 (Bradford)

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), I write in support of Senate Bill 575 (Bradford), which extends eligibility for Cal Grant awards to incarcerated students pursuing post-secondary education.

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.

A strong body of evidence suggests homelessness—both here in Los Angeles County and across the state—is a symptom of larger systemic inequities. Common socio-economic issues such as income inequality, discrimination, and instability of employment, paired with skyrocketing housing costs, have left more Angelenos at-risk for homelessness than ever before.¹ Research finds that people who are formerly incarcerated face particularly high barriers to housing and employment long after incarceration, increasing their risk of recidivism and homelessness. Nationwide, incarcerated people are ten times more likely to experience homelessness² and struggle with an unemployment rate of over 27% - or nearly five times the rate of the general public.³

By removing barriers to education access, the state can support the rehabilitation of formerly incarcerated people and take a step forward in stemming the flow of Californians falling into homelessness. Studies indicate that formerly incarcerated people entering a college program reduce their risk of recidivism by 43%⁴ and increase their chances of employment by almost five percent.⁵ Yet, people who are incarcerated are largely disqualified from receiving state and federal financial aid for higher education, including the state’s Cal Grant program. This requires students to independently finance their studies and

rly on low wages in the penal system averaging between $0.08 and $0.95 an hour\(^6\) and any support they may have garnered in the community to pay for it. SB 575 simply removes eligibility restrictions for Cal Grant funding and gives people who are incarcerated equal access to one stable source of funding for their education and a real opportunity at genuine re-entry and reintegration into their communities and the broader economy.\(^7\)

Through this bill, the state has an opportunity to invest in a preventative framework that directly targets poverty, recidivism, and—by extension—homelessness by supporting the rehabilitation of those incarcerated through our criminal justice system. In 2018, the LAHSA Commission convened the *Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness* to explore the systemic drivers behind the overrepresentation of Black individuals in the county’s homeless population. In its findings, the committee stressed the importance of providing adequate supportive services to incarcerated individuals, which would not only contribute to reducing rates of homelessness across the county, but also mitigate the devastating socio-economic effects of over-incarceration on the Black community. In 2017, nearly 64% of unsheltered Black individuals experiencing homelessness in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care reported involvement with the criminal justice system.\(^8\) Among the Committee’s recommendations are support for efforts to remove barriers to public benefits and financial aid for people exiting incarceration, actions that are critical for advancing racial equity across our system and reducing homelessness in the state.

By taking a proactive approach, we can create a pathway for students to use the skills and opportunities they attained through accessing higher education to subvert the factors that contribute to poverty and subsequently reduce their risk of homelessness. LAHSA appreciates the work the state has done to address gaps in homelessness prevention. We look forward to continued collaborations with our state leadership to advance supportive services and reduce barriers for our most vulnerable communities.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Peter Lynn
Executive Director

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