September 12, 2019

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

Re: Support for Assembly Bill 1197 (Santiago)

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, I write in support of Assembly Bill 1197 (Santiago), which streamlines the development of select interim and supportive housing projects in the City of Los Angeles. If signed into law, this bill would speed up the process for placing the city’s hardest-to-house residents in needed interim and supportive housing.

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.

Three years ago, voters in the City of Los Angeles made a formidable commitment to ending homelessness by passing Proposition HHH, a $1.2 billion bond measure to build approximately 10,000 units of new supportive housing for the city’s most vulnerable residents. Supportive housing pairs affordable, permanent housing with services that address the distinct, often complex, needs of people experiencing homelessness. Above all, it’s evidence-based, cost-effective, and sustainable, effectively ending homelessness for those with the highest acuity-needs. To date, just over 5,300 Proposition HHH-backed housing units are in the city’s pipeline, ready to permanently house thousands of residents, including transition aged-youth, seniors, veterans, and people with physical and mental health needs.

Yet, as we wait for these resources to scale, demand continues to outpace the supply of permanent and interim housing resources available to the homeless services system. According to the 2019 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, the City of Los Angeles saw a 16% increase in homelessness from the year before. The increase is even higher for people living on our streets; just over 22,000 people are unsheltered, a 19% jump from 2018. To address the crisis, communities need service-rich housing options, from supportive units to interim housing beds that swiftly get people off the street and linked to permanent housing.

AB 1197 would accelerate these resources by granting select supportive and interim housing projects in the city a temporary exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In addition to local support from Proposition HHH and the County of Los Angeles’ Measure H, we appreciate the state’s leadership in allocating dedicated funding for housing and homelessness each of the past two years, recognizing the acute need for permanent and emergency solutions across the state. In the City of Los Angeles, the need for interim housing is dire. On any given night, nearly 75% of people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles sleep on sidewalks, in tents and vehicles, and other places not meant for habitation.
The rate is even higher for those that are seen as the hardest-to-serve; 9 in 10 individuals who are chronically homeless are unsheltered and without the services interim housing can offer. When paired with intensive case management and other supportive services, shelter can be an entryway into permanent housing, while offering refuge against the severe health and safety hazards people routinely face while living on the street.

Though homelessness is increasingly visible on our streets and more people are entering our system than ever before, the development of needed facilities is hindered by a burdensome process that subverts the recent commitments made by local voters and the State Legislature. Through a CEQA exemption, AB 1197 ensures that local and state investments in homelessness are used effectively and as intended, to bring housing closer and quicker to those with the highest needs.

Given the limited resources we have on hand, we must continue to identify and reduce barriers to using these housing dollars as effectively as possible. AB 1197, by temporarily extending CEQA exemptions for voter and state-backed projects, takes an important step in that direction. We appreciate your leadership in committing housing resources for people experiencing homelessness and look forward to continuing to work with you and the State Legislature to address housing instability and homelessness in our communities.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Heidi Marston
Chief Program Officer