January 24, 2020

Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon
State Capitol, Room 219
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SUPPORT for Senate Constitutional Amendment 1 (Allen-Wiener)

Dear Speaker Rendon,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Continuum of Care (LA CoC), the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority writes in support of Senate Constitutional Amendment 1 (Allen-Wiener), which proposes to California voters an amendment repealing Article 34 from the California Constitution. The stipulations of Article 34 requiring voters to approve publicly-funded “low-income” housing create a stigmatizing and onerous standard for development, one that is applied only to housing occupied by low-income people and no other type of residential development.

LAHSA is a joint powers authority of the City and County of Los Angeles, serving as the lead agency in the 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.

California needs far more affordable housing units to meet the needs of low-income households. Many Angelenos are facing homelessness for the very first time, as they struggle to find housing that is affordable; the 2019 point-in-time homeless count identified a total of 58,936 people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County.¹ Among unsheltered adults, a quarter became homeless for the first time in 2018.²

In Los Angeles County, 516,946 affordable units are necessary to meet the needs of low-income and extremely low-income households.³ In Los Angeles County, 555,105 households spend more than 50% of their income on rent and nearly 90% of these households are very low-income or extremely low-income,⁴ often one emergency or missed paycheck away from losing their housing and falling into homelessness. Partially as a result of this shortage of affordable housing, the number of people experiencing homelessness increased in the City of Los Angeles by 16% and the County of Los Angeles by 12% in 2019, despite our systems of care housing more people than ever before.⁵ Affordable housing can serve as a critical safety net for vulnerable people that are at risk of homelessness as such, continuing to produce and preserve affordable units should be a critical policy priority.

² Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
Due to provisions in Article 34 of the California State Constitution, the City of Los Angeles is limited to 3,500 publicly funded low-income housing units in each of the City’s 15 council districts; this threshold was approved by voters in 2008. Such requirements hinder the City’s ability to respond to the homelessness crisis. In order to develop additional units, the City would be required to hold an additional election, despite voters already approving a $1.2 billion bond to build supportive housing projects in 2016. This situation exemplifies the undue burdens Article 34 imposes on cities and counties across California, as they work to address the urgent need for affordable housing.

Furthermore, Article 34’s enactment reflects a history of racial discrimination that continues to perpetuate disparities in homelessness today. LAHSA’s Ad Hoc Committee Report on Black People Experiencing Homelessness found that Black people make up over a third of those experiencing homelessness in LA County, yet only 9% of its overall population. A deep legacy of structural racism and housing discrimination continues to exacerbate these inequities, and Article 34 is a piece of this painful legacy. At a time when it was legal to deny housing on the basis of race, Article 34’s passage created additional barriers by allowing voters to block the production of publicly funded low-income housing. At present, Article 34 can continue to be used as a tool to prevent equitable patterns of development across the region from moving forward.

If passed by the legislature, California voters would have the opportunity to repeal Article 34 in the 2020 statewide election. If repealed, California jurisdictions would have greater ability to invest in more housing options for low-income households. It would ensure that cities can fully take advantage of opportunities meant to increase the production of affordable housing, such as the State Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program that was expanded under the 2019-2020 Budget Act and additional funding made available through the Multifamily Housing Program after the passage of 2018’s Proposition 1. SCA-1 is a step forward in continuing to reduce housing instability and homelessness. Your office’s leadership on affordable housing and homelessness is appreciated, and we look forward to continuing to work with the State Legislature to reduce and end homelessness in California.

Sincerely,

Sarah Dusseauault
Chair, LAHSA Commission

Heidi Marston
Interim Executive Director

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