January 24, 2020

Senator Scott Wiener
Chair, Senate Housing Committee
State Capitol Room 2290
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for Assembly Bill 1279 (Bloom)

Dear Chair Wiener,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Continuum of Care (LA CoC), the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) writes in support of Assembly Bill 1279 (Bloom), which streamlines the development of mixed-income and affordable housing projects and encourages greater density in select high-resource neighborhoods.

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

Statewide, the homelessness crisis is largely driven by the shortage of affordable housing options for California renters. Los Angeles County continues to face a deficit of 516,945 affordable housing units for renters making less than 50 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI).\(^1\) At the same time, more than 10,000 existing units, the vast majority of which house older adults and families, are at risk of losing their affordability due to expiring covenants and market-rate conversions that permanently take limited units off the affordable housing market.\(^2\) If passed, AB 1279 helps alleviate the state’s housing crisis by authorizing by-right approvals for projects in high-resources areas that meet robust affordability requirements, while protecting communities vulnerable to gentrification and displacement.

As we wait for newly funded affordable housing units to come online, the weight of the housing crisis continues to fall heaviest on those who can afford it the least. In Los Angeles County, 540,000 low-income households spend at least half their income on housing costs alone, 74 percent of whom make less than 30 percent AMI — or $27,050 for a family of four.\(^3\) These are households that are forced to make difficult decisions between housing and other essential needs, and are often just one missed paycheck, one emergency expense away from falling into homelessness. We see the effects on housing instability reflected in the growth of the region’s homelessness population, tempering the record gains we have made in placing people into permanent housing. According to the 2019 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, 58,936

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\(^1\) California Housing Partnership. (June 2019). Los Angeles County Affordable Housing Outcomes Report.

\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Ibid.
people are experiencing homelessness on a given night, up 12 percent from the previous year.\textsuperscript{4} In the LA CoC, 23 percent of people had their first bout of homelessness in the past year, largely due to economic factors.\textsuperscript{5}

AB 1279 offers a systemic approach to the affordability crisis by focusing on growth in resource-rich neighborhoods, while addressing some of the underlying drivers of poverty and homelessness crisis including residential segregation and displacement. If passed, this bill would upend zoning barriers that have historically precluded low-income, communities of color from housing and economic opportunity pivotal to upward mobility. A wide body of research finds that residential segregation has negative impacts on childhood well-being in a number of indicators including health, educational attainment, and social behavior. In the same vein, research finds that moving young children to higher-opportunity neighborhoods has profound effects on childhood development, including higher chances of attending college and increasing earnings potential in the future.\textsuperscript{6}

Today, the legacy of exclusionary housing policies is reflected, in part, in the overrepresentation of communities of color in national poverty rates and in our homeless populations. In 2018, the LAHSA Commission convened the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness to identify the systemic drivers behind the overrepresentation of Black people in the homeless population, including housing policies that have intentionally kept communities of color out of high-opportunity neighborhoods. At present, Black/African Americans make up 33 percent of people experiencing homelessness in LA County, while comprising just 9 percent of the general population. Among the Committee's recommendations include advocacy for more robust enforcement of Fair Housing provisions and housing policies, akin to this bill, that address the shortage in affordable housing options while considering the needs of disenfranchised communities.

To effectively address homelessness, we must continue to preserve and build affordable housing while also working to dismantle systemic barriers to opportunities and mobility. We appreciate your leadership on this issue and strongly urge your support for this bill.

Sincerely,

Sarah Dusseault
Chair, LAHSA Commission

Heidi Marston
Interim Executive Director


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.