



LOS ANGELES

# Daily Journal

## Budget hints at less focus on homelessness

**By Adam Murray**

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Voters in Los Angeles spoke loudly and clearly last November. Seventy-seven percent of city voters supported a \$1.2 billion bond to provide permanent supportive housing and other facilities to address homelessness. In March, 69 percent of county voters supported a 10-year, quarter-cent sales tax that will provide \$355 million annually to prevent and end homelessness. Angelenos want an all hands on deck approach to homelessness - more housing, more services, more focus on ending the homeless crisis.

Unfortunately, not all of L.A.'s elected officials are listening. The city is using the recent ballot measures as an excuse to scale back its commitment to tackle homelessness. The city's proposed budget suggests decreasing its General Fund commitment to homelessness by over \$28 million because replacement funding "may be available from Prop HHH proceeds" and "[t]he reduction in funding is expected to be offset by an increase in funding ... from Measure H." Proposed cuts run the gamut from defunding emergency shelters and programs to help homeless youth and survivors of domestic violence, to defunding

access centers, toilets and showers.

Rather than owning up to these cuts, the draft city budget disingenuously purports to increase city funding for homelessness. Many news reports have accepted the city's sleight of hand, but don't be confused by a smoke and mirrors budget that uses \$87 million of Measure HHH funding to paper over a \$28 million cut in city General Fund funding.

The city of Los Angeles is not the only local government considering using Measures H and HHH as an excuse to renege on previous commitments. In October 2015, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted to substantially increase funding for affordable housing. Recently, some at the county have proposed using Measure H funds to cover one-third of this obligation. This is not OK.

At both the city and the county level, the voters have spoken. The voters want more housing and services, not a financial shell game that fails to fully address our homeless crisis.

As we hold our elected officials accountable to the peoples' wishes, it is important to commend them for their recent

efforts to meet the challenge of homelessness. Over the past two years, the city and county of Los Angeles have provided significant leadership on homelessness - passing comprehensive homelessness strategies and increasing both city and county funding by over \$100 million to implement these strategies.

These efforts are especially important because these are challenging times to be poor in America. Policies from the new administration in Washington are already making the housing crisis worse in L.A. Since the election, proposed cuts to the corporate tax rates have led to a 15 percent drop in the availability of low income housing tax credit funding for affordable housing. Things are likely to get even worse. We can expect to see cuts to the Section 8 voucher program, reduced enforcement of housing discrimination laws, scaled back public benefits programs, and further decreases to federal funding for affordable housing construction.

To meet these reductions in programs and gaps in coverage, many local nonprofit organizations are increasing their staffing and services. My own organization in L.A., Inner City Law Center, for example, will grow by 35 percent this

## Budget hints at less focus on homelessness—continued

year, adding staff so we can help more families in imminent danger of becoming homeless stay in their homes and help more homeless veterans and others with significant disabilities access public benefits and move off the streets. Additionally, we are ramping up our advocacy for public policies that promote more affordable housing construction, and launching a new effort to engage more Angelenos in the solutions to homelessness.

We know what it takes to end homelessness. We know raising incomes and building more affordable housing works. We know rental subsidies and legal assistance keeps families in their homes. We know intervening early makes it

easier to get people back into housing. We know permanent supportive housing is the solution to ending chronic homelessness.

The voters have said they want us to bring these successful programs to scale. The voters have said they want to tackle homelessness with resources commensurate to the scope of the challenge. We need our elected officials at every level to do everything they can to support and supplement this effort. Measure HHH and Measure H funds were intended to expand programs and services. They were never intended to be used as an excuse to supplant funding for existing homeless services and housing.

Over 10,000 people in L.A. become homeless each month. Over 167,000 experience homelessness over the course of the year. Fourteen percent of Los Angeles County voters have personally experienced homelessness. Now is not the time to retreat. As the people overwhelmingly said in November and March, now is the time to do more, not less.

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