

Date: March 13, 2023

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

Subject: **Letter to the State regarding the Homelessness Emergency**

A critical component of the City Council action to proclaim a local emergency on homelessness on January 10, 2023, was to request that the Governor and State Legislature declare a state of emergency to combat homelessness and direct resources to support the efforts of cities in California addressing this problem.

In response to this direction, the City has sent the attached letter to the state regarding the homelessness emergency. Included in the letter are the following priority asks:

- Declare a statewide emergency on homelessness and coordinate state resources in support of the City's emergency operations;
- Expand local mental and behavioral health resources in Long Beach, including access to funding and services;
- Make distribution of state homeless funding more equitable for Long Beach through sources like the Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention program; and,
- Expand state efforts to incentivize and produce affordable housing and shelter in the Gateway Cities region.

We have initiated conversations with the City's legislative delegation on these priorities and will continue to follow-up with state leaders to advance the City's requests in support of the emergency proclamation.

If you have any questions, please contact Tyler Bonanno-Curley, Manager of Government Affairs, at (562) 570-5715 or Tyler.Curley@longbeach.gov.

ATTACHMENT

CC: DAWN MCINTOSH, CITY ATTORNEY
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MAYOR **REX RICHARDSON**

March 9, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, 9th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: City of Long Beach's Priorities Regarding the Emergency on Homelessness

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of the City of Long Beach, thank you for your leadership and commitment to prioritizing homelessness as one of the state's top issues. As you know, the City of Long Beach has declared an emergency on homelessness as have our regional partners, the City and County of Los Angeles. Despite historic investments in prevention, housing, outreach, and other solutions, we have continued to see people fall into homelessness in recent years, which has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are committed to working with you and the Legislature to provide the resources needed to house people experiencing homelessness, and we would like to request additional support in the key areas outlined below.

Declare a statewide emergency on homelessness and coordinate emergency resources

The City has dedicated significant resources to address homelessness in Long Beach. In recent years, the City has opened a year-round bridge housing facility with 125 beds; partnered with the County to secure and operate three hotels through the first two rounds of Project Homekey; purchased a 78-unit hotel and more than 30 modular shelter units; and plans to apply for additional housing opportunities through Round 3 of Project Homekey. The City also implemented three Restorative Engagement to Achieve Collective Health (REACH) teams focused on physical and mental health outreach, increasing the number of outreach and call center service coordination staff from four to 27, while also expanding hours for weekend outreach. Despite these and other efforts, the City's 2022 point-in-time count found that approximately 3,300 people are experiencing homelessness in Long Beach at any given point in time.

Following the declarations of emergency on homelessness in Long Beach and Los Angeles, it is essential that the state also declare an emergency to help coordinate and provide resources to jurisdictions that have activated emergency operations. The City set up an incident command structure, modeled after our COVID-19 pandemic response, to bring together the relevant staff and City leadership to expedite actions that will reduce homelessness. The City requests that the state assign staff to participate in our emergency operations to ensure strong communication and alignment across local, regional, and statewide efforts, and that the state allocate funding to

localities like Long Beach for emergency expenses, as would be done in the case of a natural disaster.

Furthermore, jurisdictions that have declared an emergency to address homelessness should receive additional streamlining from state requirements, similar to what the state has done for Project Homekey. The Long Beach emergency declaration expedites the permitting and review process for a variety of development projects related to addressing homelessness, including but not limited to emergency shelters, transitional housing, supportive housing, affordable housing, social service facilities, personal storage facilities, safe parking sites, and mental healthcare facilities. The declaration suspends portions of the Long Beach Municipal Code relating to zoning and conditional use permits. The City provides further procurement and labor process relief to assure these necessary projects will be completed in an expedited manner. The City recommends the state pass legislation reinforcing that these local emergency actions are allowable under state law in efforts to reduce homelessness. While the City is confident in the legality and necessity of its emergency measures, clarity from the state is needed to prevent any opportunistic or extraneous litigation or challenges.

Expand local mental and behavioral health resources in Long Beach

Of the nearly 3,300 people experiencing homelessness in Long Beach, roughly 31 percent are affected by a chronic health condition, 29 percent are affected by substance misuse, and 37 percent are affected by a serious mental illness. Moreover, since 2020, the number of people in Long Beach reporting a severe mental illness has more than doubled to 1,200 people, and those reporting a substance use disorder has increased by 70 percent to 950 people. Though 37 percent of those experiencing homelessness are reported to have a severe mental illness, the City estimates that half of those experiencing homelessness in Long Beach need mental health support, as the traumas of experiencing homelessness are understood to contribute to and exacerbate mental health conditions.

Currently, the administration and location of mental health and substance use services falls within Los Angeles County's jurisdiction, rather than the City's Health & Human Services Department, creating disconnected systems of care for those needing mental health services. The Mental Health Services Act provides resources to the County for assessment, therapy, medication, case management, crisis intervention, and other supportive services. And yet, despite the overwhelming need for mental health services in Long Beach, the County has very few mental health residential beds, step-down beds, and recuperative care services available in our city. We have consistently asked the County to increase resources and access to these opportunities locally, but we have not seen significant movement in this direction.

Given the lack of local mental health resources, in 2021, the City began the process to research options to bring more localization of mental health resources to leverage existing County-supported efforts within the City. We seek state support to revise the Mental Health Services Act to allow for the provision of direct resources to local city health jurisdictions and large cities for mental health services, and we ask that the state support allowing for local decisionmaking and

resourcing of mental health services in cities through increased funding for prevention, mental health treatment, the expansion of wellness facilities, and the development of more residential, recuperative care, and step-down beds in partnership with counties.

Make distribution of state homeless funding more equitable for Long Beach

Along with the Big City Mayors coalition, Long Beach has been a strong advocate for ongoing funding to address homelessness through the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Program. We appreciate that your FY 23-24 Budget proposal includes another \$1 billion for HHAP. Supporting HHAP, as well as other critical programs like Project Homekey and the Encampment Resolution Grant, clearly demonstrates your resolve to meaningfully reduce homelessness across California. And with that, the City is dedicated to utilizing these funds to continue building out critically needed infrastructure to address unsheltered homelessness, such as expanding outreach, bridge housing and emergency shelter supports, and more. We recommend changes in statute to expand access to unused funds through these and other critical programs, allowing more opportunities for Continuums of Care (CoC) and large cities to compete for underspent funds.

The state's allocation methodology for HHAP, however, is inequitable to Long Beach and some other large cities, and we ask that you explore ways to provide equitable funding to cities. Because Long Beach is both a large city and has its own CoC, we receive significantly less large city HHAP funding than others. For the HHAP Round 4 large city category, for example, some cities will receive well over \$5,000 (with one city getting upwards of \$85,000) per person experiencing homelessness, whereas Long Beach expects to receive just over \$2,600 per person experiencing homelessness. Over the previous cycles of the Homeless Emergency Aid Program and HHAP, the City has lost out on nearly \$25 million in funding based on the current formula when compared to other large cities with similar population size and demographics. Because we stepped up as a City to establish a local CoC within the County system, the HHAP methodology should reward our efforts instead of putting Long Beach at a disadvantage relative to others.

State requirements for expanding affordable housing and shelter in the region

Homelessness and a lack of affordable housing are regional challenges, and resources for housing and shelter are not equitably distributed throughout Los Angeles County. In recent years, one in every two affordable units built in the Gateway Cities region has been built in Long Beach, while our City represents only one-quarter of the region's population. Long Beach has supported the development of 530 new interim housing units since 2020 and nearly 600 new affordable housing units over the past five years, with another 760 affordable units in the development pipeline. The City also adopted inclusionary zoning and tenant assistance policies to further support housing stability.

Meanwhile, there are nearly 2,300 people experiencing homelessness in the remaining Gateway Cities who are unsheltered, and additional resources and housing are needed throughout the region. Daily visits to Long Beach's Multi-Service Center have gone up by nearly 100 percent since

2020; and based on homeless count data, nearly half of individuals come from outside the City to seek services in Long Beach. We request that the state further incentivize and encourage the development of additional shelter space and affordable housing in areas of greatest need across the Gateway Cities, to more equitably distribute resources in the region. The state should also fund the development of accessory dwelling units that will be leased to people with housing choice vouchers, to ensure long-term affordability of units that are being developed.

Thank you for your leadership on this important matter. We look forward to strengthening our partnership to identify solutions to homelessness in the region. If you have any questions, please contact Tyler Bonanno-Curley, Manager of Government, at tyler.curley@longbeach.gov.

Sincerely,



Mayor Rex Richardson
City of Long Beach

cc: Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary, California Health & Human Services Agency
Lourdes M. Castro Ramirez, Secretary, Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency
Nancy Ward, Director, Office of Emergency Services
The Honorable Jim Wood, Chair, Assembly Health Committee
The Honorable Corey Jackson, Chair, Assembly Human Services Committee
The Honorable Buffy Wicks, Chair Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee
The Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman, Chair, Senate Health Committee
The Honorable Marie Alvarado-Gil, Chair, Senate Human Services Committee
The Honorable Scott D. Wiener, Chair, Senate Housing Committee
The Honorable Lena Gonzalez, State Senate, 33rd District
The Honorable Mike Gipson, State Assembly, 65th District
The Honorable Josh Lowenthal, State Assembly, 69th District