

# CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

STATE CAPITOL  
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA  
95814

January 7, 2022

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
1021 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Request for an Extraordinary Session of the Legislature

Dear Governor Newsom:

Homelessness in California has been a visible and vexing public policy problem since the late 1970s, with endless state, local, and federal efforts and countless tax dollars spent to fix it. From the 2018-19 fiscal year to the current fiscal year, California has spent \$10.1 billion in total funds on homelessness, yet homelessness in California grows worse than ever. One recent federal study showed that nearly half (47 percent) of all unsheltered homeless persons in the United States are in California, almost four times our state's share of the total US population. Four of the five cities with the highest rates of unsheltered homelessness are in California (San Francisco, Los Angeles, Santa Rosa, and San Jose), and the other is Seattle. Despite spending billions of tax dollars to fix this very visible problem, it is only getting worse. We can, and must, do better.

Even now, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Californians see homeless persons suffering in plain view every day. Two years ago, in January 2020, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) estimated California had 161,548 homeless persons on any given day. There is little reason to believe that number has significantly improved, but many reasons to think it has only grown larger. Yet, in the face of this growing problem throughout our state, California's approach has been to focus on the most expensive and difficult policy, "Housing First," buying underused hotels and motels and building astonishingly expensive new units, but not at a rate near enough to significantly improve this problem.

California needs to look for deep and broad reform, beyond the limited, shortsighted, and ultimately cruel focus on homelessness as primarily, if not exclusively, an economic problem. Another recent study shows there is now a generational cycle of homelessness, with 78% struggling with mental illness, substance use disorder, and/or physical disability, a percentage much higher than what is often reported in the news media. California will not be able to make meaningful improvements in homelessness until we are serious about addressing the need for mental health, drug, and alcohol treatment for homeless persons.

We believe it is an urgent matter of public health and safety for you to call an Extraordinary Session of the Legislature to address the range of homelessness issues confronting California today. The Extraordinary Session should be designated to address the following four broad categories:

- Assessment and Accountability of Homelessness Programs: California and its local governments have spent tremendous amounts of money on homelessness, over several decades, with little evidence of success or even accountability. We cannot fix this record of failure until we begin to thoroughly assess the problems afflicting California’s homeless population, and we act to improve accountability for fixing California’s disconnected and dysfunctional programs.
- Focus and Improvement of Homelessness Programs: The State Auditor points out California continues to “struggle to coordinate its efforts to address homelessness,” and it “continues to lack a comprehensive understanding of its spending to address homelessness, the specific services the programs provide, or the individuals who receive those services.” This condition is an unacceptable disservice to all Californians, but most especially California’s homeless persons.
- Prioritize New Funds on Building Critical Infrastructure for Homelessness Programs: California counties face a deep shortage of inpatient psychiatric bed capacity, currently at 21 beds per 100,000 people, one of the lowest inpatient psychiatric bed capacities in the nation. California also faces a severe shortage in its mental health workforce, with an estimated 41% fewer psychiatrists than needed. We must close this mental health treatment bed and workforce deficit in order to properly care for the tens of thousands of homeless persons in need.
- Targeted Prevention & Emergency Services: Although every person comes to homelessness in their own way, we know certain groups – former foster youth, veterans, those suffering from substance use or mental health disorders, domestic violence victims, and the formerly incarcerated – are at far greater risk than the general population. However, California’s prevention programs, to the degree they exist, show little evidence of success or accountability.

Californians are telling us they want to help our homeless population. Abandoning persons to deteriorate on the streets with mental health and substance abuse problems without hope of treatment while waiting for housing that almost never happens is no longer an option. We need to recognize our expensive but ineffective solutions to date are not working.

Therefore, we urge you to act now and call an Extraordinary Session of the Legislature. California’s homelessness crisis will only grow worse without strong, focused action now.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Patricia Bates  
36<sup>th</sup> Senate District



Janet Nguyen  
72<sup>nd</sup> Assembly District



Scott Wilk  
Senate Republican Leader  
21<sup>st</sup> Senate District



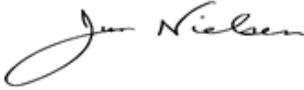
Marie Waldron  
Assembly Republican Leader  
75<sup>th</sup> Assembly District



Brian Dahle  
1<sup>st</sup> Senate District



Megan Dahle  
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Jim Nielsen  
4<sup>th</sup> Senate District



James Gallagher  
3<sup>rd</sup> Assembly District



Shannon Grove  
16<sup>th</sup> Senate District



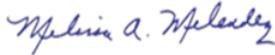
Frank Bigelow  
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Randy Voepel  
71<sup>st</sup> Assembly District

Laurie Davies  
73<sup>rd</sup> Assembly District

cc: The Honorable Toni Atkins, Senate President pro Tempore  
The Honorable Anthony Rendon, Assembly Speaker