



February 17, 2021

Public Comment Re: Agenda Item 14, Resolution to Approve SGVCOG White Paper On LAHSA Reform

Dear Councilmembers,

We applaud South Pasadena's engagement in the San Gabriel Valley Council of Government's (SGVCOG) to take a more proactive approach to addressing homelessness in our community. The White Paper contains excellent suggestions for local interventions and stakeholder participation. **But, we urge you to vote against the resolution affirming the SGVCOG's White Paper until it reflects realignment away from policing unhoused individuals.**

The SGVCOG White Paper on Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) Reform complains that a major impediment to effective local implementation of Measure H funds in San Gabriel Valley cities is its prohibition on using funds for law enforcement. It contends that small cities lack alternatives to law enforcement to engage people experiencing homelessness, and calls on LAHSA to lift the ban on using Measure H funding for law enforcement activities engaging people experiencing homelessness.

Allocating Measure H funding to law enforcement for outreach to unhoused people in the community is the wrong approach. The purpose of outreach is to develop trust, a connection to community, and hopefully in time, a bridge to appropriate services. The purpose of policing—enforcement of laws—is at odds with those goals.

In South Pasadena, officers are tasked with addressing both neighbors' complaints about people who are unhoused and the humanitarian needs of the unhoused. South Pasadena's homeless plan says that 20% of the calls to dispatch are regarding unhoused individuals—a staggering percentage given that the 2020 LAHSA point-in-time survey identified only 15 unhoused individuals in our city. Officers notify unhoused individuals that they need to take down camps and remove personal items from public spaces. They request installation of dividers on bus benches to prevent unhoused individuals from sleeping there when housed neighbors complain. Officers are also tasked with connecting unhoused people to resources. They distribute blankets and masks.

Unsheltered people are far likelier to be cited and arrested for a range of reasons, not least of which are laws that criminalize homelessness. *See, e.g., SPMC §§ 24.02(c)(26) & (27).* Many unhoused people have had traumatic experiences with law enforcement. Some unhoused people report discomfort speaking to law enforcement because other unhoused people suspect they are reporting illegal activity, sowing distrust among the local unhoused community.

Moreover, SPPD already receives substantial funding for “non-enforcement outreach,” including Measure H money.<sup>1</sup> Its programs have not produced the outcomes envisioned by the City’s 2018 Plan to Combat and Prevent Homelessness.<sup>2</sup>

We recognize and appreciate the humanity demonstrated by SPPD officers engaged in this work, like Lieutenant Shannon Robledo. However, SPPD has been given an impossible task. Law enforcement officers do not have access to the Coordinated Entry System, which would allow them to enter unhoused individuals into the system, locate an individual’s caseworker, and identify available services and housing. As shared in the Measure H reports, “a real challenge in getting new program enrollees [is] to accept shelter and services.” This process “requires building a relationship and trust.” Even with the best intentions, SPPD’s effectiveness will be limited, for the reasons explained above.

The White Paper argues that small cities lack infrastructure to recruit and hire non-law enforcement personnel, like licensed clinical social workers, to conduct outreach and connect unhoused people with services. Yet if more resources are directed to law enforcement, it will make it that much harder to use licensed social workers to address homelessness.

Policing people experiencing homelessness, under the guise of outreach, is now a publicly recognized cruel and outdated practice of excluding specific populations of people from the city. In the past, as a sundown town, South Pasadena used the same methods of policing to remove non-whites from the city after dark and exclude non-whites from the community. Policing the unhoused is an extension of that antiquated form of policing. According to SGVCOG, 75% of people experiencing homelessness in our region are people of color.

The city is poised to pass a resolution apologizing for its past as a sundown town on February 17. The city must do more than pass a resolution. It must take affirmative steps to remove sundown town practices from policing. Deputizing law enforcement to address unhoused people living in our community is out of sync with the city’s goal of being inclusive and anti-racist.

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<sup>1</sup> The Measure H grant does not allocate funding specifically for SPPD but does assign SPPD the role of overseeing and implementing the grant for South Pasadena. As part of the city’s Measure H grant, South Pasadena committed \$25,000 in matching funds for SPPD in the role as Homeless Coordinator. SPPD is entitled to reimbursement from the County for overtime hours worked by officers during HOST engagements. County of Los Angeles, Chief Executive Office, Expansion of Sheriff’s Homeless Services Outreach Teams, June 29, 2020, <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/146384.pdf>. The SGVCOG grant allocates \$20,000 to “non-law enforcement outreach” and an additional \$20,000 to public outreach programming by SPPD over the course of about 18 months.

<sup>2</sup> About five months into the SGVCOG grant, the only programming that has occurred is the expenditure of \$978.31 to pay for the port-a-potty and handwashing station at the South Pasadena Library—services that were already established prior to this grant as the city’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. About nine months into the Measure H grant, only about 10 to 13 individuals in the cities of Arcadia and South Pasadena have retained, been placed into, or exited homelessness to permanent housing. It is unclear from the grant reporting whether these counts cover different individuals or individuals who were part of different programs during the same grant reporting cycle. South Pasadena reported two (2) individuals were matched to apartments during the nine-month period, but it has not yet been reported whether these two individuals did move into their apartments at this time.

Signed,



1. Alexander Aquino
2. Ahilan Arulanantham
3. Kiera Atkinson
4. Anne Bagasao
5. Isabel Barbera
6. Matthew Barbato
7. Katrina Bleckley
8. Felicie Borredon
9. Laurent Borredon
10. David Carbonara
11. Angel Castillo
12. Christine Chin
13. Isabel Chin
14. Caroline Creaghead
15. Frederick Eberhardt
16. Richard Elbaum
17. Owen Ellickson
18. Riko Enomoto
19. Sarah Erlich
20. Caitlyn FERENCE-Saunders
21. Tzung-lin Fu
22. Robert Grant
23. Sue Grant
24. William Hoadley-Brill
25. Laboni Hoq
26. Mariana Huerta Jones
27. Che Hurley
28. Nancy Hurley
29. Ella Hushagen
30. Phung Huynh
31. Amber Jaeger
32. William Kelly
33. Afshin Ketabi
34. Christopher Kramsch
35. Myra Kramsch
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54. Stephanie Stein
55. John Srebalus
56. Kathleen Telser
57. Andrew Terhune
58. Cassandra Terhune
59. Helen Tran
60. Amy Turk
61. Roya Yasharpour