

Assembly Bill 1845

Office to End Homelessness

Assemblywoman Luz Rivas

SUMMARY

Increasing housing costs and stagnating incomes have been the main drivers that cause individuals to fall into homelessness. To help alleviate those pressures, the Legislature and Governor has allocated significant resources in response to the growing crisis. While state funding plays a critical role in the fight against homelessness, funding alone will not solve systemic issues.

Continued state investments, combined with significant structural changes to how California oversees, coordinates, and delivers its homelessness programs is essential to ensuring that state and local programs are being utilized effectively.

BACKGROUND

In 1989, the Little Hoover Commission recommended, “unifying all ‘homeless’ state programs” to be housed under one entity.¹ Almost three decades later, in 2017, the California State Auditor reported the core reason our “unsheltered homeless population exceeds that of other entities” is due to the fact that “other entities have a single entity charged specifically with addressing homelessness. Furthermore, other entities invest significantly in administering and funding homeless services.”²

Governor Newsom, within days of taking office, took action to assist our state’s unhoused residents by creating a Council of Regional Homeless Advisors (Task Force). After months of meetings with local governments to identify best practices and solutions to end the homelessness crisis, the Task Force came to the determination that the state should “create a single point of authority of homelessness in state government,” and suggested “a high-level official that reports directly to Newsom.”³

PROBLEM

Over 151,000 Californians experience homelessness at any point in time, a 16% increase from 2018 to 2019. Additionally, it is well known those figures do not fully represent the amount of homeless youth in the state.

¹ <https://lhc.ca.gov/report/meeting-needs-californias-homeless-it-takes-more-roof>

² <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2017-112/summary.html>

³ <https://calmatters.org/housing/2020/01/gavin-newsom-homelessness-task-force/>

⁴ <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4152>

For decades, the state has disregarded multiple appeals by those who are charged with providing government oversight, to create a single entity in charge of homelessness. Currently, there are 13 different state agencies and departments administering at least 30 different programs relating to homelessness.

The Legislative Analyst Office recently commented on the state’s current approach to addressing homelessness by asserting: “[A] fragmented approach creates various challenges. Addressing a problem as complex and interconnected as homelessness requires the involvement of departments and agencies across the state and collaboration among all levels of government and other stakeholders. A fragmented response creates various challenges, including:

- Difficulty tracking all homelessness-related expenditures across the state.
- Difficulty assessing how much the state is spending on a particular approach towards addressing homelessness, for example—prevention versus intervention efforts.
- Difficulty determining how programs work collaboratively.
- Difficulty assessing what programs are collectively accomplishing.”⁴

Due to the state’s lack of a centralized office on homelessness, our response to the crisis has been unnecessarily fragmented.

SOLUTION

AB 1845 establishes a single point of contact on homelessness at the state level, by creating a Secretary on Housing Insecurity and Homelessness, who will be in charge of overseeing all homelessness programs that would continue to be managed by existing entities. By placing the Coordinating and Financing Council within the Office on Homelessness, the state can ensure proper authority exists to effectively coordinate and hold the state accountable for its response to addressing homelessness.

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