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AB 67 (Muratsuchi) – Homeless Courts Pilot Program

SUMMARY

AB 67 builds upon the success of homeless court programs, as seen in San Diego and Redondo Beach, by building out a model that provides a tried rubric for success while providing participating counties the flexibility to tailor their homeless court program to their specific region and community's needs.

Homeless court's participants are generally low-level offenders that are provided with access to wrap around services such as housing, employment, public assistance, and treatment programs to assist in reentry to better integrate individuals into their communities.

BACKGROUND

The state has established a Collaborative Justice Courts system through Judicial Council. These Courts are meant to address a number of infractions related to drug abuse, domestic violence, mental health, child welfare, and homelessness.

Homeless courts efficiently expand access to justice by integrating the shelter system into the established courts system. Advanced preparation and fewer hearings translate into reduced courtroom hours and court costs. Shelters and service agencies save precious resources when clients move toward self-sufficient lives with cleared criminal cases. Before the Homeless Court Program, a client might successfully complete the agency program only to be incarcerated on an outstanding criminal case and, afterward, return to homelessness.

In 2020, former California Supreme Court Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, established a Workgroup on Homelessness to evaluate how court programs might be improved to better serve people who are without housing or are housing insecure. One of the key recommendations of the Workgroup was to establish a homeless court program in more counties to reduce barriers to housing stability.

ISSUE

The homelessness crisis in California is an exceptionally complex issue that requires attention and resources unlike any other societal problem. According to federal data released in 2022, California accounted for 30% of the country's homeless population and 50% of the country's unsheltered people, or those living in places such as streets, cars or parks. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Housing and Community Development estimated that more than 172,000 Californians experienced homelessness in 2022.

California's growing homelessness problem can be seen in the increasing number of tent encampments and unhoused people living on the streets, despite significant spending and legislative efforts. Unhoused individuals not only need housing, but many suffer from physical and mental health disorders, and substance abuse disorders, that are exacerbated by homelessness. Further, these individuals are more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system, many for minor infractions based on being homeless.

SOLUTION

AB 67 establishes a competitive grant pilot program administered by the Judicial Council to eligible participants to establish comprehensive community-based services to homeless individuals until January 2028. Grants would be used to establish or expand homeless courts to provide comprehensive community-based services to achieve stabilization for, and address the specific legal needs of, chronically homeless individuals involved with the criminal justice system.

STAFF CONTACT

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SUPPORT