

## **MEMORANDUM**

To: Mayor Eric Garcetti  
For: Los Angeles City Council  
From: Rebecca Zajac  
**Subject: Importance of Sustainable Solutions When Addressing the Homelessness Crisis**  
Date: November 22, 2021

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Dear Mr. Mayor and the City Council,

### **SUMMARY**

The City of Los Angeles must implement a vision for change that directly addresses the deep connection between climate change and homelessness. With the engagement of homeless individuals in community planning along the way, Los Angeles can work its way out of these crises by supporting or establishing entities that provide educational and preparational resources to the homeless population pre-disaster, facilitate housing post-disaster, and conduct research to gather information about the issue as a whole.

### **ISSUE ANALYSIS**

As climate disasters such as floods and wildfires in California decimate housing or make it more expensive to maintain, people are becoming displaced. Homeless individuals are disproportionately more vulnerable to climate disasters as they lack financial, social, and physical resources such as shelter and transportation. Policies currently in place do not do enough to prevent this positive feedback loop of continual escalation of human vulnerability to climate change: the city's low-income families become displaced via disasters, and their situation exposes them more greatly to the dangers of future disasters. With over 66,000 people

experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County, it is apparent that more should be done to prevent and remediate the political, economic, and social processes that contribute to this issue. Possible solutions discussed at the City Council meeting on November 11 carefully addressed the role that the criminal justice system, low wages, job insecurity, housing costs, disabilities, and mental health play in the county's homelessness. However, your discussion failed to consider strategies that took the climate crisis into account. Sustainability-focused strategies to fight homelessness are imperative because effects of climate change will continue to complicate living conditions and cause displacement in the county unless addressed urgently.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Los Angeles County has already made strides in sustainability. The city's plan to modernize its electricity system and infrastructure will contribute to the overall strategy of fighting climate crisis induced challenges. While the aim for a 100% renewable energy supply is a significant step in preventing climate disasters, this long term strategy will operate most effectively when paired with solutions that address both climate change and homelessness.

One opportunity I propose for the city to build from its prior commitments is to implement a tax similar to one in Miami-Dade County, Florida. The county, which had struggled with providing affordable housing while facing intense storming and flooding, has had a 1% tax in restaurant sales since 1993, of which 85% goes towards a homeless trust that helps get people off the street. The number of homeless people living on the street in the County has dropped from 8,000 two decades ago to under 1,000 today as a result, as evidenced by the 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. The city council should consider adopting a similar approach with money from the tax contributing to one or multiple funds.

Another strategy the City Council of Los Angeles can attempt is to work towards enacting policies and practices that:

1. utilize existing government subsidies that contribute to available resources after climate disasters and
2. target environmentally induced migration and population displacement.

Money from a tax may not be necessary if we investigate if or where subsidies may be available to support entities that can educate, prepare, house, and research. However, policies of this nature may be better advocated for on a federal level if these subsidies are not available.

While both courses of action present their own benefits, more substantial change may be able to result from a tax on restaurant sales that goes towards funding local entities while keeping in mind the goals listed in the second proposed solution. You will find success by focusing on changes you can make using money generated by sales within the city than by uncertain subsidies. With Miami-Dade County as an example of the success of this method, Los Angeles can design our own tax based on their model.

Any course of action will only be sustainable with the engagement of the affected community.

While generating solutions to the climate and homelessness crises, the City Council must allow homeless individuals to be involved in community planning. A task force is to be created for disseminating information throughout the city for homeless people to be informed of opportunities for engagement. It is essential to have pre-existing relationships with members of the homeless community in order for decision makers to understand what they need most from entities that are supported or created to assist them. These conversations can add to research that

is needed to further understand the lived experiences, behaviors, and gaps in resources for those experiencing homelessness.

### **LIMITATIONS**

There are some limitations to the favored strategy. Constituents may be opposed to an increased tax, even though it would contribute to a good cause. Additionally, Miami-Dade County had a lower total homeless population when they implemented the tax. Los Angeles would have to consider the effectiveness of the strategy on a much larger scale. It may also be challenging to disseminate information to the homeless population so they can provide input and collaborate with the city council as many of them might not have financial resources to have a phone and keep up with online announcements. These are obstacles that can be overcome through public collaboration and dedication to the cause.

### **STAKEHOLDERS**

The solutions I have outlined in this memo aim to combat the issue on political, educational, and social standpoints. Stakeholders including the homeless population, non-homeless population, nonprofit organizations, and city council will all benefit widely from these solutions.

Working towards reducing homelessness and environmental risk will finally restore basic needs to people experiencing homelessness. Relief from physical and psychological distress is a powerful benefit of my proposed solutions. There will also be benefits for non-homeless people in the county. By encouraging education and awareness for the issue, people of every housing status will be able to curate a more engaged and unified community. Benefits continue for nonprofit organizations, who will be able to use increased funding to complete their goals of improving quality of life in the Los Angeles area.

## **CONCLUSION**

We will not be content with only an investment in sustainable energy as the strategy to address the impact the climate crisis has on homelessness because disasters will continue to pummel Los Angeles, and consequently our homeless population, in the meantime. Research and action must be done urgently in order to elevate those less fortunate. I implore you as City Council to recognize the system goal you should serve at the minimum: ensuring that people of every background in your city have their basic needs met. Mayor Garcetti, I will also remind you of your “commitment to the core values of justice, dignity, and equality for all people.” Furthermore, by taking on more opportunities to elevate Los Angeles socially and economically, the city council will set an extraordinary example. The county will be able to show that it is not an area plagued by climate disasters and homelessness, but a resilient and thriving city.

## Works Cited

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