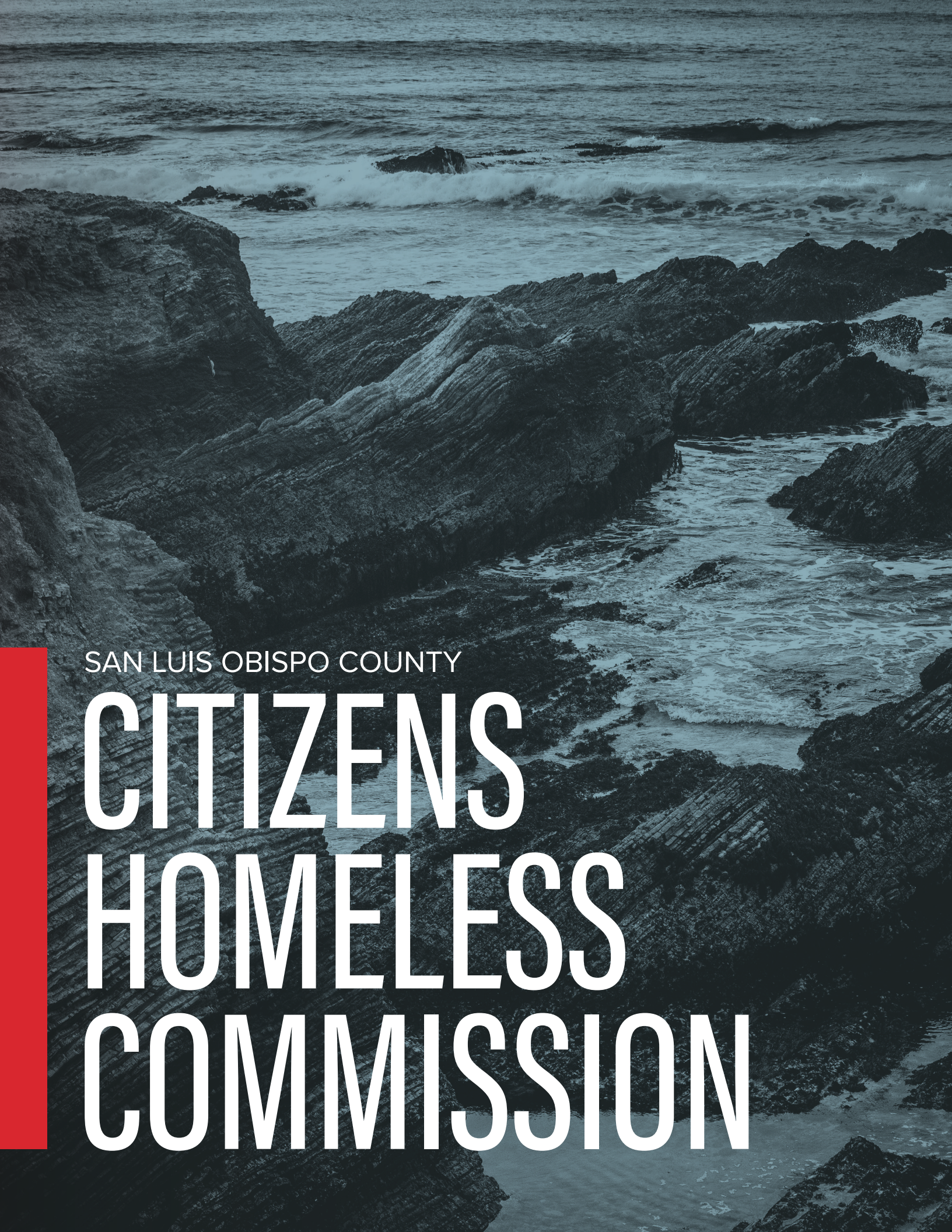


SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

CITIZENS HOMELESS COMMISSION

SUMMARY

Reforming regional governance structure for homeless services would significantly impact SLO homeless response by streamlining infrastructure and increasing accountability, citizen commission finds.

In 2008, when the San Luis Obispo homeless population was an estimated 2,400, community leaders created a 10-year plan to solve the problem. At last count, the number of unhoused individuals living in SLO has increased, and residents have grown concerned as the issue has become more visible during the pandemic.

The SLO Citizen's Homeless Commission formed in 2021 to study the existing homeless services infrastructure and identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. The resulting report is attached. Here are the key findings:

- SLO County has a complex network of dedicated government and nonprofit service providers, each of which performs a vital function.
- Key individuals within those entities identified a lack of effective coordination between service providers as a primary hurdle to impacting the unhoused population.
- Under the current organizational structure, there is no one entity that has accountability to decrease the unhoused population writ large.

Recommendations:

- Create centralized entity that would coordinate activities between disparate organizations, prioritize and align goals, utilize data-driven metrics to track performance, and be accountable to the public for reducing the number of unhoused neighbors.
- Refocus individualized services across the continuum of care to ensure seamless intervention resulting in sustainable and permanent housing.
- Stakeholders (government agencies, municipalities, non-profit organizations, etc.) initiate studies to identify gaps in services and methods to improve coordination between organizations.
- Establish a countywide goal to reduce our unhoused population by 50% in 4 years.

Contact

Sam Blakeslee - sam@actionslo.com

Gregory Francisco Gillett - greg@actionslo.com

San Luis Obispo County

CITIZENS HOMELESS COMMISSION

Preliminary Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SLO Citizen's Homeless Commission was established earlier this year to provide a citizen's perspective on how homelessness efforts are succeeding, or failing, in San Luis Obispo County. The effort was launched due to the growing perception that the problem of homelessness in San Luis Obispo has gotten significantly worse over the years, despite the implementation of the community's 2008 "10-Year Plan to End Homelessness".

Throughout California homeless encampments have become a pervasive fact of life along freeway underpasses, creek beds, public parks, and in some cases – downtowns. Citizens of our community prefer to see this issue forcefully and effectively addressed rather than to let it metastasize with all the attendant deleterious effects that impact the unhoused and the broader community.

One of the principal findings of the Commission is that our community is fortunate to have a dedicated team of people working on the homeless challenge within government, public agencies, and non-profits. What is also clear is that the delivery of individualized service to our unhoused neighbors and development of adequate housing supply are challenges that require a markedly improved governance system. The best people, strategies, organizations, and programs will never fulfill their true potential without an equally capable governance system; one that provides operational coordination, strategic alignment, and accountability.

The SLO Citizen's Homeless Commission recommends the creation of centralized governance entity in San Luis Obispo County that takes responsibility for addressing homeless issues. The would be accomplished through the formation of new Joint Power Authority, namely - The San Luis Obispo Housing Infrastructure and Services Authority (SLO-HISA). SLO-HISA would be responsible for coordinating activities between disparate organizations, prioritize and align goals, and utilize data-driven metrics to track performance. SLO-HISA should immediately take a two-pronged approach as oulined below.

1. Increase the supply of 'Strategic Housing Solution' (SHS) units (emergency shelters, residential hotels, group homes, tiny villages, single-room occupancy dwellings, permanent supportive housing) to reduce homelessness by:

    - Coordinating and aligning jurisdictional strategies related to land use, housing elements, transportation, and funding to support SHS projects;
    - Identifying and acquiring properties throughout the county to increase the supply of SHS units;
    - Creating and implementing regional policies and ordinances to streamline permitting procedures, provide density bonuses and builder incentives, reforming parking and setback impediments for SHS projects;
    - Establishing and enforcing regional and sub-regional benchmarks to increase accountability.

2. Reform service streams to promote individualized services and quality of care by:
    - Prioritizing and enhancing existing programs that focus on holistic and targeted intervention strategies;
    - Calibrating and enforcing the use of client tracking protocol and database systems (i.e., HMIS);
    - Creating and utilizing metrics to track inputs and outcomes of coordinated/individualized services;
    - Establishing benchmarks and real-time feedback mechanisms to support ongoing gap analyses, funding allocations, and service coordination.

STATEMENT OF GOVERNANCE PROBLEM

Homelessness is an enormously complex problem that it involves a wide range of inter-related issues. Those issues largely fall into two broad and disparate categories.

The first category pertains to the adequacy of affordable housing supply, a long-standing problem in California entangled with politically charged issues and logistical challenges such as land use, permitting, zoning, NIMBYism and CEQA, transportation, and other infrastructure considerations. Furthermore, the unhoused population often needs access to kind of housing, described here as Strategic Housing Solution (SHS) supply, that is not well-served by the traditional systems that have focused on single-family dwellings for middle-income households.

The second category pertains to the patchwork of current human services designed to help the unhoused population. It is clear that the unhoused population is diverse, varied and, dynamic, as this population often operates outside traditional insurance and public assistance models with unique needs in the arenas of healthcare, mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, and public safety.

Because the homeless challenge is systemic in nature, issues in both categories must be addressed simultaneously to produce successful outcomes. For example, providing homeless services with the goal of getting people into housing is likely to fail if the supply of appropriate housing is inadequate. This deficiency in supply produces the phenomenon in which new individuals are becoming unhoused at a faster rate than currently unhoused people can become housed. Similarly, unhoused people's needs are rarely limited to a lack of housing alone and require individualized approaches to overcome their underlying reasons for being unhoused. The most visible issues to the community are those who suffer from substance abuse, mental health issues, family dysfunction, and joblessness. These and other factors must be successfully addressed to maintain a person in housing once acquired. Furthermore, the unhoused population is mobile which creates tracking issues when there is movement between jurisdictions. Due to the systemic nature of homelessness, it is no surprise that the problem continues to worsen as housing prices climb and the social safety net frays.

The investment required to increase the supply of the SHS units and human services appropriate for the unhoused population is not only financially expensive, but it also entails considerable expenditure of political and collective will. Because of the complex dynamic and lack of coordination, including data collection, the general public has not been advised as to the scope and scale of the issue. The voting public may not currently grasp the need for substantial investment to resolve these growing issues.

As if the inherent political, policy, and economic costs of these individual challenges were not difficult enough, there is one last factor that may be more significant than any of the others. Specifically, our governance system was never designed to solve inter-related problems of this nature, particularly at this scale.

Land use and permitting issues are under the jurisdiction of multiple cities, the County, as well as LAFCO and SLOCOG. But human services issues are largely under the jurisdiction of the County and are delivered through non-profits that receive grants administered by the County. This fundamental division of effort between cities and the county exac-

erbates the difficulty of addressing housing supply needs and homeless services issues simultaneously.

There is no single entity or individual that is clearly accountable for making the entire system work as a whole. Instead, the organizations that work on homelessness coordinate their activities through a large unwieldy array of committees and subcommittees populated with representatives of the organizations. Each participating organization has its own governing authority, whether it be a non-profit board, executive director, or elected body; each has its own policies and sources of funding; and each has its own priorities and mission objectives.

Given the loose and informal governance system, it is difficult to compel cooperation or coordination between organizations or across the system. As a result, no overarching strategic plan captures the full spectrum of local housing and human service needs. Individual strategic plans within individual organizations are often under-developed or are not aligned with those of other organizations. Goal setting between organizations is not calibrated for individualization. Thus, redundant expenditures and inefficient approaches are not uncommon due to data not being tracked or shared, an inability to continue care from one service to another, and/or restrictions on what care can be provided. Moreover, gaps in services between organizations can arise due to territoriality and jurisdictional issues.

These deficiencies produce two glaring problems. First, it is difficult to know if public resources are being spent in the wisest or most efficient manner. And second, it is impossible to know who to hold accountable when the overall homeless problem fails to substantively improve year after year, despite enormous investments of effort and money.

STATE RESPONSE TO STATE GOVERNANCE DEFICIENCIES

In February of 2021 the California State Auditor evaluated four counties (Santa Barbara, Mendocino, Riverside, Santa Clara) to assess the delivery of homeless services. The Auditor concluded:

> *With more than 151,000 Californians who experienced homelessness in 2019, the State has the largest homeless population in the nation, but its approach to addressing homelessness is disjointed. At least nine state agencies administer and oversee 41 different programs that provide funding to mitigate homelessness, yet no single entity oversees the State's efforts or is responsible for developing a statewide strategic plan." (emphasis added)*

The state's Legislative Analyst Office offered a similar critique, stating:

> *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 stakeholders. A fragmented response creates various challenges, including:*
>
> *Difficulty tracking all homeless-related expenditures across the state;*
>
> 1. *Difficulty assessing how much the state is spending on a particular approach toward addressing homelessness, for example – prevention versus intervention efforts;*
> 2. *Difficulty determining how programs work collaboratively; and,*
> 3. *Difficulty assessing what programs are collectively accomplishing."*

In reviewing the problems playing out at the local level the Auditor's analysis identified a critical shortcoming of the state – specifically the lack of a single entity that is ultimately responsible at the state level.

In response to this difficulty the state is now taking action to establish a new state agency enacted through AB1220 – The California Interagency Council on Homelessness. This agency will initiate steps to coordinate the state's response to homelessness. To force coordination and cooperation AB1220 will require the California Interagency Council on Homelessness be populated with the actual Directors and Secretaries of state agencies, not appointed representatives. To qualify for some state sources of funding, local jurisdictions will need to align their goals

with the state and demonstrate that a local plan is in place to spend the new funds responsibly.

Furthermore, with the passage of AB 977 local communities will now be statutorily required to collect and share data, not just on federal programs, but also on users of state programs such as CalWORKS Housing Support Program, the Housing and Disability Advocacy Program and Bringing Families Home Program.

NEED FOR A RESPONSE TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE DEFICIENCIES

The critiques leveled by the Legislative Analyst Office and the State Auditor at the State's governance deficiencies apply equally at the local level, perhaps more so due to land use jurisdiction issues which are not present at the State level. Just as the state is now taking steps to tackle their governance challenge communities across the State should review what can be done to improve coordination and operations locally.

This is not simply an academic discussion or an exercise in optimization. The current budget in California designates $22 billion for the state's homeless and housing needs. A total of $12 billion of those funds are allocated to homelessness and behavioral health services to get tens of thousands of people 'off the streets'. The competition for those funds will be intense. Additionally, the federal government is investing heavily in addressing these issues through infrastructure and social services programs coming out of Washington.

An inefficient local governance system could be quite costly in terms of lost grant opportunities. By enacting governance reform locally our community could become a leader in this space. A reformed governance system could improve our community's ability to compete for newly available Federal and State funding.

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT LOCAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

Decades ago, Federal funding for homeless programs dealt with large numbers of disparate applicants who brought forward proposals without a requirement for coordination with other applicants operating in the same community. The loose and largely informal grantmaking system proved unwieldy and inefficient.

In 1995 reforms were implemented to force local coordination. The Department of Housing and Urban Development required community organizations to work together and submit a single application for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants. This coordination was expected to occur through an entity described as a local Continuum of Care (CoC) which consisted of applicants and stakeholders in a particular geographic area.

The CoC is organized based on a written charter, which establishes the structure and operation of the organization per CFR 578, the Continuum of Care Program Interim Rule. California currently has 44 such CoCs including one representing San Luis Obispo County.

A CoC is a broad-based membership organization that is open to participation by the myriad of organizations and stakeholders who are working on homeless issues. Participants must agree to adhere to basic conditions such as meeting attendance and participation, cooperation, avoidance of conflicts-of-interest, for example. A typical membership list might consist of:

- Non-Profit Homeless Assistance Providers
- Mental Health Agencies
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Hospitals
- Governments
- Universities
- Businesses
- Affordable Housing Developers
- Advocates
- Law Enforcement
- Public Housing Agencies

- Veteran Service Providers
- School Districts
- Unhoused Individuals
- Social Service Providers.

According to HUD, a CoC creates "a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximize self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness. The CoC serves a central collaborative planning body and a gate keeper for preparing and submitting applications to HUD." As a condition of receiving funding HUD requires a CoC to adopt certain best practices and undertake four primary responsibilities:

1. Conducting a biannual Point-in-Time count of the homeless population and an annual count of both emergency systems and transitional housing units;
2. Maintaining HMIS database and entry system;
3. Assessing and prioritizing the region's homeless needs;
4. Reviewing and ranking applicants for HUD funding.

The CoC must also identify a "lead agency" to serve as its sole interface with HUD for the purpose of grant submissions from the area. That "lead agency" is also responsible for the coordination and implementation of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), a database to collect relevant homeless information across multiple organizations. The CoC will typically establish numerous working committees to collect information and facilitate coordination on homeless issues associated with substance abuse, veterans, encampments, foster children, housing, etc.

A CoC is responsible for establishing a governing Council or Board that is broadly representative of the larger body. The Council must act on behalf of and in the best interest of the CoC. The rules or bylaws of the Council are delineated in a Governance Charter and include protocols for holding meetings, selecting members, voting on officers, and identifying its "lead agency".

Homeless Services Oversight Council (HSOC): The 20-member HSOC serves as the governing board or council for the San Luis Obispo CoC. As required by HUD, it is composed of representatives from the broad range of homeless services and advocate stakeholders.

- County Board of Supervisors, 1 member
- City Council Members, 7 members, one from each municipality
- County Government Service Providers, 2 members, selected from Behavioral Health, Planning, Social Services, Veterans Services, Probation
- Non-profit Service Providers, 2 members
- Affordable Housing Developers, 2 members
- Local Businesses/Business Organizations, 1 member
- Law Enforcement, 1 member
- Local K-12 Academic Institution, 1 member
- Local Health Provider, 1 member
- Local Faith Community, 1 member
- Interested Community, 2 members
- Currently or Formerly Homeless Person, 1 member
- Veterans Services Representative, 1 member
- Local Hospital, 1 member
- Victims' Services Representative, 1 member

The HSOC meets regularly to fulfill its various duties. It also oversees committees such as the Executive Committee, the Finance and Data Committee, the Housing Committee, the Services Coordinating Committee, as well as other Ad Hoc Committees (see website at slocounty.ca.gov/departments/social-services/homeless-services/homeless-services-oversight-council-(HSOC).aspx). The HSOC has designated the County of San Luis Obispo as the Lead Agency to fulfill duties stipulated by HUD.

Notwithstanding the dedication of the members of HSOC it was never designed to be a centralized governance system for its members. Each city, county agency, and non-profit group in the CoC is accountable to its own city council, board of supervisors, and non-profit board. The CoC council does not exercise authority or control over the cities, county, or non-profit entities that make up the CoC.

It is challenging to coordinate a community-wide response to homelessness. Each non-profit provides

a different array of homeless services based on the nature of the service, the geography of the service provider or, in some cases, the needs of the homeless person. Similarly, cities often hire city staff to tackle homeless issues in its particular city. The County also has staff to interface with and deal with certain homeless issues. Typically each of these entities hire their own staff to handle outreach, intake, and assessment.

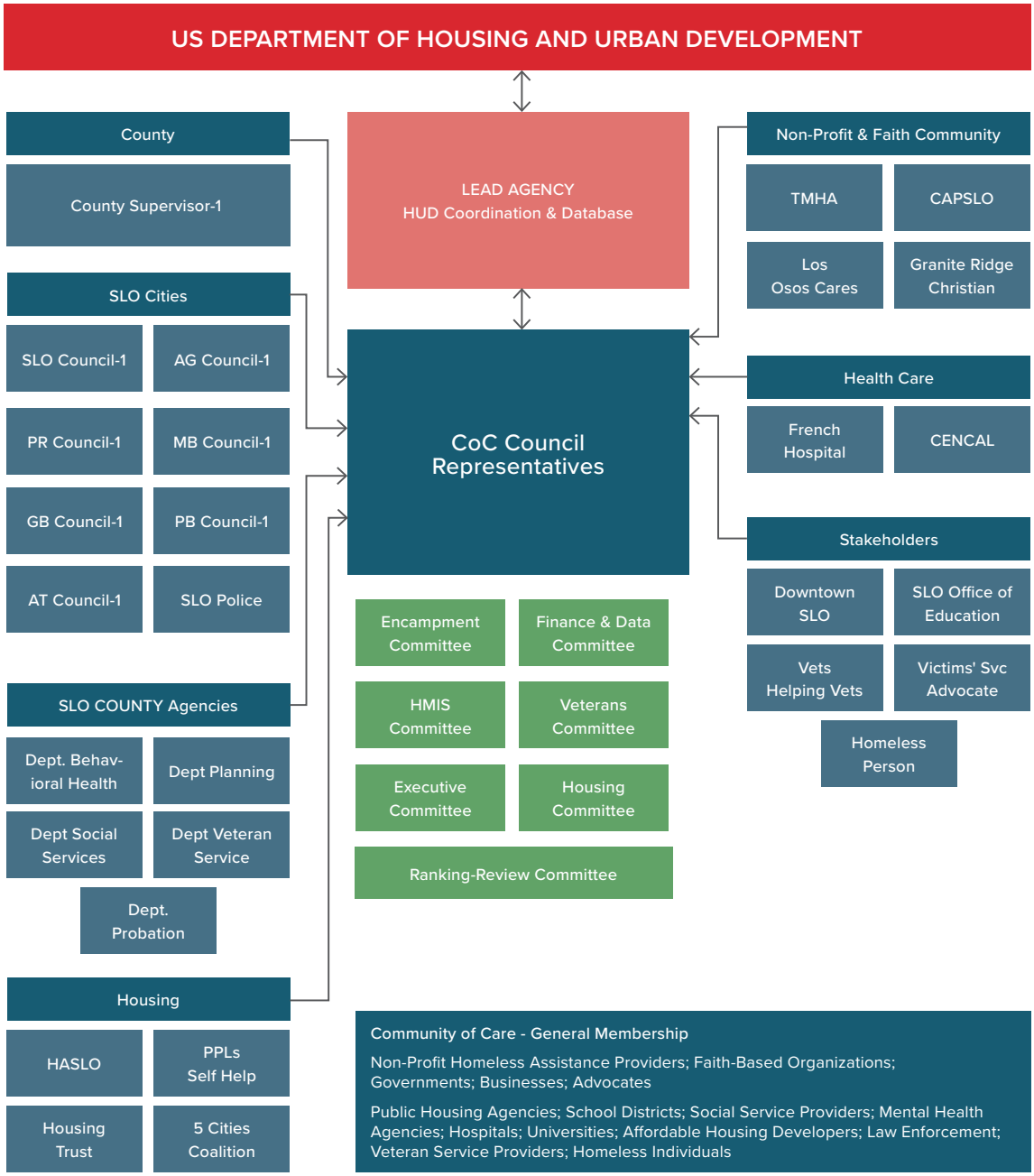
It's not uncommon for the same unhoused person to engage with staff from multiple organizations, each with its own intake system and internal processes. Because of the large and complex suite of services involved it is common for a unhoused person to encounter multiple delays during hand-offs from one group to another. Those delays can have deleterious effects on a homeless person whose needs are immediate. This lack of coordination can cause an unhoused person to 'fall out of the system' and return to homelessness, despite herculean efforts by service providers in each organization.

It is difficult to achieve that coordination with a dispersed governance system that relies heavily upon voluntary collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries. Personal networking among CoC leaders can and does produce helpful cooperation between entities. However, it is significantly less effective than the sort of explicit coordination and organizational alignment that is produced with centralized governance model, which would include a common team of staff to manage system-wide outreach, intake, and assessment.

The challenges described above regarding homeless services is just as severe when attempting to increase the supply of SHS units throughout the community. In the same manner as homeless services, each city has its own general plan peculiarities, zoning, housing and transportation element, planning department, as well as its own planning commission and city council. Building housing suitable for the homeless population requires complex engagement with all the aforementioned elements as well as the involvement of developers, homeless housing advocate non-profits, and housing trust fund organizations – each with its own disparate sources of funding. There is limited ability to coordinate SHS projects between the county and each of the county's seven cities.

Furthermore, individual jurisdictions face the classic "Prisoner's Dilemma". This well-known problem arises when individual entities are faced with a system that incentivizes individuals to make decisions that are suboptimal. The classic "Prisoner's Dilemma" is the situation in which two criminals are separated from each other and interrogated by law enforcement. If both remain silent neither will be prosecuted and face no jail time, which is the optimal outcome from the prisoner's perspective. However, if one prisoner takes a plea bargain the cooperating prisoner will get a reduced sentence and the non-cooperating prisoner the full sentence. Both prisoners know that the other prisoner can benefit through being the first to accept a plea deal. The "Prisoner's Dilemma" arises because both parties are strongly incentivized to take an action that minimize the cost to themselves even though it increases the costs overall – i.e., both prisoners are now found guilty. In the same way cities are disincentivized from making investments in homelessness solutions unless they know that their neighboring cities do likewise. The city that increases housing and services for the homeless population will bear additional cost and likely become a magnet attracting those who need such services who live in other nearby cities. The net result is that one city bears all the costs, both financial and political, but the other cities benefit. This perverse incentive system makes it challenging for any one city to act without knowing that the others will do likewise. The current system puts all seven cities and the county into an 8-way "Prisoner's Dilemma" that can only be avoided through collective action and decision making.

CURRENT HOMELESS ORG CHART



A JOINT POWER AUTHORITY PROPOSAL

A Joint Power Authority (JPA) is an entity that is formed by multiple public agencies (cities, counties, CSDs, school boards, etc.) for the purpose of jointly exercising common powers to provide services in a more efficient manner. They have been used for a wide range of purposes when an issue of concern crosses multiple jurisdictions – for example, fire management, groundwater management, regional transportation projects, library services, waste management, and airport expansion.

The JPA is a separate government organization created by the member agencies but is legally independent from them. Some of the potential advantages of a JPA include:

- Improving efficiency by reducing overlapping services;
- Sharing resources and expertise;
- Coordinating plans and actions.

As a legally separate public agency a JPA can hire staff, issue revenue bonds, obtain financing, sue or be sued, and manage property. JPA's typically protect their member agencies from JPA liabilities. Some of the advantages of a JPA include:

- Flexibility and ease of formation;
- Ability to finance projects;
- Coordination on regional problems; and
- Improved ability to secure grants with demonstration of regional cooperation.

San Luis Obispo LAFCO's website shows the following JPA's having submitted their agreements and amendments in San Luis Obispo County as required per SB 1266:

- Black Gold Cooperative Library System;
- Central Coast Community Energy;
- Central Coast Water Authority;
- Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Authority;
- Integrated Waste Management;
- Monterey Bay Community Power Authority;
- Morro Bay/Cayucos JPA Wastewater Treatment Plant.

FRAMEWORK FOR SAN LUIS OBISPO HOMELESS INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES AUTHORITY (SLO-HISA)

This proposal recommends the establishment of a JPA to tackle the homelessness challenge locally - the San Luis Obispo Homeless Infrastructure and Services Authority (SLO-HISA). SLO-HISA would serve as a centralized governance body with the goal of producing greater system coordination, operational efficiency, and accountability. The key elements to SLO-HISA include:

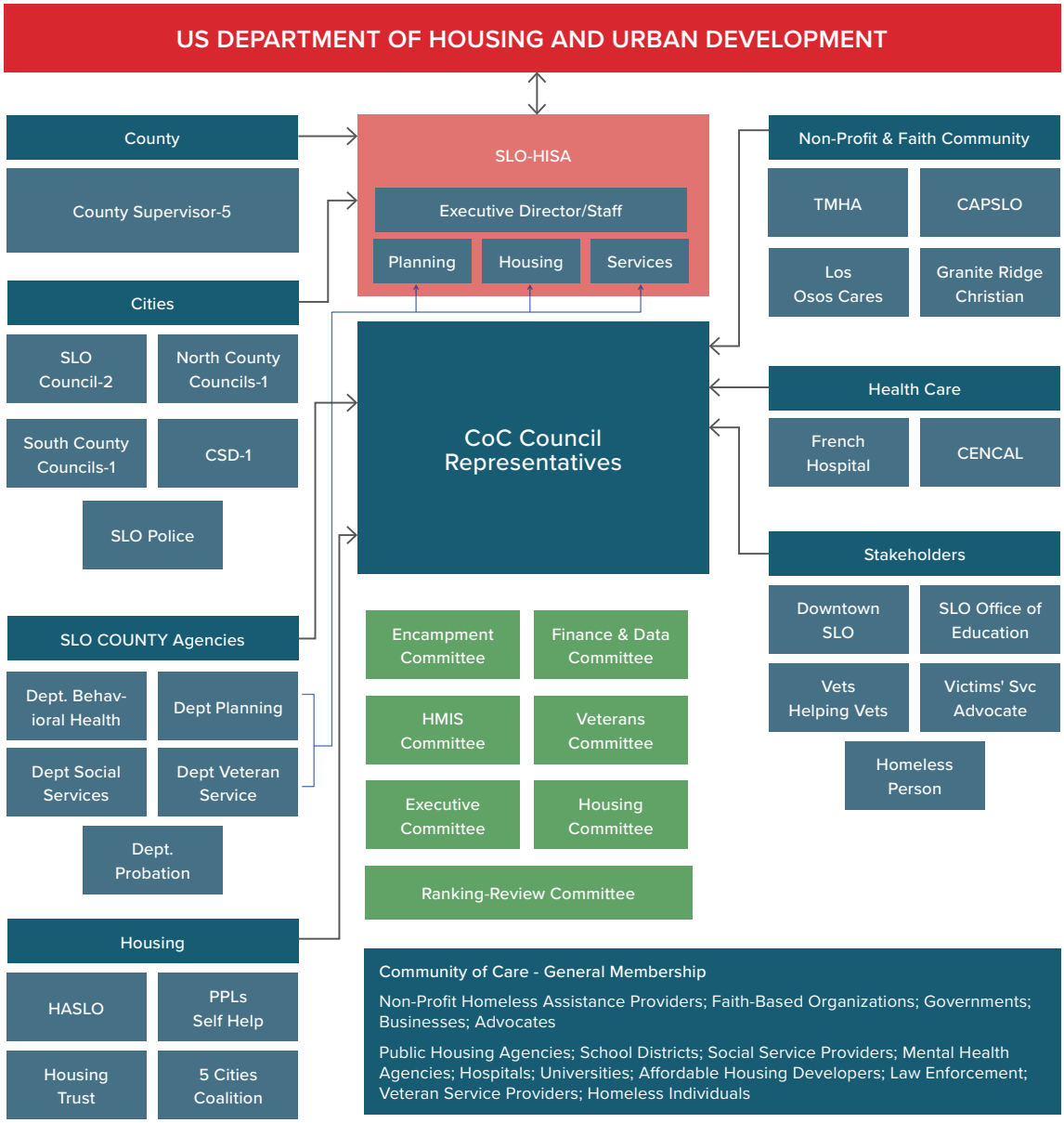
1. Governing Board: Bring together elected representatives in an oversight role to be accountable to the public for solving homelessness in our community;
2. Executive Director: Establish an Executive Director with specific delegated powers to oversee staff and key functions (see below) critical to coordination across services and housing programs;
3. Staff Resources: Bring together county and city staff to work together in a single organization and location to maximize cooperation and coordination;
4. Key Functions: Establish three key functions within the JPA: Accountability, Housing, Services;
5. Public Engagement: Serve as a single point of contact for the public to engage on homelessness issue.

SLO-HISA would be designated as the HUD lead agency for San Luis Obispo's Continuum of Care. But it would not fulfill that role simply as a grant facilitator and administrator, instead SLO-HISA would serve as an overall system administrator. SLO-HISA would also serve as lead agency for engaging with the state for programs such as AB83 Project HomeKey, which can provide CEQA exemptions that streamline homelessness housing solutions, per statute:

If the lead agency determines that a project is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to this section, and the lead agency determines to approve or to carry out that project, the lead agency shall file a notice of exemption with the Office of Planning and Research and the county clerk of the county in which the project is located in the manner specified in subdivisions (b) and (c) of Section 21152 of the Public Resources Code."

SLO-HISA would provide funding, program design, outcomes assessment, coordination, and technical assistance to the community's homeless services and housing non-profits. SLO-HISA would take responsibility for engaging with the broader public, as a single-point-of-contact, on homelessness issues. It would also solicit the community for increased involvement with SLO-CoC. SLO-HISA would also work with the SLO-CoC to ensure that the SLO-CoC Board is representative of the community's key homeless service providers, SHS stakeholders, homeless advocates, and representation from key individuals such as homeless vets, families, and other target populations.

PROPOSED HOMELESS ORG CHART



SLO-HISA Board: As conceived, the SLO-HISA would create a formal system to bring together public agencies that are working to address housing and service issues related to homelessness. The size and composition of the board would be the subject of negotiations to be formalized in an MOU. The representation ultimately agreed upon would likely reflect a variety of factors, e.g., resources committed (staff and funding) and Point-in-Time County of homelessness throughout the region thereby ensuring that the distribution of representation is well-matched to the community's needs and efforts.

One possible example of a 10-member board might include five representatives from the county four representatives from the cities, one representative from CSDs. In such a scenario San Luis Obispo County might seat all five supervisors, San Luis Obispo City might seat two councilmembers, Cities from the North County (Paso Robles, Atascadero) might seat one councilmember, Cities from the South County (Arroyo Grande, Grover Beach, Pismo Beach) might seat one member, and Los Osos might seat a member. Representation from the North and South County cities might rotate between the cities every two years, as an example. In reviewing the performance of JPAs there is good evidence that the best results are obtained when JPA board members are themselves elected persons who serve in the public agencies they represent, rather than appointees. Such representation ensures that actual decision makers are involved in setting priorities and policies and increases alignment between SLO-HISA and public agencies.

The SLO-HISA Board would be responsible for establishing policies and priorities for the organization. It would also be responsible for authorizing budgets, securing funding, making expenditures, and executing contracts. The SLO-HISA Board would delegate implementation to an Executive Director and organization staff.

SLO-HISA Executive Director: The Board would employ an Executive Director with broad responsibilities. The executive director would serve as president of the organization with responsibility for managing staff, the interface between the Board and JPA staff, as the lead interface between the Board and city councils and the county, and as lead communicator for engaging with the CoC Council, which would serve in an advisory body to SLO-HISA. The executive director would be directly responsible to the Board for all SLO-HISA operations.

Staff Resources: Currently city and county staff work directly for the chief executives of each of the seven cities and the county. Those staff that work principally on homelessness services and homelessness housing issues in their particular jurisdiction would be tasked, per an MOU, to work for SLO-HISA. In so doing the cities and county would off-load those responsibilities, along with the liabilities, onto the JPA. Cities and the County would determine what financial and staff resources would be committed to the new organization. Funding from HUD and state homelessness programs would be used to help supplement the investments made by the cities and county.

Functions: SLO-HISA would be organized to engage in three principal functions – Accountability, Housing, and Services.

ACCOUNTABILITY FUNCTION:

Establish a strong accountability capability that utilizes evidence-based metrics to drive performance. Take responsibility for adopting and monitoring progress on an overall systemwide 10-year strategic plan. Track annual goals, priorities, metrics, gap analysis, and outcomes to maximize accountability and progress toward quantitative milestones. Serve as gatekeeper to facilitate solicit creation and submittal of high-quality grant applications to HUD, state funding opportunities, and philanthropic support. Manage the HMIS system to ensure its broad utilization across organizations. Manage Human Resources, operational, fiscal, and legal responsibilities.

This function would also be responsible for annual audits to ensure that local state and federal grant money was spent responsibly, that best accounting practices were utilized to track and report income and expenditures accurately and transparently, and that conflicts of interest were assiduously avoided. The audit function would take direct responsibility

for compliance with the Brown Act, the California Public Records Act, and any public reporting duties.

HOUSING FUNCTION:

SLO-HISA explicitly incorporates the word "Infrastructure" into its name to emphasize the need for building actual SHS projects for the homeless population. This JPA would not simply bring together homeless services entities it is also bringing together those responsible for building SHS units – for those who are ultra-low income (<30% median income) and dealing with the unique health and social needs of the unhoused.

Traditional housing is delivered via a complex interrelated system of developers, contractors, zoning criteria, local ordinances, building standards, financing, and permitting processes that may not be responsive to the unique difficulties of building housing that is appropriate for the homeless population. Low-income housing is created through a similar system that has been modified to incorporate elements such as housing trust funds, density bonuses, and other incentives to lower costs. However, the unhoused population faces challenging housing needs that aren't readily provided by the current systems. For that reason, SHS projects are needed to create a continuum of housing options, from shelters to tiny villages to residential hotels, that are uniquely designed to meet the needs of those who are homeless.

Not only will a sufficient number of such units be required as an overall aggregate number but also the proper amounts of each type of unit will be needed to match with the needs of the overall region and subregions. The responsibility for developing strategies that reduce the barriers to delivering such units would be conveyed by the cities and county to SLO-HISA. The responsibility would be limited to SHS units such as:

- Emergency shelters;
- Safe park facilities;
- Tiny villages (transitional only);
- Residential hotels;
- Boarding homes/single-room dwellings;
- Congregate living with onsite support; and
- Supportive permanent housing facilities.

In many cases a person seeking to move back to permanent housing may need to access one or more of these solutions as they transit out of homelessness. In other instances, a person may fall back out of traditional housing but, rather than find themselves on the street, land into one of the SHS units on the continuum which helps them return to permanent housing more quickly.

SHS projects often fail to get the attention they need in the formulation of public policy or in staffing resources because they are lumped in with and compete with city and county resources dedicated to serving the demand for traditional and low-income housing.

The housing function would create the diverse inventory of SHS units needed to address homelessness. Because SHS projects often involve dwellings that are tailored for the unique needs of the homeless population, as well as infrastructure for support services (e.g., restrooms, showers, intake, support staff), it will be important to ensure close coordination with the homeless services function. The homeless supply work would be performed in close coordination with the Housing Trust Fund, People Self Help, the Housing Authority of SLO, as well as CAPSLO's staff at 40 Prado, the 5 Cities Homeless Coalition, the El Camino Home- less Association and Hope's Village.

SLO-HISA would offload some of those responsibilities from cities and counties so they could focus on what they do best – increase the supply of well-planned traditional and low-income housing. SLO-HISA would focus on designing programs that reduce barriers to SHS projects across multiple jurisdic- tions simultaneously. It would do so in a way that is responsive to the unique housing, safety, health, and social needs of this diverse population.

SLO-HISA would implement two strategies for reducing barriers to the construction of SHS projects

First: SLO-HISA would design a Model Housing Element tailored to facilitate SHS projects. This model Housing Element would be designed around impactful goals, clearly worded policies, and actionable programs that are designed to meet the unique needs of

the homeless population. Each city and the county would agree to incorporate the features of the Model Housing Element into their own individual housing elements. Key SHS-related issues to be reviewed for Model Housing elements that are suitable for SHS projects (e.g., tiny villages) might include: broader and more flexible definition of permitted uses, increased units per minimum lot, reduced minimum building setbacks, lower minimum open space per unit, higher maximum building height, reduced floor area ratio or lot coverage, and reduced minimum parking requirements.

Second: SLO-HISA would write a Model Ordinance that amends the local zoning and development ordinance to allow automatic "by-right" approval of any housing or land use project that is consistent with the adopted SLO-HISA homelessness plan. The SLO-HISA homeless plan would need to meet the following criteria:

1. Be consistent with the goals, policies, and programs in the Model Housing Element (see above);
2. Be consistent SLOCOG Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) allocation of "Very Low" income units with each local jurisdiction. SLO-HISA would strictly defer to SLOCOG to determine allocations by jurisdiction;
3. Provide the proper distribution of SHS units by type (e.g., shelters, safe park, transitional, etc), region, and subregion.

Such an ordinance would allow SLO-HISA to efficiently bring more SHS projects to the development phase without violating the cities' and county's police powers (land use). The model ordinance essentially declares that each jurisdiction shall automatically approve appropriate projects, i.e., that meet the criteria listed above. Projects built through the model ordinance would be approved through a ministerial rather than a discretionary process. By so doing the model ordinance would bring far greater certainty and reduced delays to the applicant while reducing the ability of NIMBY or CEQA lawsuits to tie up projects indefinitely. Each of the cities and county would need to adopt the model ordinance.

SERVICES FUNCTION:

Initially, SLO-HISA would need to establish a clearly defined centralized and coordinated data collection system (presumably maximizing HMIS) with common staff members who provide entry, assessment, and referral services to connect clients to the appropriate non-profit services and housing non-profits. Such a centralized intake system would have some admissions authority to help streamline delivery of initial housing and services to those seeking help. A centralized and coordinated data collection system would allow for an initial gap analysis to determine programmatic reform to focus all services on individualized care with the goal to change the trajectory of unhoused neighbors on an individual basis. Ultimately, SLO-HISA would be responsible for recalibrating services to create more efficient approaches to individualized care. This may include the bundling of existing services or realignment of organizational priorities to best serve individuals who find themselves unhoused.

The CoC Council would serve in an advisory capacity to SLO-HISA providing a critical link to the larger Continuum of Care in San Luis Obispo County. The CoC Council would be responsible for interfacing with the CoC to organize committees to secure high-quality input from stakeholders. Input from committees would be designed to continually improve the effectiveness of SLO-HISA policies and programs. CoC committees might include subjects such as policy, point-in-time count, coordinated entry system, encampments, veteran needs, family support, transitional housing, emergency shelter, safe parking, etc.

Public Engagement: To improve public understanding of the homelessness challenge SLO-HISA would be responsible for communicating with the public about current programming in their community. Accurate communication would seek to de-stigmatize the condition of the unhoused and seek to build greater community support re-housing and other community services. This communication role is critical to overcome the syndrome of 'NIMBYism' (or, "right idea but wrong location" reactions), which often thwarts housing solutions or triggers judgement for community-based support services.

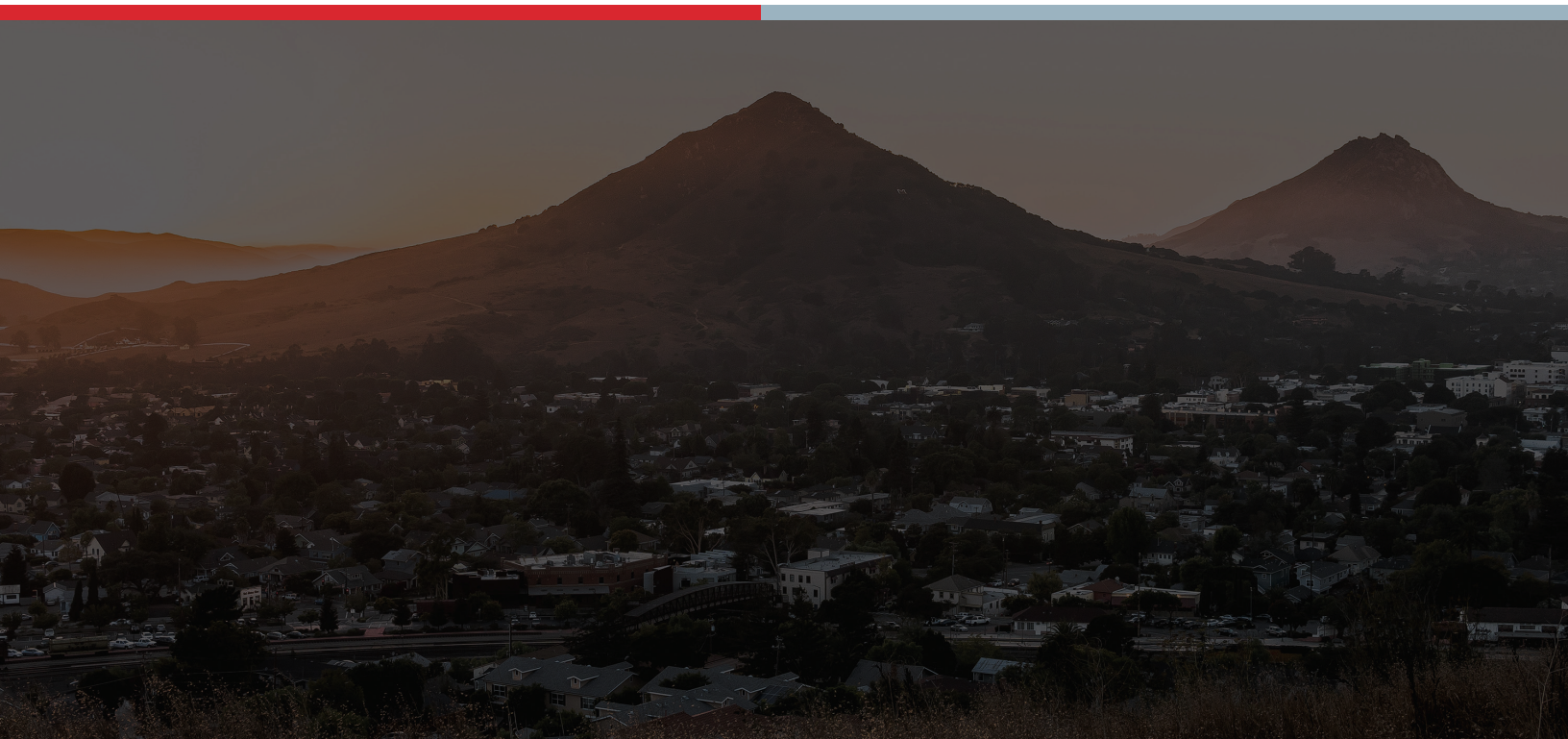
If successful, such support would increase volunteer engagement, promote land-use decisions required to build SHS projects, and increase willingness to invest greater resources in those programs that are demonstrated to be effective. The key to building community trust would be honesty and transparency, which starts with strict adherence to the Brown Act but also includes frequent public forums and roundtables.

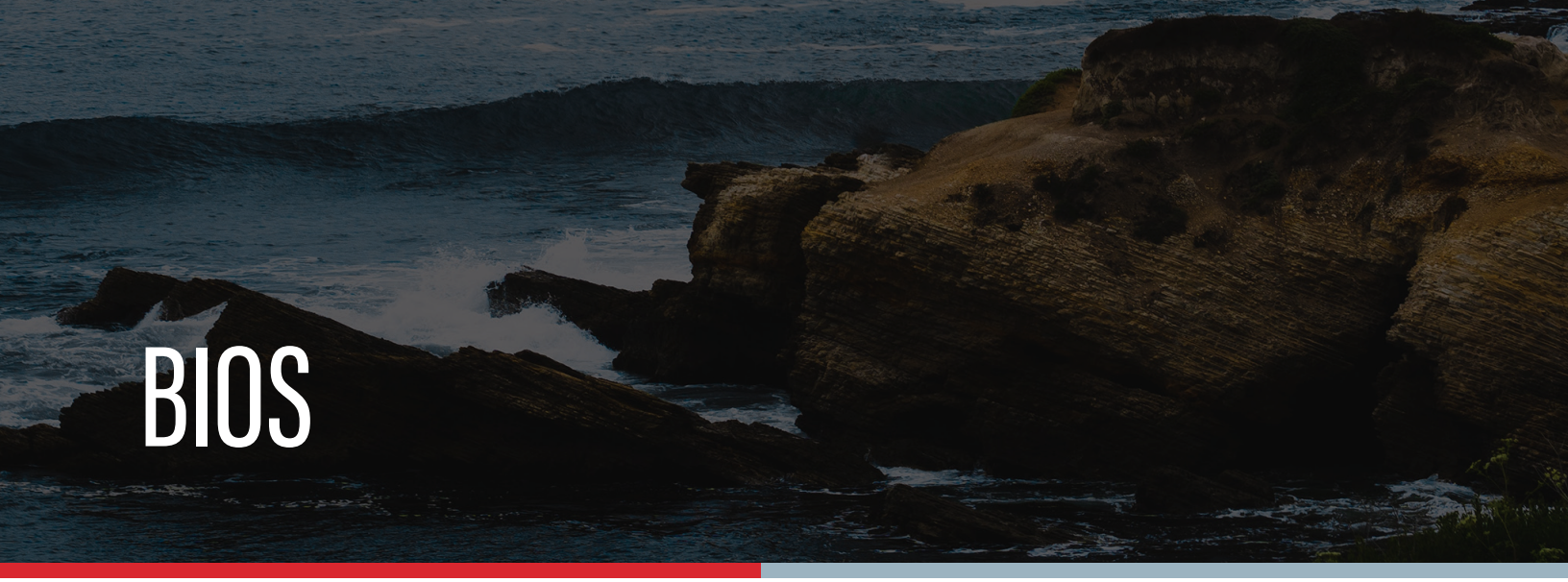
SLO-HISA would prioritize engagement with the SLO-CoC and its Governing Board. The SLO-CoC Governing Board would be a key interface between SLO-HISA and the larger community. Although the voting members of the SLO-HISA board would represent the cities, CSD, and County, it would be important to add Ex-Officio SLO-HISA board members from the SLO-CoC Governing Board. These Ex-Officio members would be present at board meetings to engage in discussion and debate as a member of the board, rather than as a member of the public.

CONCLUSION

The Citizen's Homeless Commission does not hold itself out as an expert on homelessness, nor does it seek to offer advice on how individual programs or organizations should operate. Instead, the Commission seeks to provide the public and homeless services stakeholders a candid assessment from an outside perspective. That assessment has concluded that a systemic reform of the governance system would do more to alleviate homelessness in the community, and do so more rapidly, than any incremental improvements to the operation of one or more organizations or programs.

The Citizen's Homeless Commission is aware of the potential resistance this proposal may encounter. These reforms would require considerable political will by the community's elected officials who would need to be willing to work cooperatively together while surrendering some control over how, where, and when certain SHS projects are built. Similarly, it would also require large and well-established nonprofit organizations to be willing to work with and through a JPA, which would have a more assertive and accountable leadership role than the current governance system. However, by each entity surrendering some if its individual power to act alone the larger entity will likely produce significantly more compelling grant proposals and measurable outcomes. By doing so our community will attract significantly more state and federal dollars thereby making the pie larger for all the parties, but more importantly – this reform will bring much needed help to those in the greatest need, our homeless community.





BIOS

Sam Blakeslee and Gregory Francisco Gillett are two residents of San Luis Obispo who, after a conversation around a social media post, sought to analyze the homelessness issue in San Luis Obispo County and created the Commission. The goal of the Commission was to identify gaps and redundancies in services, as well as identify actionable steps to improve the human condition of our unhoused neighbors. Although not a comprehensive study, the Commission applied academic principles in collecting and reviewing publicly accessible data. The commission interviewed leaders and employees of organizations who serve the unhoused, as well as our unhoused neighbors themselves. The Commission reviewed established best practices and worked with researchers from Cal Poly to analyze the data and determine appropriate policy recommendations.

The overarching theme of the Commission's findings is that to tackle the issues facing the unhoused, we must be coordinated and targeted in providing service. And, although there are tremendous efforts being made, we can do better.

SAM BLAKESLEE

Sam Blakeslee is the president of Blakeslee & Blakeslee, a financial services firm with offices in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara. He is also the founding Director of the Institute for Advanced Technology & Public Policy at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Blakeslee is a former California State Senator representing California's 15th State Senate district and previously served as a California State Assemblymember for California's 33rd district. He grew up on the Central Coast, graduating from SLO high and Cuesta. Blakeslee earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in geophysics from University of California, Berkeley and obtained a Ph.D. from University of California, Santa Barbara.

GREGORY FRANCISCO GILLETT

Gregory Francisco Gillett is the primary shareholder of Gillett Law, APC, a law firm with offices in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara. Gillett is a lieutenant colonel in the California State Guard where he serves as the commander of the Operations Group who support civil response and disaster relief throughout the state. He grew up in the Central Valley and moved to San Luis Obispo with his family in 2015 where he has been an active member of the San Luis Obispo County community. Gillett obtained his undergraduate degree from the University of California, San Diego, his law degree from the University of California Davis, and his Doctor of Education from the University of Southern California.