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COMMENTS ON PROPOSED ORDINANCE:  
DEFINITION OF FAMILY, CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION

TO: Los Angeles Planning Commission  
RE: Hearing Item 9, Case Number CPC-2009-800-CA  
FROM: Corporation for Supportive Housing  
DATE: October 13, 2010

The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) respectfully submits the following comments in response to the proposed ordinance to change the definition of "family" and to define a "single housekeeping unit" and "correctional and penal institutions." The proposed definitions would unintentionally undermine the City's ongoing efforts to address homelessness.

**SUPPORTIVE HOUSING**

CSH is a non-profit that helps communities create permanent housing with support services, "supportive housing," to prevent and end homelessness. Supportive housing enables homeless people with disabilities to achieve housing stability. Supportive housing tenants do not require "care and supervision" and are able to live independently, enjoying the rights and responsibilities of tenancy. As a result, under California law, supportive housing does not require a license.<sup>1</sup>

Studies prove supportive housing is a cost-effective approach to addressing homelessness.<sup>2</sup> A recent Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority-commissioned report found costs of hospital, ambulance, jail, police, and other services used by homeless people with mental illness and substance abuse disorders total \$5,038 per person, per month. Homeless people moving into supportive housing decrease costs by 79%.<sup>3</sup> Supportive housing is also linked to improved neighborhood property values,<sup>4</sup> as well as reductions in crime.<sup>5</sup> The City, County, State, and federal government recognize supportive housing as an essential ingredient to ending homelessness and federal courts have found supportive housing to be an effective means of allowing disabled people to live independently.

CSH is concerned that the proposed ordinance would construct barriers to supportive housing, while undermining California law, which requires local government to consider supportive housing, for zoning purposes, the same as housing of similar type.<sup>6</sup>

**DEFINITIONS OF FAMILY AND SINGLE HOUSEKEEPING UNIT**

As part of the State's Mental Health Services Act Housing Program, which enables Los Angeles County to provide supportive housing to homeless residents with mental illness, the County has committed to creating 100 shared housing units, in which residents of a single unit share common areas, bathrooms, and kitchens, but each occupy his/her own room. Each resident, by State

<sup>1</sup> Health & Safety Code § 1504.5.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Laura Sadowski, Romina Kee, Tyler VanderWeele, et. al. "Effect of a Housing and Case Management Program on Emergency Department Visits and Hospitalizations Among Chronically Ill Homeless Adults: A Randomized Trial." *J. Am. Med. Assoc.* 2009; 301(17): 1771-78. Mary Larimer, et. al. "Health Care and Public Service Use and Costs Before and After Provision of Housing for Chronically Homeless Persons with Severe Alcohol Problems." *J. Am. Med. Assoc.* 2009; 301 (13): 1349-57.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Flaming, Patrick Burns, Michael Matsunaga. "Where We Sleep: Costs When Homeless and Housed in Los Angeles County." *Economic Roundtable*. 2009. p. 1-2 (Executive Summary).

<sup>4</sup> Furman Center for Real Estate & Urban Policy. "The Impact of Supportive Housing on Surrounding Neighborhoods: Evidence from New York City." *New York University School of Law*. 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Justice Policy Institute. *Housing and Public Safety*. 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Government Code § 65583(a)(5).

requirement, has a lease. Shared housing does not, in any way, resemble boarding or rooming houses. Though shared supportive housing tenants have typically been excluded from housing due to their disability, receive an array of services, are responsible for their own rent, live independently, and could remain housed for long periods,<sup>7</sup> the proposed definition of a “single housekeeping unit” would consider their housing a “rooming or boarding house,” leaving these tenants few alternatives but to enter into an arrangement that makes them more dependent on others, to live more restrictively, to live only in certain areas, or to face homelessness. It would also violate court-recognized privacy rights among such tenants.<sup>8</sup> As such, the proposed definitions, due to their breadth, could not only put at risk of homelessness people living in overcrowded housing throughout the City,<sup>9</sup> but would also erect unnecessary burdens on shared supportive housing, potentially placing in jeopardy of homelessness people who would otherwise live independently.

#### DEFINITION OF CORRECTIONAL AND PENAL INSTITUTIONS

The proposed definition of correctional and penal institutions, which would have the effect of requiring a conditional use permit of any housing for probationers or parolees, would similarly impact residents of supportive housing. People with histories of homelessness and mental illness are 23% more likely to be incarcerated due to their homeless status.<sup>10</sup> Over half of all homeless people have a history of incarceration.<sup>11</sup> The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation reported that one-third to one-half of all parolees in Los Angeles experience homelessness.<sup>12</sup>

As a result, supportive housing tenants are often parolees, “under the supervision of the State of California Department of Corrections” and Rehabilitation or probationers. Yet, studies find that supportive housing tenants make good neighbors<sup>13</sup> and decrease their likelihood of re-offense. Supportive housing has been associated with improved public safety in neighborhoods across the country.<sup>14</sup> The proposed ordinance would require supportive housing providers to screen out applicants with the greatest vulnerabilities, many of whom will reoffend without the services and housing necessary to diminish the effects of their disabilities.

#### CONCLUSION

Despite evidence that creating supportive housing improves neighborhoods, saves costs, and increases public safety, siting supportive housing remains difficult due to fear and misinformation. However unintentional, erecting additional barriers to supportive housing would not only frustrate the City’s larger policy goals to create more supportive housing, it would disproportionately impact homeless people with disabilities, when feasible alternatives exist to achieve the Commission’s objectives. As the Executive Summary states, City ordinances already include provisions for transient residential uses of single-family homes. CSH urges the Commission, therefore, to reject proposed definitions of “family,” “single housekeeping unit,” and “correctional institutions.”

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<sup>7</sup> 81% of supportive housing tenants with mental and substance abuse disabilities remain housed after one year; 64% remain housed after two. Martha Burt, Jacquelyn Anderson. “AB 2034 Program Experiences in Housing Homeless People with Serious Mental Illness.” *Corporation for Supportive Housing*. Jan. 2006.

<sup>8</sup> *City of Santa Barbara v. Adamson*, 27 Cal. 3d 123 (1980).

<sup>9</sup> In 2007, 9% of the City’s renters lived in severely overcrowded housing, 29% of renters faced severe rent burdens. Economic Roundtable. “Economic Study of the Rent Stabilization Ordinance and LA Housing Market.” Oct. 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Metraux, Caterina Roman, Richard Cho. “Incarceration and Homelessness.” *2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research*. Feb. 14, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Carol Caton, Carol Wilkins, Jacquelyn Anderson. “Characteristics and Interventions for People Who Experience Long-Term Homelessness.” *National Symposium on Homelessness Research*. Feb. 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Metraux, *ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Malone. “Assessing Criminal History As a Predictor of Future Housing Success for Homeless Adults with Behavioral Health Disorders.” *Psychiatric Services*. Vol. 60, No. 2. Feb. 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Justice Policy Institute. *Housing and Public Safety*. 2007.