



June 1, 2016

To: Homeless and Poverty Committee

From: Peter Lynn, Executive Director, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

Subject: **LOS ANGELES HOMELESS SERVICES AUTHORITY – CONTINUATION OF THE WINTER SHELTER PROGRAM (WSP)**

Peter Lynn
Executive Director

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The Budget and Finance Committee Discussing the Mayor’s Proposed Budget for FY2016-17 approved by City Council included a requested report on whether it makes sense to continue devoting resources to winter shelters considering their limited use, underutilization, or inability to fill to capacity. The report should address whether the resources should be reallocated to support permanent shelters.

In considering the City’s ongoing Winter Shelter Program (WSP), and the utilization for the 2015-2016 season, it is important to recall that the City greatly expanded its bed capacity this past year in anticipation of a projected severe El Nino storm season. Expanding bed capacity by 50% provided great depth in expectation of greatly increased need if the storms LA saw in 1997 re-emerged. The absence of those predicted storms is what drove the under-utilization of bed capacity, not the unwillingness of homeless Angelenos to access Winter Shelter in general. The WSP actually saw an increase in beds utilized – we served thousands more people than we did in 2014-15 – but because we had added 50% more bed capacity, the utilization rate was lower. Had we deployed only the beds we had available in 2014-15 WSP, the bed utilization in 2015-16 would have been consistently over 100%.

While we cannot know for certain what the utilization would have been if a full-scale El Nino had struck LA, we know that utilization would have gone up. And it is likely that we would have drawn on that entire increased capacity had the severe, multi-day storms struck LA, with the accompanying severe winds that could destroy tents and makeshift dwellings, driving residents out of encampments.

Even though our overall bed capacity was underutilized because so many additional beds were available, the 2015-16 WSP still provided more than 200,000 bed nights of service, a 73% increase over 2014-15. WSP served more than 10,000 unique individuals County wide, 13% more than were served in 2014-15. As a way to compare that number, the 2016 Homeless Count found 24,470 adult individuals homeless on a given night in the City of LA in January. This means a relatively large percentage of single adult homeless individuals passed through the WSP over the months it was in operation. And we were able to assess more than 3,100 of the people served for the Coordinated Entry System, putting them in a trajectory to access permanent housing and other resources.

As LAHSA undertakes a complete redesign of our shelter programs, as outlined in the City’s Comprehensive Homeless Strategy 7A – Shelter System Personnel Need for Bridge Housing Conversion, and funded in this FY 2016-17 budget under item Coordinated Entry System (CES) Crisis and Bridge Housing for Singles and Youth System, it is appropriate to consider

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the role that Winter Shelter plays in our overall system. Traditionally, the role has been to offer homeless residents a buffer against the risk of mortality from exposure during our coldest, wettest nights. That need will not diminish in this year, as we ramp up to deploy all of the newly funded programs; there will remain a large population who are unsheltered over the 2016-17 winter season. But LA's ability to deploy our Coordinated Entry System, a comprehensive infrastructure from outreach through permanent housing placement, affords us an additional purpose for the WSP, which is that it forms a significant point of engagement for those who use it – at least half of whom we do not otherwise serve in our shelter system.

Where WSP has traditionally performed a straight-forward humanitarian relief role for the Los Angeles Continuum of Care, with the emergence of an integrated Coordinated Entry System, we can see an expanded role as point of entry.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

This memorandum is provided for informational purposes only. There is no fiscal impact.