

January 24, 2017

Councilmember Huizar,

We the undersigned Skid Row-based organizations and service providers write you to express our deep concern with the proposed appointment of Blair Besten to the Proposition HHH Civilian Oversight Committee. This appointment is expected to go in front of City Council on Friday, January 27, and we strongly urge you to reconsider this appointment and instead propose someone who is more qualified and has more experience in working with homeless policy and programs.

Our organizations worked tirelessly in last year's election to ensure that every voter we engaged voted "Yes" on Proposition HHH. LA CAN's work on HHH alone through door knocking, phone banking, and GOTV efforts resulted in us contacting more than 35,000 unique voters to support HHH. Now that it has passed, proper implementation is key, and the civilian oversight committee is critical to ensuring that these funds are spent wisely. It is also an opportunity to bring experts and advocates on homelessness and housing to the table to provide the valuable input required to make sure Proposition HHH funding is delegated appropriately. Lastly, we believe that there should be representation from those impacted by homelessness. Expertise comes in many forms – and those with lived experience in homelessness and/or working directly with homeless populations is extremely important.

For these reasons and others, we strongly oppose the appointment of Blair Besten to this committee. Besten is a business leader in Downtown LA whose work has actually contributed to the displacement of low-income and/or homeless residents in our community. As opposed to the other two proposed appointees, she has no expertise on homeless services, policy or permanent supportive housing development. Additionally, in recent years she has been opposed to opportunities to get people off the streets and into housing, like the failed Cecil Hotel Home for Good proposal that would have seen 300 homeless people put into housing.

There are far more qualified individuals within Downtown and specifically Skid Row who would be better candidates for this committee. We would be willing to submit potential names, as our organizations have been serving the homeless population in Skid Row for decades.

In closing, we urge you to not appoint Blair Besten and instead make a greater effort to create a committee of individuals who are qualified and fully committed to getting homeless individuals off the streets and into permanent housing.

Church without Walls
UCCEP
Los Angeles Community Action Network
Los Angeles Poverty Department
United Central City East Prevention Project