

REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

DATE: April 14, 2022

TO: Honorable Members of the Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee

FROM: Sharon M. Tso *KEK*
Chief Legislative Analyst

Council File No: 22-0002-S8
Assignment No: 22-02-0080

SUBJECT: Resolution (Blumenfield, de Leon, Harris-Dawson – Rodriguez) to include SUPPORT and/or SPONSORSHIP of legislation that work to abate benefit reductions for lived experience advocates, in SSI or other programs, when receiving compensation for providing services to better the homeless services delivery system.

CLA RECOMMENDATION Adopt the attached Resolution (Blumenfield, de Leon, Harris-Dawson – Rodriguez) to include in the 2021 -2022 Federal Legislative Program SUPPORT and/or SPONSORSHIP of legislation that works to abate benefit reductions for lived experience advocates, in SSI or other programs, when receiving compensation for providing services to better the homeless services delivery system.

SUMMARY

Resolution (Blumenfield, de Leon, Harris-Dawson – Rodriguez), introduced February 1, 2022, states the following:

- There were 41,290 individuals in the City of Los Angeles experiencing homelessness in 2020;
- Every tool and resource available must be utilized to combat this crisis and create a more effective homeless services delivery system, including engaging individuals with lived experience of homelessness as advocates and consultants;
- It is best practice and morally right to compensate these individuals fairly for their time and their expertise; and
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) has extremely restrictive income requirements that result in sharp benefit reductions when an individual on SSI receives compensation or other payments.

The attached Resolution seeks to support and/or sponsor legislation that would ensure SSI benefits are not reduced for homeless individuals who earn income from serving on lived experience advisory boards. The City should support this Resolution as benefit reductions can traumatize lived experience advisors by forcing them to make difficult decisions regarding essential needs and income, as well as deter them from providing services to improve homeless services delivery systems.

BACKGROUND

Homeless Lived Experience Advisory Boards

There are two lived experience advisory boards in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority's (LAHSA) Lived Experience Advisory Board (LEAB) for adults and Homeless Youth Forum of Los Angeles (HYFLA) for homeless youth have been designed to impact homelessness policy in the City of Los Angeles and throughout the County.

LAHSA informs that LEAB was founded to provide advice and counsel to LAHSA and its system partners to help end homelessness, as well as to ensure that the unique voice of those with lived experience are incorporated throughout the Los Angeles homeless crisis response system. HYFLA was founded to end youth homelessness in the County by centering the voices of youth with lived expertise in decision-making and to provide advice on the following issues: program development; funding; policy making; and evaluation of programs and system performance.

LAHSA states that the compensation for participation in these boards is \$25/hour, and the time commitment is a minimum of four hours per month to attend mandatory meetings. Members can also participate in speaking engagements and advocacy efforts, such as attending and participating in homeless system meetings and providing public comment to legislative bodies.

In addition to LEAB and HYFLA, LAHSA reports that there are other boards throughout the City and County that impact homelessness, including lived experience boards that advocate for supportive housing and domestic violence.

LAHSA's Legislative Proposal

In alignment with Resolution (Blumenfield - de Leon - Harris-Dawson – Rodriguez), LAHSA has proposed, and is currently seeking federal support for legislation that would ensure that members of homeless lived experience advisory boards would not experience a reduction in SSI benefits as a result of income earned for serving as an advisory board member.

In support of their proposal, LAHSA states that many advisory board members have experienced a reduction in needed public benefits due to the compensation they receive. Specifically, any paid income over \$30 that is received "infrequently or irregularly" in any quarter-of-a-calendar-year lessens an advisory board member's SSI payment by that same amount. LAHSA states that many lived experience advisors, who may have only recently exited homelessness and may be disabled and/or in deep poverty, rely on these benefits to pay for food, housing, and medical services. If a paid opportunity threatens those benefit amounts, these individuals may avoid participating on a Board in order to maintain their current level of benefits. LAHSA informs that these members are forced to make difficult and often traumatizing budgeting decisions.

LEAB Advocacy Efforts

LAHSA states that LEAB members have assisted service providers and system administrators to make thoughtful and effective local system changes, and have advocated to the Federal Government for such changes. For example, LEAB members have strongly urged the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to withdraw a proposed rule change to

the Fair Housing Act that would take away a critical tool that allows vulnerable individuals to challenge underlying, and sometimes unintentional, discriminatory housing practices.

Additionally, LEAB provided public input on the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness's Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness. LEAB provided an 11 page letter advocating for improvements to various homeless programs and policies including prevention, eviction protection, rental assistance, supportive housing construction, and removal of barriers to housing such as obtaining identification. LEAB also advised that lived experience advisors should be compensated fairly for their time and efforts and be able to participate without fear of jeopardizing their eligibility for public benefits. Further, LEAB advised that individuals with lived experience of homelessness are valuable advocates and consultants whose experiences are necessary when shaping policy, developing programs, and advancing change.

HUD Recommends Lived Experience Advisors

In their aforementioned legislative proposal, LAHSA highlights the fact that HUD also advocates for the engagement of lived experience advisors by homeless service systems nationwide. Specifically, HUD states the following:

“Those with lived experiences of homelessness typically have the best understanding of the reality of our work to prevent and end homelessness, both in terms of the problems that exist and the knowledge of the services and interventions that are the most effective solutions. This is why it is so important to meaningfully and intentionally integrate them into the decision-making structure of our work at the system and program level. HUD recognizes the importance of their participation and wants stakeholders to share in our commitment to finding effective ways to hear the voices of persons with lived experience of homelessness.”

Given that HUD advocates for lived experience advisors to assist decision makers in making more informed homelessness policy, there is an inherent conflict that the federal government also restricts SSI benefits for homeless persons serving on advisory boards. This Resolution and LAHSA's legislative proposal seek to remove that conflict.



Jack Reef
Analyst

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, any official position of the City of Los Angeles with respect to legislation, rules, regulations, or policies proposed to or pending before a local, state, or federal governmental body or agency must have first been adopted in the form of a Resolution by the City Council with the concurrence of the Mayor; and

WHEREAS, there were 41,290 individuals in the City of Los Angeles experiencing homelessness on a given night in 2020, which was an increase of 16% from 2019; and

WHEREAS, every tool and resource available must be utilized to combat this crisis and create a more effective homeless services delivery system, including engaging individuals with lived experience of homelessness as advocates and consultants; and

WHEREAS, individuals with lived experience of homelessness have unique expertise and provide a critical lens for the homeless services delivery system; and

WHEREAS, these individuals provide valuable input which has been used, and will continue to be used, to improve homeless services delivery systems across the country; and

WHEREAS, it is best practice and morally right to compensate these individuals fairly for their time and only adequately values their expertise and knowledge when they are fairly compensated; and

WHEREAS, many of these individuals also rely on public benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), to pay for living expenses such as housing, food, transportation, and medical expenses; and

WHEREAS, SSI has extremely restrictive income disregard amounts which result in sharp benefit reductions when an individual on SSI receives compensation or other payments; and

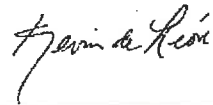
WHEREAS, these benefit reductions can not only cause additional trauma to people with lived experience by forcing them to make difficult decisions about essential needs and money, but can also deter these individuals from providing services that can help better homeless services delivery systems; and

WHEREAS, organizations should be able to encourage and incentivize the provision of lived experience advocacy services, especially in the homeless services delivery system, without fear of penalizing these individuals for their participation; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, with the concurrence of the Mayor, that by adoption of this Resolution, the City of Los Angeles hereby includes in its ²⁰²¹⁻²⁰²² ~~2022-23~~ Federal Legislative Program SUPPORT and/or SPONSORSHIP for legislation that work to abate benefit reductions for lived experience advocates, in SSI or other programs, when receiving compensation for providing services to better the homeless services delivery system.

PRESENTED BY: 

BOB BLUMENFELD
Councilmember, 3rd District



KEVIN DE LEÓN
Councilmember, 14th District



MARQUEECE HARRIS-DAWSON
Councilmember, 8th District

SECONDED BY: 

MONICA RODRIGUEZ
Councilmember, 7th District

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