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Crisis Housing for Homeless Women

Los Angeles County, like other areas of the country, has a consistently significant population of homeless women. In the recently completed 2017 Homeless Count in the County, almost one-third of the total homeless population said they were women. This high number has generally remained consistent since 2011, when women comprised 33% of the homeless population. Given this fact, the County must identify and advance initiatives that realistically decrease the number of homeless women and systematically work to create more pathways for them to attain stable housing and the ability to live free of violence and exploitation.

The information gathered from service providers and clients shows that women often become homeless as a result of a variety of traumatic experiences. National statistics show that over 90% of women who are homeless report a history of severe, and often prolonged, physical or sexual abuse. In particular, 22%-57% of women in differing surveys list domestic violence as an immediate cause of homelessness. Similar to national statistics, the 2017 Point-in-Time Homeless Count found that 50% of

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homeless woman in Los Angeles County reported having experienced domestic violence or intimate partner violence.

This data is particularly strong in older women who are on the streets. In addition to the traumatic experiences that result in homelessness, women also incur extraordinarily high rates of violence and trauma while homeless, especially those who are older or disabled. To focus solely on transitioning women to stable housing is insufficient. In order to move safely off the streets, women need an environment where they can be protected from experiencing new trauma as well as take critical first steps toward healing from past trauma.

In December 2016 the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) created an Ad Hoc Committee on Women and Homelessness to develop recommendations for reducing the number of women experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles. While that Committee will not release its formal recommendations until summer 2017, a central theme of the Committee's work has been the need for Trauma-Informed Care in homeless services for women. A trauma-informed approach has proven effective in preparing individuals to reintegrate into healthy communities. Trauma-Informed Care concentrates on responding to the impact of trauma and creating programming that ensures the safety, healing, and self-determination of survivors. One example of a program that demonstrated early success in trauma-informed housing for women who were escaping domestic violence and homelessness is Volunteers of America's Home Free program in Portland, Oregon. Initial findings show that 86% of households remained stably housed after one year of exiting the program and had better outcomes on measures of PTSD, depression, and quality of life.

Los Angeles County has a rare opportunity to address a significant root cause of homelessness by implementing trauma-informed crisis housing for women. Because homeless women have extensive histories of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual assault and human trafficking, this crisis housing will require a greater emphasis on safety planning than the traditional crisis housing program. To successfully connect homeless women to permanent housing, this program will also require a low-barrier Housing-First approach that, whenever feasible, screens in single-women, older women, women with children (including boys and older children), and transgender women, rather than screening these women and families out.

With the passage of Measure H, and the expenditure plan for this funding, Los Angeles is poised to make a significant reduction in homelessness. It is critical that this investment recognize the unique needs of homeless women and provide funding for programs that meet their unique needs.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct LAHSA to implement a Women's Crisis Housing program by:

1. Directing LAHSA to determine how much Measure H funding dedicated to Homeless Initiative strategy E8 would be needed annually to support a minimum of 200 crisis housing beds at one or more locations dedicated to homeless women including programming to address safety and trauma needs experienced by victims of intimate partner violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and other forms of violence against women and direct LAHSA to dedicate this level of funding to this program;

2. Directing LAHSA to convene stakeholders including domestic violence agencies, sexual assault agencies, human trafficking agencies, homeless agencies, the Chief Executive Office (CEO), the Department of Public Social Services, the Domestic Violence Council, other relevant parties, and women with lived experience to provide recommendations on the program design of the Women's Crisis Housing program; and
3. Direct LAHSA, in collaboration with the CEO, to report back to the Board of Supervisors in 90 days with a program design for the Women's Crisis Housing Program including a timeline for implementation and annual reports on the outcomes of the program thereafter.

WE FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors: Direct the CEO, in collaboration with LAHSA and Department of Health Services (DHS), to report back to the Board of Supervisors in 90 days with recommendations regarding whether funding in other Homeless Initiative strategies should be set aside to specifically address the needs of homeless women.