

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

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Bringing Critical Summer Relief to Vulnerable Residents

Heat waves have always been a sign of summer; however, climate change has led to every year becoming another year of record heat. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), an average of 1,220 people die from extreme heat annually. However, in 2023, there were 2,302 fatalities due to heat exposure in the United States. California was in the top five states for heat-related mortalities at 84.

With excessive temperatures come excessive health risks, particularly for those most vulnerable. Heat-related illnesses, such as heat stroke or heat exhaustion happen when a person’s body temperature rises faster than it can cool itself, which can cause catastrophic damage to the brain and other vital organs.

It is undeniable that in communities across the County, including heat vulnerable communities in the San Gabriel Valley, East LA, Downtown Los Angeles including Skid Row, and beyond, and community residents of varying ages and health conditions will continue to face intense heat that will impact them uniquely based on their individual health condition. People with underlying health conditions such as cardiovascular,

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respiratory, kidney concerns, and more, are at elevated risk of heat stroke. Persons experiencing homelessness are two-fold exposed to health risks from extreme heat due to their chronic exposure without respite.

According to the CDC, drinking enough fluids to stay hydrated is one of the most important things that can be done to prevent heat illness. Access to clean water, can be a lifeline amid extreme heat. However, it can be out of reach for some of our most vulnerable residents, including unhoused individuals. The Water Box is an efficient and effective mechanism by which to provide large quantities of water in short periods of time, utilizing any container. The Water Box is meant to help public service organizations distribute water, via a four-stage treatment system designed to be connected to the municipal water infrastructure. This removes the burden associated with funding, storing, and acquiring water bottles. The Water Box has been an important resource by which to provide water to vulnerable residents in the five locations where they are available throughout the County, comprised of Skid Row and La Puente.

Cooling centers are also vital for individuals that lack access to air conditioning, by providing enclosed spaces with lower room temperatures than other places. It can take many hours before individuals' temperatures regulate after heat stress, and access to cooling centers that are open for long period of time is critical. Outdoor cooling centers are also an effective strategy that is already being utilized in cities across the country. Outdoor cooling centers are typically comprised of completely shaded areas with natural or artificial breezes via the use of fans, evaporative coolers, and misting tents. Many outdoor cooling centers also have designated areas where people can sit with their pets and drink water.

Despite work that has already been done to increase the number of cooling centers countywide, cooling centers only operate after two consecutive days in which temperature is perceived to be at or above 95°F in the LA basin (and 104°F for valleys, deserts, and mountains). Cooling center operations do not account for the proportion of individuals that are unhoused, live in crowded housing, housing without air conditioning, or proximity to green spaces or other locations with air conditioning, such as shopping centers, which can alleviate heat burden. Furthermore, there is much more work needed to provide outreach to the most vulnerable residents to ensure they are aware of when cooling centers are operating.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Office of Emergency Management and the Department of Public Health, in partnership with the Chief Sustainability Office, to:

1. Reassess existing protocols for the activation of cooling centers and incorporate additional factors contributing to heat, including social determinants of health, such as housing density, overcrowding, lack of green space, family income, and more;
2. Establish a protocol and toolkit to provide extreme heat warnings in multiple languages to impacted residents and communities through direct outreach and notifications on ways to address the impacts of extreme heat, including nearby cooling centers and transportation options. These messages should include:
 - a) Social media graphics and copy to be shared with and disseminated by partners, including County departments, community-based organizations, and other trusted entities that share public service announcements,

including cities, LA Metro, and others; and

- b) Engagement of traditional, ethnic, and hyperlocal media to pitch cooling center locations and, if feasible, media advertisements.

I, FURTHER, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Chief Executive Office, the Office of Emergency Management, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Public Works, the Chief Sustainability Office, and other relevant departments, and in collaboration with the Center for Strategic Partnerships, and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) to:

1. Identify available funding opportunities, including philanthropic and non-County funding, to procure additional Water Boxes to be placed in vulnerable communities, including settings serving high numbers of people experiencing homelessness;
2. Identify additional opportunities to expand available cooling centers in areas of the County susceptible to high heat events;
3. Assess the feasibility of establishing outdoor cooling centers, that would also allow residents to bring their pets, in conjunction with the Water Boxes in vulnerable high-heat areas; and
4. Report back to the Board in writing in 30 days on the above directives.

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