



ASSEMBLY BILL 799

Homelessness Accountability and Results Act

Assemblywoman Luz Rivas



SUMMARY

California's homelessness problem is rooted in high housing prices, a lack of available housing, the state's inconsistent funding commitments and shifting homelessness accountability benchmarks, and local governments' failure to utilize state funding effectively on programs that reduce homelessness.

According to the PPIC, homelessness is the top issue that Californians want to see addressed. Nevertheless, posturing and finger-pointing has fed into the frustration that has caused the issue to reach the boiling point we are at today. In order to move the state towards an effective solution, the following must happen: the legislature, administration, local governments, and advocates must work together to produce solutions that create clear accountability, firm homelessness reduction targets, and stable ongoing funding.

BACKGROUND

The HHAP Program was enacted to provide grant funding to large cities, counties, and homeless Continuums of Care to support a variety of homeless interventions, including funding for interim housing, services, rehousing, and homelessness prevention. The California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH) issues HHAP funds using a system upon approval of local homelessness action plans on an annual basis. These year-by-year, one-time investments hamper local governments from investing in long-term programs that reduce homelessness.

Further, because the State has only invested in HHAP through one-time allocations, the State is unable to hold local recipients accountable under the tool of reallocating future funding when recipients fail to meet expectations. Moreover, local jurisdictions have set goals and strategies largely in accordance with their ability to access future "bonus" funds, instead of as a part of a larger, overarching strategy.

As a result of our lackluster progress in reducing homelessness, Governor Newsom took the extraordinary step of temporarily withholding HHAP funds when local governments' HHAP action plans collectively set goals of reducing homelessness by only "2% statewide by 2024." The Governor commented, "At this pace, it would take decades to significantly curb homelessness in California."

PROBLEM

According to the federal Housing and Urban Development Department, over 171,000 Californians experience homelessness on any given night. Our State accounts for 30% of the nation's homeless population. According to the 2022 Los Angeles County Homeless Count, 69,144 people experienced homelessness in 2022, a 4.1% rise from 2020.

With the mantle of the nation's highest homelessness population, the State must respond with funding local governments at the scale needed to meet the scope of the crisis. However, in order to provide that level of stable funding, the State must ensure local governments take a data-driven, evidence-based approach moving forward, and local jurisdictions must invest in comprehensive and strategic solutions proven to reduce homelessness.

This lack of accountability, coupled with inconsistent funding has caused a public policy feedback loop resulting in homelessness response systems unable to fully meet the challenges of rising housing costs and insufficient supply.

SOLUTION

In order to combat homelessness, the State must reform its current approach to issuing funds by enacting meaningful accountability measures, promoting transparency in the use of HHAP funds, and setting State goals to anchor local progress.

AB 799 requires the State to take a more direct leadership role in working with local jurisdictions collaboratively to set homeless reduction targets. Additionally, the bill sets consequences for failing to meet goals, including the potential for HHAP funds to be reallocated to another entity within the same region. Furthermore, the bill streamlines administrative burdens on local systems, while ensuring that more detailed information is made public to improve transparency and oversight. Lastly, the bill requires investments in balanced homeless response systems that promote equitable housing outcomes while maintaining flexible eligible uses.

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SUPPORT

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