



**Testimony to City Council Homeless Committee
February 29, 2016
Bob Erlenbusch, Executive Director, SRCEH**

My name is Bob Erlenbusch, Executive Director, Sacramento Regional Coalition to End Homelessness.

Thank you to the committee for giving me the opportunity to speak this evening.

I traveled to Seattle with Steve Watters, First Steps Communities, and Holly Wunder-Stiles, a partner from Mutual Housing. We were able to tour Tent Encampment 3 and the Nickelsville encampment as the city delegation did. We also met with a representative of the Seattle University, School of Law, Homeless Rights Advocacy Project, who provided expertise and perspective on Seattle's tent encampment efforts as part of their city's approach to homelessness. On Saturday we traveled to Olympia, Washington with Ryan Loofbourrow and Emily Halcon and were provided a tour and discussion of the Quixote Village by PANZA board members, city Housing Program Manager, and residents of Quixote Village.

5 observations from my trip to Seattle:

1. State of Emergency: Seattle's elected officials were motivated, in part, to declare a homeless state of emergency due to the increase in the number of homeless deaths in 2015. Seattle had about 60 deaths- out of 10,000 homeless people on an annual basis - or .006%. Sacramento had over 90 homeless deaths last year out of 5,000 homeless people on an annual basis - or 1.9%- 3 times that of Seattle- yet no mention to date from this committee of declaring a state of emergency.

2. Tent cities- we can do better in creating safe zones for people experiencing homelessness: we agree that the tent cities in Seattle provide a sense of safety, security and community, however:

A. what we saw at Nickelsville was not as dignified as I had hoped. No heat, no electricity, no water; and the 4 or 5 "tiny homes" we saw were essentially "tuff sheds"--- as a community I hope that your Committee and City Council has a much higher standard for legalized tent city[s] in our community;

B. Tent City 3: while an improvement over Nickelsville- in terms of heat, electricity, water, showers, food etc- the fact that they have to break down and rebuild their community of 100 every 3 months is not a program we support - the main reason is the hardship it puts on people who are working- they told us 80% at Tent City and for any children in the Tent City going to school - to have to figure that out every 3 months is an unnecessary hardship. If we are to have a safeguard concept in our community- it should be on several sites that are stationary.

3. Quixote Village- to be transparent- I am a board member of First Steps Communities. It is a shame that members of the Committee could not see the Village- however it was great that both Emily and Ryan made time to stay over on Saturday and visit. It was inspiring to see the Village and what is possible and what we should aspire to in Sacramento. Quixote Village is a near image of what we envision as an interim solution for Sacramento. SRCEH feels strongly that legalized campground[s] and First Step Communities are not an "either/or" proposition but support each other in our effort to save lives and provide a safe community for people to be while we are creating enough affordable housing.

4. Moratorium on the anti-camping ordinance: SRCEH continues to support a moratorium on the anti-camping ordinance as a policy that violates the 8th amendment of the US Constitution and is out-of-step with federal homeless policy. We can not take the approach that Seattle has - according to a Seattle advocate that we spoke to - of declaring an emergency; legalized tent cities and then increasing police sweeps in downtown. This policy is counter productive and undermines the city's credibility of trying to find proactive, rather than punitive solutions, to address our homeless crisis. The current Sacramento City Council stance on retaining the anti-camping ordinance runs counter to federal policy including HUD, the Department of Justice and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.

5. Affordable Housing: The Committee- while focused on emergency "solutions" must not lose sight of the end goal- to begin creating housing, jobs and livable incomes for people experiencing homelessness. These efforts must move forward simultaneously if we are going to be serious as a community about ending and preventing homelessness.

2 additional comments as it relates to two issues that have been brought up this evening:

1. Rapid rehousing: With a 3% apartment vacancy rate in our community there is nothing "rapid" about this approach. While touted as a national best practice, it rests on the premise that affordable housing exists. Additionally, as a member of Women's Empowerment's Board of Director, we see it all the time- once the housing subsidy runs out, women are evicted because they do not have the income to continue to pay rent and they become homeless again. Unless there is an employment and income strategy coupled with the housing, this approach is doomed to fail.

2. Winter shelter: As our "Homeless Deaths Report" found, 25% of the over 600 homeless deaths from 2002-2014 occurred during the winter. The other 75% occurred in the Spring, Summer and Fall – 25% each season. SRCEH supports expanding winter shelter to be year round as a live saving measure. We would never open a hospital and have the emergency room open only 25% of the time.

Thank you for allowing me the 5 minutes tonight. Do you have any questions?