



# LWVC Homelessness Action Policy

Adopted by the LWVC board of directors on August 5, 2020

## Introduction

California has been in the midst of a housing and homelessness crisis for many years, and its impact has been exacerbated in the past year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, driving homelessness to new highs. The League has long been supportive of government action to increase both the supply and availability of affordable housing, using our positions on Meeting Basic Needs and our principles calling for issues around equity.

While we continue to re-examine policies and practices which have historically resulted in the lack of supply of affordable housing, we cannot ignore the growing numbers in our community who are forced into homelessness. At the 2019 state convention, local Leagues called for more action and education around homelessness. Many local Leagues have been engaged in such efforts. A state Homelessness Task Force looked at the broad issues causing homelessness and have developed a Homelessness Action Policy which will assist local Leagues across the state to address this growing issue.

In addition to national League positions, our LWVC positions on Criminal Justice, Children and Family Issues Action Policy, Housing, Land Use, Mental Health, and State and Local Finance all work together to support action.

This LWVC Homelessness Action Policy is designed for use by California state and local Leagues and Inter-League Organizations (ILOs) to guide specific action and education at their respective levels.

## Position in Brief:

**The League of Women Voters of California supports actions to reduce and eliminate homelessness, both sheltered and unsheltered,\* throughout the State.**

### We support:

- Equal opportunity for access to housing with no barriers on the basis of gender, gender identity, ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin, age, generation, sexual orientation, culture, religion, belief system, marital status, parental status, socioeconomic status, language, accent, ability status, mental health, educational level or background, geography, nationality, work style, work experience, job role function, thinking style, personality type, physical appearance, political perspective or affiliation and/or any other characteristic that can be identified as recognizing or illustrating diversity.

- Programs and policies to assist those who are experiencing homelessness, or about to become homeless, so their basic human needs can be met.
- Supportive services, including effective case management, job training, domestic violence services, and treatment for physical and mental health, as well as substance use disorder, to help people experiencing homelessness succeed in obtaining and maintaining permanent housing.
- Building of shelters, permanent supportive housing, and low-income/very low-income/extremely low-income housing for those who are experiencing homelessness.
- An increased stock of affordable housing to decrease the number at risk of becoming homeless.
- Educating the public about people experiencing homelessness and their needs, and the services and support that are effective.
- Promotion of cost-effective prevention services to assist those on the edge of becoming homeless from losing their housing.
- Facilities and venues to meet the basic needs of people experiencing homelessness for personal hygiene, storage, and trash removal, as well as for safe spaces in which to live.
- Rescission of policies, practices, regulations and laws that criminalize, penalize, or permit the harassment of people experiencing homelessness for engaging in necessary life activities in public spaces (e.g. sleeping, standing, camping, etc.).
- Using a variety of crisis response and housing interventions to meet the needs of persons coming into the homeless system or who are at risk of homelessness.
- Policies and programs to provide income assistance to lower income families and individuals.

## Justification for Homelessness Action Policy Elements

These next sections specify **National and State League positions** that justify elements of the proposed Action Policy. The full position statements are given in the LWVUS publication *Impact on Issues* and the LWVC publication *Action Policies and Positions*. (*links are embedded in position name*)

Positions are quoted in **bold**; the extrapolations from those positions used to justify the language in the Action Policy are in *italics*.

### LWVUS Positions

[Meeting Basic Human Needs](#) as it relates to Homelessness

**Support programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families. Support income assistance programs, based on need, that provide decent, adequate standards for food, clothing and shelter. Provide essential support services. Support policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.**

- *In order to promote self-sufficiency, it is important to advocate for a living wage.*
- *Ensure that safety net services provide the support necessary to prevent people from becoming homeless.*

- *Advocate for appropriate supportive services to prevent families and individuals from falling into homelessness, as well as if they should become homeless. Area Continuums of Care (COC)\* via Coordinated Entry Systems (CES)\* ensure that the best supportive services are provided in a timely fashion.*
- *Assume “every American family” means any resident of the state.*

**Equality of Opportunity** as it relates to Homelessness

**Support equal access to education, employment and housing.**

- *Advocate for access to a quality education for all people, which is vital in order to obtain upward mobility and access to good-paying jobs.*
- *Support job training and re-training in specific skills to give all people access to employment, especially those whose skills may not match up with current economic needs.*

**Urban Policy** as it relates to Homelessness

**Promote the economic health of cities and improve the quality of urban life**

- *Target economic and community development assistance to families and individuals most in need, and especially to those who are impoverished or on the verge of becoming impoverished.*
- *Promote policies to encourage businesses to locate in distressed communities and neighborhoods through financial incentives such as investment tax credits, loan guarantees, interest subsidies and subsidies to hire the long-term unemployed and formerly incarcerated.*
- *Support policies that promote a balance between jobs and housing, including land use policies to promote jobs and housing in proximity to one another.*
- *Support a comprehensive mass transit system to ensure all workers can reach their employers more easily while keeping greenhouse gas emissions low.*

**Health Care** as it relates to Homelessness

**Promote a health care system for the United States that provides access to a basic level of quality care for all U.S. residents and controls health care costs.**

- *Advocate for access to quality and affordable health care for all people regardless of income.*
- *Advocate for mental health care as an integral part of basic health care services.*
- *Advocate for prenatal programs for homeless women who are pregnant.*

**Natural Resources** as it relates to Homelessness

**Promote the management of natural resources as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Pollution of these resources should be controlled in order to preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of ecosystems and to protect public health.**

- *Support social justice programs that strive to improve air and water quality in communities which historically have suffered from high levels of air and water pollution.*
- *Homeless services and facilities should be sited within walking distance of transit to the extent possible to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.*

**Violence Prevention** as it relates to Homelessness

**Support violence prevention programs in communities.**

- *Advocate for programs to educate law enforcement on how to de-escalate domestic violence situations.*

- *Urge policies, practices, regulations and laws that address violence against people experiencing homelessness.*
- *Support safe facilities for battered women, and their children, many of whom are homeless or on the verge of homelessness.*
- *Support protection of homeless people from random acts of violence.*
- *Support programs to give victims of domestic violence access to job training to enhance their marketability for employment.*
- *Support emergency shelter and housing interventions for domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking survivors who are fleeing, or attempting to flee, and have no other residence, and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.*

## **LWVC Positions**

**Children and Family Issues Action Policy** as it relates to Homelessness

**Support policies and programs that promote the wellbeing, development and safety of all children**

- *Make it a priority to keep families experiencing homelessness together.*
- *Support programs that provide for affordable early childhood education and developmental services, including pre-K.*
- *Encourage a strong support system for juveniles who may become separated from one or both parents due to divorce, court order, prison or death.*
- *Advocate for childcare and after-school care for homeless families.*
- *Advocate for an extended safety net for foster care children as they age out of the system as well as other young adults (16-26).*

**Criminal Justice** as it relates to Homelessness

**LWVC supports the elimination of systemic bias, including the disproportionate policing and incarceration of marginalized communities:**

### **Policing**

- Establish de-escalation (the use of time, distance, communications and available resources whenever it is safe to do so) and anti-bias training; ensure all staff is provided with this training.
- Authorize minimal use of force during police encounters with the public and consider deadly force only when necessary to prevent imminent death or serious bodily injury.

### **Pre-Trial**

- Ensure no person suffers discrimination before the law due to their economic status nor should they be subject to risk assessment tools that can produce biased outcomes.
- Recognize that mental health conditions and substance abuse/addictions are public health issues, not crimes.
- Implement the use of specialty courts, e.g. drug treatment courts and restorative justice programs.
- Consider community-based treatment programs and other alternatives to incarceration when appropriate.

### **Sentencing**

- Consider the individual circumstances of the person charged and nature of the crime, rather than mandatory minimum sentences.
- Consider split sentencing and/or alternatives to incarceration when appropriate.

**Housing & Homelessness** as it relates to Homelessness

**Support of equal opportunity in housing. Support of measures to provide state programs to increase the supply of safe, decent, and adequate housing for all Californians. Support for action at all levels of government for the provision of affordable housing for all Californians.**

- *Advocate for policies to provide a decent home and suitable living environment for all.*
- *When families or individuals cannot afford decent housing, the role of government is to provide assistance in the form of income and/or assisted housing.*
- *Advocate for removing local barriers to building extremely-low, very low, low-income and affordable housing\* in all areas of California.*
- *Take proactive measures to protect residents from evictions, displacement and housing discrimination.*
- *Advocate for the preservation of all types of existing low-income housing, both naturally affordable and those with rent restrictions due to expire.*

**Land Use** as it relates to Homelessness

**Support state land use planning that recognizes land as a resource as well as a commodity. The state should establish guidelines and standards for land areas of more than local concern.**

- *Advocate for enforcement of state requirements that local jurisdictions plan for sufficient land\ with adequate zoning for housing to meet the needs of all income categories.*
- *Encourage, and incent, local jurisdictions to reduce regulatory constraints that make it more difficult and costly to build affordable and extremely low, very low and low-income housing.\**
- *Support legislation to allow more homeless, extremely-low, very low and low-income housing\* to be built “by-right” without public hearings or special land use permits.*
- *Support legislation to allow homeless facilities “by-right” in mixed use and commercial zones.*
- *Promote regional planning in order to plan growth in an orderly manner including housing for all levels of low- and moderate-income families.*
- *Affordable housing for low- and moderate- income families and individuals should be planned as part of balanced communities with provision for adequate public facilities and services. Such housing should be dispersed throughout cities and regions while avoiding undue concentration in any particular neighborhood or community. Support incentives to build such housing.*

**Mental Health Care** as it relates to Homelessness

**Support an adequately funded mental health care system that provides comprehensive services to the acutely, chronically and seriously mentally ill of all ages; maintains optimal mental health services for all clients; places emphasis on meeting the needs of children; offers mental health services for the homeless; seeks additional funds for preventive services; implements a master plan to integrate services; raises awareness of critical unmet needs; and emphasizes case management.**

- *Advocate for outreach services to work with the homeless where they live.*

- *Recognize that finding shelter/housing for the homeless, such as emergency shelter, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing and bridge housing\*, is often a needed first step to ensure that continuous care can be provided.*

**State & Local Finance** as it relates to Homelessness

**Support measures: to ensure revenues both sufficient and flexible enough to meet changing needs for state and local government services; that contribute to a system of public finance that emphasizes equity and fair sharing of the tax burden as well as adequacy; that include longrange finance methods that meet current and future needs while taking into account the cumulative impact of public debt.**

- *Recognize that support for homeless individuals and families is a responsibility of all levels of government – federal, state and local.*
- *Advocate for the creation of dedicated funding sources for the sole purpose of affordable, extremely low, very low, and low-income housing\*, as well as any type of homeless housing construction, acquisition and maintenance.*
- *Encourage partnerships with corporations, philanthropic institutions and individual donors to secure private funding to augment public funding in order to reduce and prevent homelessness.*

# Homelessness Glossary of Terms

**Affordable Housing** – Housing is considered affordable if a family spends no more than 30% of their income to live there.

**Bridge Housing** – Safe, reserved, 24-hour emergency shelter to be utilized by eligible homeless individuals, identified through the Continuum of Care.

**Continuum of Care (CoC)** – A community or regional plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximize self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness.

The essential components of CoC are: 1) a system that is low-barrier and easy to access; 2) a system that identifies and assesses people’s needs; and 3) a system that prioritizes and matches housing resources based on those needs.

**Coordinated Entry System (CES)** – CES is a regionally based system that connects new and existing programs into a “no wrong-door network” by assessing the needs of individuals/families/youth experiencing homelessness and linking them with the most appropriate housing and services to end their homelessness. The goal of the CES is to streamline processes through which communities assess, house, and support housing retention for individuals; families who are homeless; to ensure all of our homeless neighbors are known and supported; to target and maximize limited housing resources; and comply with the federal mandate to adopt a standardized intake and coordinated assessment process for housing.

**Emergency Shelter (ES)** – Any facility whose primary purpose is to provide temporary shelter for the homeless in general, or for specific populations of the homeless.

**Extremely low income** – 0%-30% of median income for the area, subject to adjustments for areas with unusually high or low incomes or housing costs.

**Low income** – 51%-80% of median family income for the area, subject to adjustments for areas with unusually high or low incomes or housing costs.

**Very low income** –31%-50% of the median family income for the area, subject to specific adjustments for areas unusually high or low incomes or housing costs.

**Homeless** - Applicants/participants are considered *homeless* when they lack fixed and regular nighttime residences. If they share a residence with family or friends on a temporary basis; if they have a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations; if they reside in a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; if they have a need for housing in a commercial establishment (e.g. hotel/motel), shelter, publicly funded transitional housing or from a person in the business of renting properties, or received an eviction notice or notice to pay rent or quit.

**Housing First** - An approach that offers permanent housing as quickly as possible for people experiencing homelessness, particularly for people with long histories of homelessness and co-occurring health challenges, while providing the supportive services people need to keep their housing and avoid returning to homelessness. The provider ensures that the supportive



services that program participants need or want in order to achieve permanent housing and to increase income are offered, but are not required as a condition of housing, including links to mainstream programs or partner agencies (i.e. mental health services, substance abuse treatment, medical services, child care, etc.). Income, sobriety and/or participation in treatment or other services are voluntary and are *not required* as a condition for housing.

**Permanent Housing** – (PH) Community based housing without a designated length of stay, which includes both Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Rehousing. Examples of PH include, but are not limited to, a house or apartment with a month-to-month or annual lease term or home ownership.

**Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)** – Long-term, community-based housing that has supportive services for homeless persons. This type of supportive housing enables the special needs of populations to live independently as possible in a permanent setting. Permanent housing can be provided in one structure or in several structures at one site or in multiple structures at scattered sites.

**Supportive Services** - A coordinated system of services designed to help maintain independence. These services may or may not come from a central agency. They may be brought together and made possible by an individual or agency involved in the matter.

**Unsheltered homeless** - Individuals and families sleeping in a place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation (e.g., abandoned buildings, train stations, or camping grounds). These people are “unsheltered” homeless.