AB 1017 (QUIRK-SILVA): RIGHT TO RESTROOMS ACT OF 2021

SUMMARY
This bill requires local governments to do an inventory of public restrooms that are available to the homeless population to use during the COVID-19 state of emergency.

BACKGROUND
According to the California Health Care Foundation at least 151,000 people are homeless in California and 75% are not living in shelters. In addition to being the largest proportion of people living without shelter in the country, the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic has caused a disproportionate risk to people who are unsheltered.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought attention to the already existing issue of the homeless population’s lack of access to sanitary living conditions. As stated by health officials, frequent hand washing is the best way to fight against the spread of COVID-19. However, due to the lockdown closures, many of the businesses once relied on by the homeless for public restrooms are no longer available. Due to the barriers in accessing adequate water and sanitation, it has created a public health issue, putting marginalized groups at increased risk of infection and other diseases.

Additionally, this issue regarding a lack of accessibility to restrooms is also connected to the widespread criminalization of the homeless. People experiencing homelessness have been marginalized by the criminal justice system due to unjust laws that make public urination a crime despite a shortage of public toilets. For instance, encampments often do not have available bathrooms which leaves the homeless with little options to wash their hands and use the toilet.

Ultimately, by being better aware of the restrooms accessible to the homeless, it would not only help to provide a basic human right to sanitation put also provide protection against the effects of COVID-19.

THIS BILL
This bill would require local City and County governments to report their findings on the public restrooms available to the homeless population during the COVID-19 pandemic to the Office of Emergency Services no later than June 1, 2022. These findings shall be compiled and submitted in a report to the Legislature.

This bill would be repealed by January 1, 2024.

SUPPORT
National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter
Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco

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