September 11, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814  

RE: Please Sign AB 1845 (L. Rivas/Chiu), Office to End Homelessness

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of a group of diverse supporters, we respectfully request that you to sign AB 1845 (L. Rivas/Chiu). AB 1845 will institutionalize an improved infrastructural response to homelessness in California. The bill passed with strong bipartisan support, without any opposition.

Project Roomkey is an example of how California has advanced innovation when faced with one of the most difficult crises of our time. We hope you can demonstrate similar innovative leadership in restructuring the state’s response to homelessness.

While programs in California have enabled tens of thousands of households to exit homelessness, California has historically failed to heed calls for a more coordinated response to homelessness. You oversee more than 10 different state agencies and departments administering at least 30 different programs impacting homelessness, all operating independently from each other. In 1989, the Little Hoover Commission recommended coordinating state programs. Almost three decades later, in 2017, the California State Auditor found California was less effective in sheltering our homeless residents because we have no single entity, “charged specifically with addressing homelessness.”

In February of this year, the Legislative Analyst similarly said the state’s fragmented response has resulted in—

- Difficulties tracking homelessness-related state expenditures;
- Difficulties assessing the effectiveness of specific interventions;
- Difficulties determining whether programs are working collaboratively; and
- Difficulties assessing outcomes.

For more information on AB 1845, contact Sharon.Rapport@csh.org or CMartin@housingca.org.
Many of our organizations, in offering community-based housing and services, have experienced the challenges of the state’s fragmentation while navigating Notices of Funding Availability/Requests for Proposals with conflicting requirements or uncoordinated due dates.

During your campaign, you recognized this fragmentation in calling for a “czar” to coordinate the state’s response. Your Council on Regional Homeless Advisors likewise recommended creating “a single point of authority on homelessness,” suggesting, “a high-level official that reports directly to Governor Newsom,” who is working on a day-to-day basis with staff to coordinate the state’s response. They further recommended working to coordinate funding for housing and services, to develop protocols to prevent people discharging state-funded institutions into homelessness, and to develop evidence-based policies across housing and services agencies.

The LAO recommended following the recommendations of the Council on Regional Homeless Advisors in identifying a clear governance model, clarifying state responsibilities, improving accountability, and establishing rigorous oversight. AB 1845 accomplishes recommendations from both the LAO and your Council of Regional Homeless Advisors.

AB 1845 creates a single point of contact on homelessness through a Secretary on Homelessness, but does not stop there. The Secretary will focus full-time on coordinating the state’s response and leading an Office to End Homelessness. By placing the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council within the Office to End Homelessness, existing Council staff will have the authority to promote collaboration across departments and agencies.

AB 1845 will centralize staff working to coordinate the state’s response, avoiding duplication of this work. The Office will help create discharge protocols for state-funded institutional settings, and develop evidence-based standards across housing and services programs. The bill has next to no fiscal cost, only the cost difference between a Deputy Secretary and a Secretary position. In absorbing the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council into the Office, AB 1845 would serve the purpose of funding you requested and the Legislature passed in this year’s budget.

AB 1845 also incorporates changes to the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council your Administration requested. It will institutionalize all of these structural improvements for decades to come.

You have taken unprecedented steps to improve the state’s response to homelessness. We ask you to take the next logical steps in implementing the innovations in AB 1845. You certainly did not foster fragmentation; we ask you, though, to end it through statutory reforms that will institutionalize a structure promoting collaborative solutions. At this time of projected increases in homelessness in the tens of thousands, we ask you to elevate the state’s response under one cabinet-level position for future Administrations. Finally, in working to make our state programs as effective as they could be, we ask you to listen to over 30 years of advice to modernize California’s approach to solving homelessness.

For more information on AB 1845, contact Sharon.Rapport@csh.org or CMartin@housingca.org.
We urge you to sign AB 1845, and look forward to working with you to implement this historic bill.

Sincerely,

Leonora Camner, Executive Director
Abundant Housing Los Angeles

Milo Peinemann, Chief Executive Officer
American Family Housing

William F. Pickel, Chief Executive Officer
Brilliant Corners

Rob Wiener, Executive Director
California Coalition for Rural Housing

Mary Kate Bacalao
Mary Kate Bacalao, Director External Affairs & Policy
Compass Family Services

Jennifer Loving, Executive Director
Destination: Home

Amy Turk, Chief Executive Officer
Downtown Women’s Center

Dora Leong Gallo, President & CEO
A Community of Friends

Michael Winkler, Mayor
City of Arcata

Debra Carlton, Executive Vice President
California Apartment Association

Krista Niemczyk, Public Policy Director
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence

Sharon Rapport, Director, CA Policy Corporation for Supportive Housing (co-sponsor)

Curtis Child, Legislative Director
Disability Rights California

Laura Hall, President & CEO
EAH Housing

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