

## HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY

Ad Hoc COVID

### MOTION

Tens of thousands of people, without opportunity for housing and shelter, fend for themselves in a growing number of makeshift encampments on our sidewalks. It is imperative that we provide a genuine alternative to sidewalk encampments – appropriate, long term housing. But as the deadly COVID-19 virus continues to spread, it is an urgent priority that we follow public health protocols and provide non-congregate shelter for people currently living on our streets and in congregate shelters.

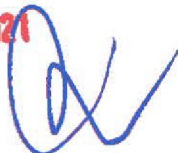
Early in the pandemic, the City, the County and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority quickly organized a multi-agency effort that brought more than 7,000 vulnerable people indoors in a period of a few months. Project Roomkey, the central initiative of this effort, secured more than 4,000 rooms in 37 hotels between the City and County of Los Angeles, which served more than 6,000 people. Project Roomkey was primarily reimbursed and funded with federal CARES Act relief money. With a December 2020 deadline to spend those funds, the City and County transitioned away from Project Roomkey to more long-term solutions.

On Thursday, January 21, ***President Biden issued an executive action directing FEMA to reimburse cities for 100% of what they spend on non-congregate shelters through September 2021.*** Previously, the reimbursements were 75%, leaving cash-strapped cities to cover the difference. The executive memorandum goes on to direct FEMA to ***expedite reimbursement*** for eligible emergency work projects and, as appropriate, ***provide an advance of the federal share*** on a percentage of the expected reimbursements from approved projects.

In recent weeks, COVID infection rates among our unhoused population have soared, tracking with the increase in the general population. After averaging about 60 new cases each week through the fall, infections among the unhoused doubled in the week after Thanksgiving and have since continued to climb. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health showed 4,578 total cases among people experiencing homelessness as of January 4, 2021.

While the City must move aggressively to purchase as many hotels and motels as possible through additional or forthcoming state or federal Project Homekey funds, which will provide housing for the long-term, it is essential that the City also avail itself of the renewed opportunity to get tens of thousands of people off the streets immediately through FEMA funds for non-congregate shelters. Many property owners may be unwilling to sell their buildings and land, but may well be interested in leasing buildings through September 2021. This new federal assistance creates tremendous opportunity to expand use of motels and hotels, and potentially vacant apartment units, for programs like Project Roomkey and other master leasing efforts that can move people off the streets, at no cost to the City and in a matter of days, instead of at substantial cost and after lengthy delays.

JAN 26 2021



OFFICE OF THE CLERK

While negotiated lease agreements or purchases are optimal, the situation is so dire, it is important that the City consider exercising its authority to commandeer hotels and motels for just compensation to help us meet this crisis. Legal analysis by constitutional scholar Erwin Chemirinsky, by the firm of Munger, Tolles & Olson, and by the City Attorney of the City and County of San Francisco have affirmed the legal authority of cities to take such actions during this public health emergency.

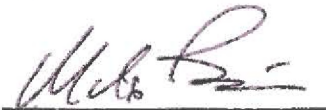
**I THEREFORE MOVE** that City Council instruct LAHSA, the CLA, and CAO to report back on opportunities for renewing and expanding Project Roomkey, with a goal of providing interim non-congregate shelter for tens of thousands of people; as well as the opportunities for additional uses for these reimbursable funds for non-congregate shelters, including master leasing of hotels and motels, including those with fewer than 100 rooms, and vacant apartment units.

**I FURTHER MOVE** that the City Council direct the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) and Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA) to consult with members of the unhoused community and service providers and report back on ways in which Project Roomkey operations could be improved and made more successful.

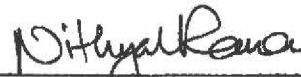
**I FURTHER MOVE** that the City Council direct LAHSA to report back on Project Roomkey program requirements that could be modified to induce greater participation from hotels and motels.

**I FURTHER MOVE** that the City Council instruct the City Attorney to report to the City Council on what steps need to be taken, and by which agency, body, or person, to begin commandeering hotels and motels for use as homeless housing.

PRESENTED BY:



MIKE BONIN  
Councilmember, 11th District



NITHYA RAMAN  
Councilmember, 4th District

SECONDED BY:

