

Senate Bill No. 1380

CHAPTER 847

An act to add Chapter 6.5 (commencing with Section 8255) to Division 8 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to homelessness.

[Approved by Governor September 29, 2016. Filed with
Secretary of State September 29, 2016.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 1380, Mitchell. Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council.

Existing law establishes various programs, including, among others, the Emergency Housing and Assistance Program, to provide assistance to homeless persons.

This bill would require a state agency or department that funds, implements, or administers a state program that provides housing or housing-related services to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, except as specified, to revise or adopt guidelines and regulations to include enumerated Housing First policies. The bill would also establish the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council to oversee the implementation of the Housing First guidelines and regulations and, among other things, to identify resources, benefits, and services that can be accessed to prevent and end homelessness in California.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) California leads the nation in the number of homeless residents with 115,738 people experiencing homelessness at some point, which is 21 percent of the nation's total. California also leads the nation in the number and ratio of chronically homeless residents with 29,178 chronically homeless residents at any point in time, which is 31 percent of the nation's total. California also has 10,416 homeless youth, which is 28 percent of the nation's total.

(b) Homelessness is expensive to the state and local governments. A homeless person receiving general assistance in Los Angeles County, for example, incurs \$2,897 per month in crisis response services.

(c) A chronically homeless Californian moving into "supportive housing" is able to reduce costs he or she incurs by almost 80 percent. Moving an individual or family experiencing chronic homelessness to housing stability costs less than the resulting savings in public expenditures.

(d) Following the example of other states, as well as jurisdictions within California, it is the intent of the Legislature to adopt a "Housing First" model

for all state programs funding housing for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. These housing models should address the distinct needs of homeless populations, including unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age.

(e) Housing First is an evidence-based model of ending all types of homelessness and is the most effective approach to ending chronic homelessness. The federal government recognizes that Housing First yields high-housing retention rates, low returns to homelessness, and significant reductions in crisis or institutional care. The federal government also recognizes the value of time-limited housing to address the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth and persons fleeing domestic violence.

(f) Homelessness affects multiple systems in California. Though almost every state with significant homeless populations has established a council to coordinate a Housing First-oriented response to homelessness, California does not have any entity to manage the state's response to homelessness.

(g) California participated in a federally funded policy academy to reduce chronic homelessness. That policy academy succeeded in revising programs that the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) administers, and in attracting federal funding opportunities requiring collaboration between the HCD and the State Department of Health Care Services. To implement additional successes, it is essential that California have a coordinating council on homelessness.

SEC. 2. Chapter 6.5 (commencing with Section 8255) is added to Division 8 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, to read:

CHAPTER 6.5. HOUSING FIRST AND COORDINATING COUNCIL

8255. For purposes of this chapter:

(a) "Coordinating council" means the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council established pursuant to Section 8257.

(b) "Core components of Housing First" means all of the following:

(1) Tenant screening and selection practices that promote accepting applicants regardless of their sobriety or use of substances, completion of treatment, or participation in services.

(2) Applicants are not rejected on the basis of poor credit or financial history, poor or lack of rental history, criminal convictions unrelated to tenancy, or behaviors that indicate a lack of "housing readiness."

(3) Acceptance of referrals directly from shelters, street outreach, drop-in centers, and other parts of crisis response systems frequented by vulnerable people experiencing homelessness.

(4) Supportive services that emphasize engagement and problem solving over therapeutic goals and service plans that are highly tenant-driven without predetermined goals.

(5) Participation in services or program compliance is not a condition of permanent housing tenancy.

(6) Tenants have a lease and all the rights and responsibilities of tenancy, as outlined in California’s Civil, Health and Safety, and Government codes.

(7) The use of alcohol or drugs in and of itself, without other lease violations, is not a reason for eviction.

(8) In communities with coordinated assessment and entry systems, incentives for funding promote tenant selection plans for supportive housing that prioritize eligible tenants based on criteria other than “first-come-first-serve,” including, but not limited to, the duration or chronicity of homelessness, vulnerability to early mortality, or high utilization of crisis services. Prioritization may include triage tools, developed through local data, to identify high-cost, high-need homeless residents.

(9) Case managers and service coordinators who are trained in and actively employ evidence-based practices for client engagement, including, but not limited to, motivational interviewing and client-centered counseling.

(10) Services are informed by a harm-reduction philosophy that recognizes drug and alcohol use and addiction as a part of tenants’ lives, where tenants are engaged in nonjudgmental communication regarding drug and alcohol use, and where tenants are offered education regarding how to avoid risky behaviors and engage in safer practices, as well as connected to evidence-based treatment if the tenant so chooses.

(11) The project and specific apartment may include special physical features that accommodate disabilities, reduce harm, and promote health and community and independence among tenants.

(c) “Homeless” has the same definition as that term is defined in Section 91.5 of Title 24 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

(d) (1) “Housing First” means the evidence-based model that uses housing as a tool, rather than a reward, for recovery and that centers on providing or connecting homeless people to permanent housing as quickly as possible. Housing First providers offer services as needed and requested on a voluntary basis and that do not make housing contingent on participation in services.

(2) (A) “Housing First” includes time-limited rental or services assistance, so long as the housing and service provider assists the recipient in accessing permanent housing and in securing longer-term rental assistance, income assistance, or employment.

(B) For time-limited, supportive services programs serving homeless youth, programs should use a positive youth development model and be culturally competent to serve unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age. Providers should work with the youth to engage in family reunification efforts, where appropriate and when in the best interest of the youth. In the event of an eviction, programs shall make every effort, which shall be documented, to link tenants to other stable, safe, decent housing options. Exit to homelessness should be extremely rare, and only after a tenant refuses assistance with housing search, location, and move-in assistance.

(e) “State programs” means any programs a California state agency or department funds, implements, or administers for the purpose of providing

housing or housing-based services to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, with the exception of federally funded programs with requirements inconsistent with this chapter or programs that fund emergency shelters.

8256. (a) Agencies and departments administering state programs created on or after July 1, 2017, shall collaborate with the coordinating council to adopt guidelines and regulations to incorporate core components of Housing First.

(b) By July 1, 2019, agencies and departments administering state programs in existence prior to July 1, 2017, shall collaborate with the coordinating council to revise or adopt guidelines and regulations that incorporate the core components of Housing First, if the existing guidelines and regulations do not already incorporate the core components of Housing First.

8257. (a) Within 180 days of the effective date of the measure adding this chapter, the Governor shall create a Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council.

(b) The council shall have the following goals:

(1) To oversee implementation of this chapter.

(2) To identify mainstream resources, benefits, and services that can be accessed to prevent and end homelessness in California.

(3) To create partnerships among state agencies and departments, local government agencies, participants in the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's Continuum of Care Program, federal agencies, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, nonprofit entities working to end homelessness, homeless services providers, and the private sector, for the purpose of arriving at specific strategies to end homelessness.

(4) To promote systems integration to increase efficiency and effectiveness while focusing on designing systems to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age.

(5) To coordinate existing funding and applications for competitive funding. Any action taken pursuant to this paragraph shall not restructure or change any existing allocations or allocation formulas.

(6) To make policy and procedural recommendations to legislators and other governmental entities.

(7) To identify and seek funding opportunities for state entities that have programs to end homelessness, including, but not limited to, federal and philanthropic funding opportunities, and to facilitate and coordinate those state entities' efforts to obtain that funding.

(8) To broker agreements between state agencies and departments and between state agencies and departments and local jurisdictions to align and coordinate resources, reduce administrative burdens of accessing existing resources, and foster common applications for services, operating, and capital funding.

(9) To serve as a statewide facilitator, coordinator, and policy development resource on ending homelessness in California.

(10) To report to the Governor, federal Cabinet members, and the Legislature on homelessness and work to reduce homelessness.

(11) To ensure accountability and results in meeting the strategies and goals of the council.

(12) To identify and implement strategies to fight homelessness in small communities and rural areas.

(13) To create a statewide data system or warehouse that collects local data through Homeless Management Information Systems, with the ultimate goal of matching data on homelessness to programs impacting homeless recipients of state programs, such as Medi-Cal (Chapter 7 (commencing with Section 14000) of Part 3 of Division 9 of the Welfare and Institutions Code) and CalWORKS (Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 11200) of Part 3 of Division 9 of the Welfare and Institutions Code).

(c) (1) The Governor shall appoint up to 15 members of the council as follows:

(A) A representative from the Department of Housing and Community Development.

(B) A representative of the State Department of Social Services.

(C) A representative of the California Housing Finance Agency.

(D) A representative of the State Department of Health Care Services.

(E) A representative of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(F) A representative of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

(G) A representative from the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee in the Treasurer's office.

(H) A representative of the Victim Services Program within the Division of Grants Management within the Office of Emergency Services.

(I) A formerly homeless person who lives in California.

(J) Two representatives of local agencies or organizations that participate in the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's Continuum of Care Program.

(K) State advocates or other members of the public or state agencies, according to the Governor's discretion.

(2) The Senate Committee on Rules and the Speaker of the Assembly shall each appoint one representative of the council from two different stakeholder organizations.

(3) The council may, at its discretion, invite stakeholders, individuals who have experienced homelessness, members of philanthropic communities, and experts to participate in meetings or provide information to the council.

(d) The council shall hold public meetings at least once every quarter.

(e) The members of the council shall serve at the pleasure of the Governor.

(f) Within existing funding, the council may establish working groups, task forces, or other structures from within its membership or with outside members to assist it in its work. Working groups, task forces, or other

structures established by the council shall determine their own meeting schedules.

(g) The members of the council shall serve without compensation, except that members of the council who are, or have been, homeless may receive reimbursement for travel, per diem, or other expenses.

(h) The Department of Housing and Community Development shall provide staff for the council.

(i) The members of the council may enter into memoranda of understanding with other members of the council to achieve the goals set forth in this chapter, as necessary, in order to facilitate communication and cooperation between the entities the members of the council represent.