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COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA
CLERK OF THE
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

December 9, 2015

Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Barbara
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Re: Downtown State Street Homeless Outreach Initiative & ADMHS Engagement

Honorable Supervisors:

On behalf of Downtown Santa Barbara (DSB), I write to thank the County Board of Supervisors for supporting the collaborative work to address homelessness in Santa Barbara County, to provide a brief update on the progress of the effort in downtown Santa Barbara, and to advocate for the allocation of resources in the areas they are most urgently needed.

Under leadership of the Central Coast Collaborative on Homelessness (C3H), Common Ground Santa Barbara County, and other local social service organizations,¹ DSB Board members, Safety Committee members, business owners, and staff are engaged in a collaborative effort to support individuals experiencing homelessness in the downtown area as they pursue housing and supportive services, and to address the impacts of homelessness on the community. In addition to regular participation in weekly meetings, DSB has contributed funding to Common Ground in support of the effort, engaged in advocacy to advance Common Ground's work, and contributed in-kind resources for clients (e.g., providing gift cards for clothing and other donations) on an as-needed basis. Additionally, DSB-affiliated business owners have created employment opportunities for work-ready individuals transitioning out of homelessness.

While DSB remains committed to this collaborative effort, progress has been limited to date. Many highly vulnerable individuals living with severe and persistent mental illness, physical disabilities, and addiction remain on our downtown streets and face an elevated risk of premature death due to their condition. The attendant adverse impacts on the surrounding community are substantial, and include a chilling effect on local business, in addition to problematic safety and sanitation issues created by increased litter and human waste in the public domain.

The principal obstacles to effectively addressing homelessness downtown include the limited availability of appropriate, affordable housing; a high ratio of clients to outreach staff; and substantial gaps in the capacity of the existing supportive service network to meet the needs of clients with the most complex cases, particularly those living with severe and persistent mental illness. **A high level of engagement from the County Department of Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Health Services (ADMHS) in the areas of street outreach, crisis response interventions, inpatient treatment, and outpatient mental health services, will be essential to the success of this collaborative effort. Support from the Board that would allow ADMHS to devote additional staff time to**

¹ In addition to C3H, Common Ground, and DSB, other participants in the collaborative effort to address homelessness on downtown State Street include the City of Santa Barbara Restorative Court & Policing; the County Department of Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Health Services; the Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara; Noah's Anchorage Youth Crisis Center; the Santa Barbara Community Housing Corporation; the Santa Barbara County Workforce Development Board; and the Uffizi Order.

street outreach and assessment, and to formalize its partnership and commitment to regional outreach efforts by defining the scope and terms of its participation, could meaningfully impact how clients experiencing homelessness are served.

Further, at a Homeless Policy Forum of the California Downtown Association this past summer, Laura's Law² was highlighted by the California Psychiatric Association as a way to serve clients experiencing severe and persistent mental illness who are unable to recognize their need for help. To date, Laura's Law programs have been approved by twelve California counties. Data from several of those counties, including Los Angeles and Nevada Counties, suggests that its implementation could offer Santa Barbara County a much-needed path to outpatient treatment for clients who present with a serious mental illness, are unable to care for themselves, have a recent history of psychiatric hospitalization and/or incarceration, or have threatened or attempted serious violent behavior towards themselves or others, and fail to recognize their need for mental health treatment. Laura's Law would serve the interests of clients with the most complex cases – many of whom are the most visible and the most vulnerable – of those experiencing chronic homelessness on State Street. Additionally, quantifiable cost savings could be realized by the community through implementation of Laura's Law, as eligible clients would be diverted from hospitalization and incarceration, and instead provided with cost effective treatment that meets their needs.

We understand that resources must be skillfully directed within ADMHS to expand and improve the efficacy of client service, and we are aware that the Board of Supervisors has set aside funds for the design of a Laura's Law Program during the 2015-16 fiscal year. We urge the Board and the ADMHS Director to move quickly and use the allocated funds to design this critically-needed Program to meet the needs of qualifying clients in Santa Barbara County, and help alleviate the attendant impacts of untreated mental illness in the community.

Representing the collective downtown business community and property owners, DSB has a vested interest in ensuring that all available resources are brought to bear in addressing homelessness. We appreciate the Board of Supervisors' leadership and thoughtful consideration in funding and prioritizing all meaningful solutions that help address the quality of life for everyone impacted by homelessness in downtown Santa Barbara and throughout the County.

Sincerely,



Maggie Campbell
Executive Director, Downtown Santa Barbara

Cc: Terri Maus-Nisich, Assistant CEO, County of Santa Barbara
Alice Gleghorn, Director, County Department of Alcohol, Drugs, and Mental Health Services
Dr. Takashi Wada, Director, County Department of Public Health
Daniel Nielsen, Director, County Department of Social Services
Mayor Helene Schneider, City of Santa Barbara & Chair, C3H Policy Council
Paul Casey, Administrator, City of Santa Barbara
Chuck Flacks, Executive Director, C3H
Emily Allen, Managing Attorney, Legal Aid/Common Ground Santa Barbara County

² A California state statute that must be authorized and implemented at the county level, and would allow for eligible clients to receive court-ordered assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) when they meet defined statutory criteria and refuse voluntary treatment.