



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Public Health  
Department No.: 041  
For Agenda Of: July 27, 2010  
Placement: Set Hearing  
Estimated Tme: 60 Minutes on 8-10-10  
Continued Item: No  
If Yes, date from:  
Vote Required: Majority

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**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Department Takashi Wada, MD, MPH Director and Health Officer  
Director(s) Public Health Department  
Contact Info: Peter Hasler, MD, Medical Director, Public Health Department  
681-5473 and David Lennon, MD, Healthcare for the Homeless 346-7246

**SUBJECT: Report from Homeless Death Review Team on Deaths and Violence Against Homeless Persons in Santa Barbara County**

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**County Counsel Concurrence**

As to form: N/A

**Other Concurrence:** N/A

As to form: N/A

**Recommended Actions:**

That the Board of Supervisors:

Set a hearing for August 10, 2010 to:

- a) Receive a written report and an oral presentation from the Homeless Death Review Team on deaths and violence against homeless persons in Santa Barbara County.
- b) Review the report recommendations and direct staff and/or take actions deemed appropriate.

**Summary Text:**

The Homeless Death Review Team was created by County staff in 2008 to review homeless deaths and their causes, explore means to avert similar deaths and, where available, compile statistical data to identify trends. On February 2, 2010, your Board, in response to requests from concerned community members, tasked the Homeless Death Review Team to undertake a project to research deaths and violence against homeless persons from 2009 to the present in Santa Barbara County and to report back to the Board within 3 to 5 months.

**Background:**

In 2009 and early 2010, citizens and community advocates raised concerns about deaths among homeless residents in Santa Barbara County and about incidents of violent crime directed against the

homeless. Without a better understanding of the extent and circumstances involved in deaths and acts of violence against the homeless, it was difficult to develop strategies to address these concerns related to homeless residents.

The Homeless Death Review Team conducted a systematic review of each homeless person who died between January 1, 2009 and March 31, 2010. The definition of homelessness for the purposes of this analysis was the definition from the federal Bureau of Primary Health Care. Data from multiple sources, including County departments (Public Health, Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services, and Social Services), was combined with data from community-based organizations (homeless shelters, hospitals) to obtain a more complete picture for each individual. Focus groups were also conducted with homeless persons and concerned citizens including representatives from the Human Services Commission, the Women's Commission, and the Mental Health Commission. The inclusive process was focused on answering the following questions:

- What are the characteristics and trends in the deaths of homeless individuals in Santa Barbara County?
- What is the extent of violent crime against the homeless and, where possible to discern, the extent to which crimes are targeted at individuals because they are homeless?
- What are the recommendations to improve care and reduce preventable premature deaths and violence within the homeless population?

The Homeless Death Review Team found there was very limited information about violence against homeless persons available. This limited information was the consequence of: having no consistent or systematic method of identifying homeless persons in law enforcement and hospital reports; the fact that many reports of violence were anecdotal and incomplete; that homeless persons often do not report such incidents through formal channels; and there is no organized system to gather such data. In order to further the analysis of violence against homeless persons, recommendations focused on implementing a data gathering tool to collect data on an ongoing basis.

The Homeless Death Review Team reviewed 45 cases of deaths of homeless persons between January 1, 2009 and March 31, 2010. 87% of the deaths were male, 13% female. Looking at race, the vast majority (82%) were Caucasian. Overall 20% were of Latino/Hispanic ethnicity. The average age at time of death was 52 years old. A comprehensive view of the findings is included in the report.

**Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

Budgeted: No

There are no fiscal or facilities impacts to accepting this report and reviewing the recommendations.

**Attachments:**

Homeless Death Review Team Report

**Authored by:** Susan Klein-Rothschild

**cc:** Ann Detrick – ADMHS and Kathy Gallagher – DSS