

Homeward & Bound

OF MARIN

May 21, 2018

Ron Brown, Foreperson
Marin County Civil Grand Jury
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 275
San Rafael, CA 94903

Dear Ron Brown and Members of Marin County's Civil Grand Jury,

Homeward Bound is in receipt of your report dated May 9, 2018, "Homelessness in Marin--A Progress Report." We are grateful for all of your efforts in advancing solutions to homelessness in our county.

It is remarkable to see how far Marin County and all of the various non-profit partners have come in creating an effective response to homelessness in our County since 2015. There is unprecedented collaboration and a single-minded commitment to end chronic homelessness during these last 2 years. There has also been concerted efforts to learn about best practices throughout the nation so that we enhance the work that is being done while honing our collective skills to make greater impact.

Your findings reference housing-focused shelter and housing first as the underlying philosophy for the services provided to homeless people. Homeward Bound has requested funding to transition all year-round shelter beds in our 5 shelter programs to a housing-focused method of service delivery. With funding in place, Mill Street Center will be open 24 hours, people will not have to leave during the day, there will be no fee for service, and dedicated staff will focus on housing plans, searches, and support services to achieve goals related to housing. (F.9)

Housing First does rely on the availability of housing—whether in this county, in another county, or with roommates. Since the housing supply has not kept pace with job development, there needs to be a focus on shared housing at the same time that there is development of additional housing options. Diversion from shelters is also a recognized practice that can lead to positive housing outcomes. Homelessness prevention is another strategy that many partners in the community have developed and are practicing.

In the Recommendations section, you suggest that the County of Marin provide capital funding for up to 400 units of additional housing for chronically homeless people (R.1). We think that the County of Marin plays a pivotal role in leading the efforts for such a development but needs a number of community partners to achieve such a goal. Non-profit housing developers, the business community, foundations, state and federal resources, and other partners are key to

creating these units. Bond measures and sales tax revenues have been utilized by other counties to address the ongoing need to build more affordable housing. It is time for Marin to engage in these strategies as well.

With housing-focused shelters and the enhanced collaboration among all partners in the county, from the government to the Housing Authority to non-profit organizations, we believe there is a diminished need for winter shelters or an expanded number of shelter beds. Funding needs to be directed to housing strategies.

The band-aid approach of sheltering unhoused people one night at a time does not cure homelessness, housing does.

We all need to unite behind a bond measure that would allow us to rapidly implement Housing First strategies and provide the funding necessary to realize your recommendations detailed in R1., R4., and R.5.

Again, we appreciate your thoughtful report and your commitment to working toward ending homelessness in Marin.

Sincerely,



Mary Kay Sweeney
Executive Director



Paul Fordham
Deputy Executive Director