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CITY CLERK, FRESNO CA

FRESNO MADERA CONTINUUM OF CARE

August 17, 2017

Ms. Yvonne Spence, City Clerk
2600 Fresno Street
Room 2097
Fresno, CA 93721

Re: Proposed ordinance of the city of Fresno, California, adding article 17 to chapter 10 of the Fresno municipal code, relating to unlawful camping.

Fresno City Council,

Over a decade ago a working collaborative made up of service providers formed the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care (FMCOC). The FMCOC is designed to promote communitywide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; coordinate the submission of a single community application to US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to fund housing and services to homeless families and individuals. In an effort to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma caused to homeless individuals, families, and communities by homelessness. Although we have coexisted with the issue of homelessness for many years, the challenges, barriers, and methods for understanding and addressing it have fluctuated. Improved strategies, best practices, agency collaborations, outcome and data-driven decisions have replaced outdated practices, silo operations, and self-accountability. Member within the FMCOC have attended National seminars and trainings on best practices, networking with other communities who have ended homelessness. Fresno has been recognized nationally for its proven practices and moving the needle on outcomes with lasting impact. Progress of this magnitude did not and cannot happen overnight.

An analysis of existing resources was completed in late 2016 and resources needed to close the gap were identified (see attached Update to the Ten Year Plan). We have reached a tipping point and strongly believe that we must stay the course and keep focus on solutions that have merit. Just as we have learned from other communities what has worked and what has not, we urge our City leaders to do the same with respect to ordinances that target and ban camping by the homeless.

Our approach to addressing homelessness starts with initiating contact through street outreach. We meet the person where they are without any expectations or judgement. After several contacts (approx. 7 times) the person usually engages in more intentional conversation about their conditions and needs and completes an assessment, beginning the process to accessing



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housing services. The assessment is used to create the most reasonable and achievable path towards housing and stability and is matched with appropriate resources. Herein lies the bottleneck. The lack of readily available resources means there are often times nowhere for them to go. Contrary to popular belief, there is not an abundance of underutilized resources, empty beds, nor accessible showers and restrooms. In fact, street homeless data estimates 1351 unsheltered individuals and families with only approximately 600 bed or units of housing inventory to serve them.

We strongly believe that the creation and investment in more housing options throughout our city is a more cost-effective solution at approximately \$4-5,000 per person, per year. An anti-camping ordinance will cost our city (and county) two or three-fold in enforcement and fallout costs (citations, court, jail). If a homeless person cannot afford a motel stay, they certainly cannot afford a \$1,000 fine. We do not believe this will be just a "tool in the toolbox" and fear the discretionary enforcement will result in unequal treatment of the homeless by districts throughout Fresno and could end with unwanted litigation.

We urge our Councilmembers to table this discussion and allow time for an external consultant, Barbara Poppe & Associates, to work with our community on strategies that address the concerns of residents, the business sector, and service providers. Her work will begin with a remote analysis of data, practices, policies, concerns, etc., to date followed by a convening of related parties in Fresno in early November. In the meantime, we hope to engage with each of you to address any specific questions or concerns. It is important that we address homelessness in Fresno as a united community, avoiding the detrimental effects that passing ordinances that make housing harder for the City's homeless constituents to obtain, which criminalization will cause, over time.

Sincerely,



Shawn Jenkins, Chairman
Fresno Madera Continuum of Care