

Talking Points: Compassionate Solutions to Prevent Homelessness and Meet the Needs of Unhoused Neighbors

It's time for local elected officials in California to get serious about helping our unhoused neighbors. To push them, we encourage all California residents to speak with their elected officials. One of the best venues for that is during the public comment periods during the meetings of your city council or county board of supervisors. You can use our talking points to give your comments in these meetings, phone calls, or other settings.

You can say these talking points word for word, but your comments are most powerful in your own voice. You can make your words more memorable and impactful by sharing personal experiences that inform or inspire your advocacy.

Through our campaign, we are putting a big emphasis on the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds that cities and counties received. Many of the solutions we are calling for are funding solutions that involve allocating money to provide resources and services. We also call for policy changes, such as strengthening tenant protection laws.

Talking Points:

The Growing Homelessness Crisis

In the past 3 years, amid a deadly pandemic that caused record job loss, homelessness in California went up by 15 percent. We now have about 175,000 unhoused people in California. That is completely unacceptable.

As a result of structural racism, our state's homeless population is disproportionately Black and Indigenous. Only about 6.5 percent of Californians identify as Black, but they account for nearly 40 percent of the state's homeless population.

California has a severe shortage of low-income housing. We need to make sure our city/county is doing what we can locally and partnering with the state of California to change that. Our current housing supply guarantees that many people won't have a home.

Despite the severe housing shortage, so many of our elected officials talk about unhoused people like they're less than human, and they pass policies that reflect this idea. We need compassionate solutions, not sweeps that move people from place to place and make it a crime to be homeless. Sweeps are expensive and unproductive.

The American Rescue Plan Act

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) has provided cities and counties with funding to help those most harmed by the pandemic. Far too little of that money has been spent to help people on the brink of homelessness and people who became homeless during the pandemic. It's time

to invest those remaining dollars to prevent homelessness and meet the greatest needs of unhoused people.

There are plenty of critical actions that cities and counties can take using their ARPA dollars.

Protected Encampments and Safe Parking

Many unhoused people live in encampments. They often experience harmful sweeps and are forced to move somewhere else. Instead of that failed approach, you can provide protected encampments with infrastructure, resources and support using ARPA dollars.

Many unhoused people live in their vehicles. They also experience harmful sweeps and are forced to move. Provide our community with safe parking sites with infrastructure, resources and support using ARPA dollars.

What kinds of infrastructure, resources and support do people living in encampments or safe parking sites need? Access to food, water, clothing, restrooms, laundry machines and showers. Access to public transportation and service providers. Assistance to get ID cards, birth certificates, and benefits such as food stamps, social security, hotel vouchers and transportation vouchers. Services that validate people's self worth and create opportunities, such as mental health therapy, educational services and employment resources.

Use your own local government resources and form partnerships with community-based organizations to create this infrastructure and provide these resources and support in the vicinity of protected encampments and safe parking sites.

Homelessness Prevention

Rent control and other tenant protections prevent homelessness. Residents of our city/county need these basic protections. Don't make a bad problem worse by letting more people lose their homes.

You can also prevent homelessness by funding services that help people stay in their homes. Invest in crisis intervention services. Partner with culturally responsive community-based organizations who can help vulnerable residents stay in their homes.

Expand rent assistance programs and guaranteed income programs that allow people to cover their most important expenses. This will keep people in their homes.