



July 11, 2020

Dr. Robert G. Marbut, Jr.
Executive Director
U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness
301 7th Street, SW, Room 2080
Washington, DC 20407

Subject: 2020 Update to Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness

Dear Dr. Marbut:

On behalf of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, thank you for the opportunity to submit public input to inform the 2020 federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, led by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). The Foundation is one of the largest grantmakers addressing homelessness in the country, awarding more than \$110 million to organizations over the last twenty-five years.

As the Council embarks on its strategic planning process, we urge the Council to boldly set a goal of reaching functional zero by 2027. The Council can achieve this goal by prioritizing the Housing First model, housing affordability, racial equity, and interconnectivity of services. Doing so will reap the benefits of preventing and ending homelessness, connecting people to employment opportunities as a result of housing stability, and efficiently allocating federal resources.

PRIORITIES

Housing First

Housing First should remain the fundamental model to ending homelessness. Offering low-barrier permanent, affordable housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness and providing tailored supportive services to meet their needs remain the most effective solutions to ending homelessness and connecting people to employment opportunities.

This approach relies on well-established research. U.S. Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) studies reinforce the success of housing first. For example, the Family Options Study concluded that "priority access to deep permanent housing subsidies produces substantial

benefits for families”¹ and the LA’s HOPE study determined that participants in permanent supportive housing (PSH) were significantly more likely to have gained and held employment than the control group.² In Los Angeles County, the Housing First model has meant that 88 percent of persons and families placed through the county’s system have not returned to homelessness. Additionally, it remains critical that people, particularly transgender persons, have inclusive, low-barrier access to interim housing on their path to PSH.

Housing Affordability

The Council should continue to address housing affordability in order to reduce the number of people entering homelessness in the first place. Advancing public policies that lower the cost of housing in the first place, such as housing vouchers, offset almost the entire cost of providing interim housing and supportive services that occur once a person experiences homelessness.

Unaffordable housing pushes people into homelessness, which in turn has deep implications for our economy. High cost of housing, where 40 percent of Californians are rent burdened, is one of the primary drivers of California’s high poverty rate — ranked first among the nation — under the Supplemental Poverty Measure. More money spent on housing means less money spent on consumer goods, which makes up 70 percent of economic growth. Philanthropy simply cannot replace the size and scope of the federal government in providing incentives for housing affordability.

Racial Equity

The Council must adopt a racial equity lens to its work on ending homelessness to eliminate racial disparities in people experiencing homelessness. The enduring impact of systemic racism means that homelessness disproportionately impacts Black and Indigenous communities. The [Government Alliance on Race and Equity](#) has developed tools to help governments operationalize racial equity, including improved planning, decision-making, and resource allocation leading to more racially equitable policies and programs.

In Los Angeles County’s 2020 homelessness count, Black persons make up 33.7 percent of people experiencing homelessness despite being only eight percent of the county’s population. Homelessness also disproportionately affects Indigenous people – including Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians. An urgent, thoughtful application of a racial equity lens will better position the Council to coordinate federal agencies to mount a deliberate offense to eliminate racial disparities.

Interconnectivity of Services

The Council must advance a strategic plan that embraces collaboration across federal agencies to jointly support shared communities of interest to efficiently allocate federal resources at the intersection of systems that feed into homelessness. This saves scarce resources for the Administration.

¹ U.S. Housing and Urban Development, “Family Options Study: 3-Year Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families” (2016).

² Martha R. Burt, “Evaluation of LA’s HOPE: Final Report,” (2007) Urban Institute.

The [California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership](#), to which the Hilton Foundation belongs, examined the effect of homelessness on child welfare systems. The policy brief noted that homelessness, more so than income level, increased the risk of child welfare involvement. Transition age foster youth (TAFY) often bear the brunt of the complex relationship between homelessness and foster care. The President's June 24, 2020 Executive Order (EO) acknowledged this observation, citing that 40 percent of TAFY experienced homelessness.³ The EO highlights the need for the interagency efforts by requiring the Secretary of Health and Human Services to facilitate "robust partnerships" across agencies.

A better understanding of youth's homeless experiences and predictors of homelessness after the implementation of extended care can help both policymakers and practitioners better assist older foster youth to secure stable housing and prevent homelessness.⁴

CONTINUING EXISTING EFFORTS

The Council also requested input related to existing efforts that achieve the Council's mandate. In response, we emphasize the need to continue with the **Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP)** to prevent and end youth homelessness by making federal grants available to communities across the nation. These funds bring together cross-sector partners and, more importantly, authentically engage young people experiencing homelessness as a part of the decision-making process. The demonstration project reflects the Council's goal of working across systems to effectively support – and fund – federal investments that effectively address homelessness.

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The above comments reflect lessons learned from the Foundation's commitment to and investment in ending homelessness and supporting TAFY. The Foundation endeavors to improve the lives of individuals living in poverty and experiencing disadvantage throughout the world.

Through our [grantmaking](#), the Foundation works to make PSH a reality for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in Los Angeles County. We have sought to advance client-centered and cost-effective solutions to homelessness. The Foundation has made investments in facilitating systems change, strengthening targeted programs, and disseminating knowledge, and has worked to garner public support and large-scale investments in solutions to chronic homelessness.

Our [Foster Youth Initiative](#), which has granted \$93.4 million to date, supports TAFY toward becoming self-sufficient and thriving adults. As it relates to homelessness, we emphasize promoting comprehensive systems reform and policy change, research, evaluation, data sharing, and enhancing cross-system collaboration to expand funding and increase the field's

³ Executive Order 13930, 85 FR 38741 (2020).

⁴ H. Feng, Harty, J., Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2020), Memo from CalYOUTH: Predictors of homelessness at age 21, Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

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ability to support TAFY. This has included supporting both programs and continuum of services that meet the needs of foster youth such as housing stability.

If you have questions, please contact me at peter@hiltonfoundation.org or (818) 851-3700. We are committed to building strong partnerships across sectors to prevent and end homelessness and look forward to engaging with the Council. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit input.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Laugharn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Peter Laugharn, PhD
President and CEO
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

CC:

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, United States Senator for California
The Honorable Kamala Harris, United States Senator for California
The Honorable Members of Congress, Los Angeles County Delegation
Helene Schneider, Regional Coordinator for California, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, Helene.schneider@usich.gov
Alicia "Ali" Sutton, Deputy Secretary for Homelessness, Homeless Coordinating and Finance Council, Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency, State of California, Alicia.sutton@bcsh.ca.gov