

March 5, 2021

The Honorable Autumn Burke  
Chair, Assembly Committee on Revenue & Taxation  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 71 (Rivas/Chiu/Bloom/Wicks) Statewide Homelessness Solutions Program – SUPPORT**

Dear Assemblymember Burke:

On behalf of Mental Health America of Los Angeles (MHALA), I write to express our strong support for your bill, Assembly Bill 71 (L. Rivas), which commits the legislature to a comprehensive plan to address homelessness by investing, for the first time in history, dedicated ongoing state investment in long-term solutions to homelessness. MHALA is one of the largest and most comprehensive mental health agencies in Los Angeles County, serving nearly 10,500 low-income individuals with mental health needs each year. Many of the members we serve are experiencing or have experienced homelessness and housing insecurity. It is hard to be mentally well when experiencing the stress and precariousness that accompany homelessness and housing insecurity.

California leads the nation in total number of people experiencing homelessness, with one in four Americans experiencing homelessness residing in California. In January 2019, an estimated 151,278 people experienced homelessness in California at a single point in time, a 17% increase since 2018. African American, indigenous, and LGBTQ+ communities show alarmingly higher rates of homelessness throughout the state. For example, African Americans, who represent only about 6.5% of Californians, account for nearly 40% of the state's homeless population. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened our homelessness crisis by putting hundreds of thousands of Californians into financial distress, and either on the brink of or experiencing homelessness. It has also endangered the health and wellbeing of those experiencing homelessness, and depleted local resources. Therefore, the need to address the homelessness crisis with urgency and innovative solutions at this moment is critical.

AB 71 (L. Rivas) establishes a permanent source of funding and a collaborative statewide strategy for solving homelessness. It will fill gaps within the state's response and will scale evidence-based solutions, while promoting innovations to move people quickly into permanent housing. AB 71 also aims to eliminate racial bias, ensure youth and survivors of domestic violence have equitable access to housing and services, and enhance coordination and collaboration among state and local agencies. The bill ensures a transparent and accountable process through performance measures, rewards local governments for hitting aggressive goals, and removes funding for any jurisdiction failing to spend resources quickly. It requires annual reporting, and strengthens data collection at the local and state levels. In transforming the state's response to homelessness, it will also create a more transparent program than the state has ever before crafted. AB 71 relies on funding for large and multinational corporations for the revenue source, rebalancing inequities laid bare by COVID.

We are committed to ensuring homelessness becomes brief, rare and nonrecurrent. Ongoing state investments, combined with significant structural changes to how California oversees, coordinates, and delivers results are essential to solving homelessness. For these reasons, we strongly support AB 71.

Thank you for your leadership in combatting homelessness and working to solve our state's housing crisis.

Sincerely,



Christine E. Petit, PhD  
Vice President of Public Policy and Advocacy