

SENATOR KEVIN MURRAY (ret)  
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE  
HEARING ON  
EXAMINING THE HOMELESS CRISIS IN LOS ANGELES  
August 14, 2019

My name is Kevin Murray. I am the President and CEO of the Weingart Center, a homeless services agency located in Los Angeles' Skid Row. The Weingart Center is both a service provider and a developer of Permanent Supportive Housing.

I want to thank Chairwoman Waters and the Committee for holding this hearing on what I believe is the most crucial issue we face today. Providing a safety net to its citizens is one of the most important roles government plays.

I want to make 7 major points.

**Resist the temptation to find and fund a silver bullet.**

Solutions must be Multi-Modal. They must match up with the multitude of ways our neighbors got to homelessness. The current emphasis of HUD on the Housing First model to the exclusion of other solutions is counter productive. We need shelters, bridge housing and transitional housing in addition to Permanent Supportive Housing. Each has its place in the arsenal of solutions for this diverse population. The Housing First model has caused a reduction in funding for transitional housing which included Mental Health Services and Workforce Training. As a result the funding for in-house mental health services has gone away. Remote or periodic mental health services may not work for everyone.

Everyone is not housing ready, many need life skills or mental health treatment for the housing to be effective and to make them good neighbors

This concept should be extend to the practice of prioritizing those with high acuity scores. At first blush, prioritizing those with the most severe issues seems laudable, but on the ground, it leaves those who could be lifted up with a smaller boost to languish on the vine until they develop severe issues and become high acuity.

**We Do Not Fund or Support Family Reunification**

From school children to college students to adults, it is clear that the best indicator of success or with solving problems is a strong support structure. The best Social Worker is a supportive family member or friend. Many homeless have, of course, damaged their familial relationships, if they ever existed. We should fund attempts or reestablish familial bonds or created new ones. One of the corner stones of 12 step programs is the idea of a sponsor who is there to support one who has fallen without judgement.

**Our Current Model Stifles Innovation**

We currently operate on a strict model of placing homeless in apartments of a certain size with their own kitchen and bathroom. It may not be appropriate for a particularly client to live alone

in an apartment. There is very little funding for shared housing, roommates, or renting a room from a family member, all solutions that would likely result in better outcomes by creating a support structure to go along with the housing and supportive services.

**We should aggressively enforce laws against those who prey on the homeless.**

In each homeless area there are criminals or gangs who traffic in drugs or humans and who have the temerity to charge rent for a place on the sidewalk.

**We need to find humane but more aggressive ways to deal with the Service Resistant.**

There are many homeless who are resistant to the services being currently offered. Some are mentally ill or have substance abuse issues. Some do not want to abide by the rules of a housing placement. Some do not want to leave the community they have established on the street.

We expect someone with severe mental illness or substance abuse to make a rational decision to seek housing. This is irrational.

In the interest of protecting civil liberties, we are literally allowing those with the worst issues to die on the streets.

Previously unthinkable ideas like civil commitment need to be considered. This would, of course, require there to be sufficient beds in mental health facilities to receive these patients.

**Los Angeles Taxpayers should be rewarded for voting to tax themselves to help solve the Homeless Crisis**

Los Angeles taxpayers have voted to invest almost \$2,000,000,000 in homeless housing and services. The State of California has invested additional monies. The Federal Government should add to this leverage to build even more housing and provide more services.

**Los Angeles needs more Section 8 vouchers**

While Los Angeles has set an ambitious goal of building 10,000 units of Permanent Supportive Housing, we will run out of Section 8 vouchers to support those units well before reaching that number

In conclusion, I would like to again thank the Chairwoman and Committee for holding this hearing and would welcome any questions.