



September 21, 2022

The Honorable Erick L. Larsh
Presiding Judge, Orange County Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, California 92701

Subject: Response to 2021-22 Orange County Grand Jury Report:
How Is Orange County Addressing Homelessness?

Dear Presiding Judge Larsh:

The City of Laguna Beach City Council, the City Manager's Office, and the Police Department have reviewed the above-referenced report. In accordance with California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the City Council has reviewed and authorized the following response to the findings and recommendations of the report.

Findings

F3. *The County of Orange and cities within Orange County have been inconsistent in collaboration for support of shelters and services, which has resulted in missed opportunities to end homelessness.*

The City of Laguna Beach agrees with the finding.

Since November of 2009, the City of Laguna Beach has owned, funded, and contracted for the operation of a low barrier, 45-bed emergency shelter within the City, commonly known as the Alternative Sleeping Location (ASL). The City contracts with the Friendship Shelter for the operation of the ASL. The majority of those staying in the ASL are residents of various South Orange County cities versus un-housed residents of Laguna Beach. Under the current agreement with the Friendship Shelter, referrals from cities/agencies outside of Laguna Beach for admittance to the ASL are allowed, but un-housed individuals from Laguna Beach are provided priority. The City will consider amending this agreement in the near future to focus exclusively on un-housed individuals from Laguna Beach, as a means to incentivize other cities to support a regional shelter system.

It must be noted that on page 4 of the report, the Grand Jury states that "South OC SPA cities did not sign the Settlement Agreement..." Unfortunately, Laguna Beach is grouped with other cities in the South OC SPA. Unlike the other cities that make up the South OC SPA, Laguna Beach has consistently and proactively stepped up to address the issue of homelessness within our community and, within the larger South OC SPA, by allowing outside admittance to the ASL. On September 23, 2019, the City proactively entered into a federal court Settlement Agreement under the auspice of United States District Judge David O. Carter. That action is one further measure that differentiates the City of Laguna Beach's response to homelessness from the other cities within the South OC SPA.

While the City of Laguna Beach has provided a safety valve by allowing other cities' use of the ASL, we realize that unregulated use of the Laguna Beach-owned and funded ASL has enabled the inconsistent collaboration for support of shelters and services to address homelessness within the South OC SPA by the other cities. Accordingly, the City of Laguna Beach will respect the July 1, 2023 deadline for the South OC SPA cities encompassed within Recommendations R1 and R2 to site, fund, and open an emergency shelter to address unhoused individuals within those cities by considering the establishment of regulations for the ASL, to reduce the enabling of the South OC SPA cities to continue to miss opportunities to end homelessness.

F4. There are an insufficient number of rental units available to those exiting Emergency Shelters, resulting in the majority returning to homelessness when leaving the shelters.

The City of Laguna Beach disagrees partially with the finding.

Through its partnership with the Friendship Shelter and actively addressing of serving the unhoused, the City of Laguna Beach has experienced general success of exiting individuals to proper housing opportunities after staying at the ASL. However, it is clearly evident that there is an insufficient number of affordable rental units and permanent supportive housing units, in addition to proper mental health facilities for individuals to advance to after staying in an emergency shelter.

Recommendations

R4. By July 1, 2024, the County of Orange, cities and CoC should collaborate to open facilities that can house people with severe and persistent mental illness and addiction issues in a secure setting.

The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.

The City of Laguna Beach cannot stress enough that facilities to support and house people with severe and persistent mental illness and addiction issues, is critical to any endgame of addressing homelessness. The City is fully supportive of the new Be Well OC comprehensive mental health center to be located in South Orange County on County-owned land in the City of Irvine. While this new wellness center is greatly needed, it must be accompanied by additional facilities to handle the growing mental health and addiction crisis that often leads to instances of homelessness, as well as providing permanent supportive housing options. The City is also home to the only behavioral health care unit in South Orange County and therefore experiences greater impact from individuals exited from that facility, the majority of which originate from other South OC cities. The City recognizes that the County of Orange, through the adopted Housing Funding Strategy and the Orange County Housing Finance Trust have increased the availability of needed housing.

R5. By July 1, 2023, the County of Orange, cities and CoC should collaborate to encourage the development of housing affordable to individuals exiting the emergency shelters in Orange County. (F3, F4, F5)

The recommendation has been implemented.

In partnership with the County of Orange, the Orange County Continuum of Care, and other cities,

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all agencies have been working together to encourage the development of affordable housing and permanent supportive housing, that supports the needs of people experiencing homelessness and to have access to the system of care available. This includes the development of housing opportunities that support participants exiting from emergency shelters into permanent housing. In 2019, the Orange County Housing Finance Trust (OCHFT) was established and is a collaboration between the County and the cities for the purpose of funding affordable housing and permanent supportive housing, to assisting the homeless population and households of extremely low, very low, and low income within Orange County.

R6. By December 1, 2022, the County of Orange, cities and CoC should collaborate to increase the number of housing opportunities for Transitional Aged Youth.

The recommendation has been implemented.

Since June 2020, County's Office of Care Coordination has worked to improve the homeless service delivery for transitional aged youth experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. The County provides oversight over the Coordinated Entry System and has worked to implement a separate process for transitional aged youth to be prioritized for available housing resources in Orange County. This has resulted in the implementation of a Transitional Aged Youth Registry, composed of youth participants experiencing homelessness in Orange County, regardless of their household composition. Transitional aged youth service providers are invited to attend a collaborative case conferencing meeting to discuss individual cases, available housing resources, and dynamic prioritization through the Coordinated Entry System to ensure that the most vulnerable participants are receiving the most appropriate housing referrals.

In addition to this, the Office of Care Coordination began tracking outcomes in the form of transitional aged youth-focused dashboard to understand the housing needs and analyze trends. The Office of Care Coordination and the Orange County Continuum of Care have utilized this information to inform the implementation of housing resources and the solicitation of new housing resources, specifically designed to meet the needs of the transitional aged youth experiencing homelessness, or at risk of homelessness in Orange County.

The Office of Care Coordination most recently submitted an application for the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program, a funding opportunity from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), designed to reduce the number of transitional aged youths experiencing homelessness through a coordinated community approach.

The City of Laguna Beach is supportive of the County and Continuum of Care's leadership in addressing the needs of transitional aged youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the Grand Jury's report.

Sincerely,

Sue Kempf

Sue Kempf
Mayor