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San Francisco Board of Supervisors and Board of Education support Safe Sleeping Sites for unsheltered people to combat COVID-19

Resolutions passed today urge the City and County of San Francisco and the San Francisco Unified School District to establish Safe Sleeping Sites for homeless people to encourage social distancing among tents and improve access to handwashing and sanitation

SAN FRANCISCO — Two San Francisco elected boards unanimously voted in support of establishing Safe Sleeping Sites for unhoused people today to help stop the spread of COVID-19 among the City’s homeless population. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted to support a resolution by District 8 Supervisor Rafael Mandelman calling on the City to urgently establish Safe Sleeping Sites in now-vacant parking lots. The San Francisco Board of Education voted to support a resolution by President Mark Sanchez and Vice-President Gabriela Lopez to use School District property for such sites.

“In the Castro and many other neighborhoods in San Francisco, tent encampments are growing, with encampment residents largely unable to achieve adequate social distancing or access hygiene and sanitation, creating a public health hazard to encampment occupants and neighbors,” said Supervisor Mandelman. “In order to protect all of us during the COVID-19 crisis we need to embrace new and different strategies to provide safer alternatives to unsheltered people for whom we do not currently have an apartment, a hotel room or a shelter bed available.”

The Board of Supervisors resolution urges the City to quickly establish Safe Sleeping Sites in now-vacant parking lots or other appropriate spaces. The sites would follow public health best practices including maintaining adequate social distancing between tents and providing access to sanitation facilities, food, and water. Each site would need a safety plan, 24/7 staffing, janitorial services, and other services to maintain the health and safety of those at the site and the surrounding neighborhood. The resolution passed by the Board of Education specified that the School District should partner with the City to identify at least one District property to be used as part of citywide safe sleeping efforts.

“I’m proud of our Board and our District for stepping up and leaning in to do our part to help out in a citywide effort to confront the epidemic of homelessness that has become a deeper crisis during the Coronavirus pandemic,” said Board of Education President Mark Sanchez.

The Centers for Disease Control issued guidance regarding protocols for tent encampments during the COVID-19 emergency that include not clearing encampments, encouraging people staying in encampments to set up their tents with sufficient space between them and ensuring nearby accessible and adequately stocked restroom facilities.

“Tent encampments in the neighborhoods I represent are happening right next to, and in some instances on the campuses of, public schools like Everett Middle School, Sanchez Elementary School and Mission High School,” said Mandelman. “I look forward to working with City departments, the School District and neighbors to open a Safe Sleeping Site to serve the Upper Market/Castro area as quickly as possible.”

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