[Urging Public Health Orders to Prioritize Needs of People Experiencing Homelessness During the COVID-19 Crisis]

Resolution urging Public Health Orders to prioritize the needs of people experiencing homelessness and to create clear guidelines for homeless people’s health and safety during the COVID-19 crisis.

WHEREAS, As of the latest Point in Time Count, there are 8,035 people experiencing homelessness in San Francisco, 64% or 5,180 of whom are unsheltered; and

WHEREAS, In 2018, the Board of Supervisors in File No. 180864 declared that a shelter crisis pursuant to Government Code, Section 8698.2 exists in the City and County of San Francisco, and made findings that the health and safety of unsheltered persons in San Francisco is threatened by a lack of shelter; and

WHEREAS, The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is a growing threat to the health and safety of all San Franciscans, especially vulnerable populations like older adults and people who have serious underlying medical conditions; and

WHEREAS, According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, “People experiencing homelessness often have a higher risk for exposure to communicable diseases and have little access to health care systems and treatment in their communities;” and

WHEREAS, On March 6, 2020, the San Francisco Health Officer issued a Declaration of Local Health Emergency Regarding Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), which was preceded by a March 4, 2020, Proclamation of a State of Emergency issued by Governor Gavin Newsom and a February 25, 2020, Proclamation by the Mayor Declaring the Existence of a Local Emergency; and
WHEREAS, Few protective measures have been announced for people experiencing homelessness, both sheltered and unsheltered against the pandemic in San Francisco, and Health Orders and local officials have given conflicting guidance; and

WHEREAS, Shelter at Home is a core public health intervention that, along with isolation of cases, quarantine of contacts, social distancing, and widespread testing, interrupt the community spread of the novel coronavirus thereby reducing illness and severe disease, reducing demands on the health care system, and reducing social and economic disruption for in San Francisco; and

WHEREAS, Ethical principles require us to ensure social equity and racial equity in the distribution of limited resources and to ensure all San Francisco residents, including persons experiencing homelessness, and especially seniors and medical fragile, have equal opportunity to Shelter at Home and to benefit from reduced exposure to novel coronavirus and COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, Shelters provide safety in normal times, however during the current pandemic any congregate living arrangement increases the risk of transmission; and

WHEREAS, At a March 17, 2020, Board of Supervisors meeting, the Director of the San Francisco Human Services Agency in charge of procuring private rooms stated that “the Department of Public Health guidance is not to take a homeless individual who is on the street and put him or her in a hotel room with no services. They would prefer that people on the street are placed in shelters and congregate areas where they can better monitor them and bring services onsite;” and

WHEREAS, During the same meeting, the San Francisco Health Officer Dr. Tomas Aragon stated that: “From a disease-transmission perspective, absolutely having your own room is the best;” and
WHEREAS, There is an urgent need for clarity on the guidance for homeless individuals in congregate settings or living unsheltered; and

WHEREAS, The latest March 16, 2020, Order of the Health Officer (C19-09) recognizes that “The virus that causes Coronavirus 2019 Disease ("COVID-19") is easily transmitted, especially in group settings, and it is essential that the spread of the virus be slowed to protect the ability of public and private health care providers to handle the influx of new patients and safeguard public health and safety;” and

WHEREAS, On March 18, 2020, the California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency released Interim Guidance for Homeless Assistance Providers on Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) that mirrors the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); and

WHEREAS, While local Health Order mandates general Social Distancing Requirements that include maintaining at least six-foot social distancing, the State Interim Guidance and CDC recommend that “In general sleeping areas (for those who are not experiencing respiratory symptoms), ensure that beds/mats are at least 3 feet apart, and request that all clients sleep head to-toe;” and

WHEREAS, As of March 23, 2020, the San Francisco Department of Health recommendations for “Preventing Spread of COVID-19 among Persons Experiencing Homelessness” had not been updated since March 11, 2020, and do not contain a recommended distancing between beds in emergency shelters; and

WHEREAS, The local guidelines recommend that emergency shelter providers screen clients for symptoms: “Screen on intake and daily for: Fever (temperature over 100.4°F or 38°C)” and “Have thermometers available for staff” but does not outline specific screening protocols; and
WHEREAS, Emergency shelter providers have not been given clear guidance or support to meet the local, state, or CDC recommended guidelines; and

WHEREAS, For example, as of March 22, 2020, SFDPH and HSH had not provided no-contact thermometers to emergency shelter providers, preventing staff from following recommended screening guidelines; and

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WHEREAS, As of March 23, 2020, emergency shelter providers in San Francisco have been given no direct resources or support to modify the arrangement of beds or cots in shelters to abide by the new guidelines; and

WHEREAS, As of March 23, 2020, the City’s largest shelter continues to shelter at least 340 people, with no reduced capacity since the outbreak; and

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WHEREAS, As of March 23, 2020, many of the City’s largest emergency shelters continue to shelter dozens of vulnerable seniors and immunocompromised individuals in close proximity to each other; and

WHEREAS, Some congregate emergency shelters are being asked to expand rather than reduce their capacity; and

WHEREAS, The crowded conditions in San Francisco’s emergency shelters run contrary to the City’s social distancing requirements; and

WHEREAS, Although homeless individuals are specifically exempt from the shelter in place order, the conditions in San Francisco’s emergency shelters run contrary to the principle behind the mandate to shelter in place to slow the transmission of a communicable disease; and

WHEREAS, A homeless encampment in San Jose has already experienced an unsheltered person dying due to coronavirus; and
WHEREAS, The City and County’s current hotel procurement is focused on sites for
those who have COVID-19 but don’t require hospitalization and those at-risk or awaiting test
results and need to quarantine; and
WHEREAS, On March 16, 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom secured 393
rooms across two hotels in Oakland “to get people out of these encampments,” and
announced that additional rooms are anticipated to “find additional hotel beds for people
sleeping outside;” and
WHEREAS, The state of California “is immediately procuring 1,309 travel trailers from
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and private vendors to provide quarantine
capacity – moving people out of shelters and into isolation placements, focused on people
with COVID-19 or those demonstrating symptoms;” and
WHEREAS, Governor Newsom’s directive to procure travel trailers prioritizes
“protect[ing] healthy people in those facilities and create capacity in the existing shelter
network;” and
WHEREAS, San Francisco currently has approximately 30,000 vacant housing units
and more than 40,000 empty hotel rooms; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Board of Supervisors (the “Board”) urges the
Public Health Officer to issue a new Order of the Health Officer to mandate that all homeless
individuals in congregate emergency shelters who can self-care be placed in private rooms
immediately; and, be it
FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board urges the Public Health Officer to issue a new
Order of the Health Officer to mandate strict social distancing requirements in congregate
emergency shelters, including a “shelter-thinning” mandate with strict maximum capacities;
and, be it
FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board urges the Public Health Officer to issue a new
Order of the Health Officer to set screening standards in congregate shelters and protocols for
testing and people exhibiting symptoms; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board urges the Department of Public Health to
create clear guidelines for homeless people’s health and safety during the COVID crisis,
including amending Order C19-07 (“Shelter In Place”) issued on March 16, 2020, to clarify
how the shelter-in-place directive applies to homeless individuals; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board urges the San Francisco Human Services
Agency in partnership with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing to
urgently procure adequate rooms, estimated at least 1,500, for the primary purpose of getting
people who are currently in congregate emergency shelters into private rooms; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board urges the San Francisco Human Services
Agency in partnership with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing to
urgently procure adequate rooms, estimated at least 3,500, for the primary purpose of getting
people who are currently unsheltered on the streets or in encampments in private rooms; and,
be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board urges the San Francisco Human Services
Agency in partnership with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing to
urgently procure adequate rooms for the primary purpose of getting people who are being
released from incarceration into private rooms, rather than shelters or encampments; and, be
it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Board of Supervisors (the “Board”)
urges Governor Newsom to secure rooms in San Francisco for the primary purpose of getting
people who are currently unsheltered on the streets or in encampments inside in private
rooms, similar to his actions in Oakland; and, be it
FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board urges the San Francisco Human Services Agency to allow the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing to issue hotel vouchers to providers of emergency shelter; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Board of Supervisors urges the Departments of Homelessness and Supportive Housing and Public Health to immediately support emergency shelter providers to abide by social distancing guidelines; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board urges the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing to work with emergency shelter providers to identify the maximum number of clients who can be safely sheltered in each shelter with appropriate social distancing in each shelter; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board urges the San Francisco Human Services Agency and Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing to immediately begin transporting older shelter clients over the age of 65 into private rooms; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Clerk of the Board, upon passage of this Resolution, shall transmit copies of this resolution to Governor Newsom, Assemblymember Phil Ting, Assemblymember David Chiu, Senator Scott Wiener; the San Francisco Public Health Officer; Mayor London N. Breed; and the Directors of the San Francisco Human Service Agency, Department of Public Health, and Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing.
Resolution urging Public Health Orders to prioritize the needs of people experiencing homelessness, and to create clear guidelines for homeless people’s health and safety during the COVID-19 crisis.

March 31, 2020 Board of Supervisors - ADOPTED
   Ayes: 10 - Fewer, Haney, Mandelman, Mar, Preston, Ronen, Safai, Stefani, Walton and Yee
   Absent: 1 - Peskin

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED on 3/31/2020 by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.

Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board

I hereby certify that the foregoing resolution, not being signed by the Mayor within the time limit as set forth in Section 3.103 of the Charter, or time waived pursuant to Board Rule 2.14.2, became effective without her approval in accordance with the provision of said Section 3.103 of the Charter or Board Rule 2.14.2.

Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board