[Supporting the Establishment of a Compassionate Alternative Response Team]

Resolution supporting the establishment of a 24 hours a day / seven days a week Compassionate Alternative Response Team (CART) in the City and County of San Francisco for a safer and more effective response to homelessness.

WHEREAS, The roots of our local homelessness crisis can be traced, in part, to federal divestment from the funding of affordable housing, and local municipalities have been left to manage the crisis without the tax base of the federal government; and

WHEREAS, In many municipalities, including San Francisco, local police departments have acted by default as the front line response to homelessness; and

WHEREAS, Instead of creating and facilitating viable exits from homelessness, a police based response creates a costly revolving door, circulating individuals experiencing homelessness from corner to corner and in and out of the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USIAC) issued a report in August of 2015 outlining best practices for addressing homelessness entitled “Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments: Advancing the Dialogue,” which includes guidelines on how to address homelessness and puts forward that linking unhoused people to an appropriate level of housing is the only lasting solution; and

WHEREAS, The 2019 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey found 8,035 unhoused individuals with 5,180 unsheltered and 2,855 accessing some form of shelter; and

WHEREAS, The number of individuals experiencing homelessness in San Francisco far exceeds the number of available temporary shelter beds and transitional or permanent housing; and
WHEREAS, The City and County of San Francisco received more than $44 million in federal McKinney-Vento funding for projects addressing homelessness last year, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has created funding incentives for communities to ensure that persons experiencing homelessness are not deemed criminals because of their use of public space for survival; and

WHEREAS, The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals rejected an en banc petition by the City of Boise in Martin v. Boise (formerly Bell v. Boise), upholding its September 2018 ruling that homeless persons may not be punished for sleeping outside on public property in the absence of adequate alternatives; and

WHEREAS, The number of police officers devoted to responding to homelessness has increased from 24 in 2017 to over 80 in 2019, and on average, the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) responds to 179 homelessness-related incidents daily, or 1,253 per week; and

WHEREAS, According to San Francisco’s Department of Emergency Management (DEM) data, SFPD was dispatched to 65,333 homelessness-related calls in 2019; and

WHEREAS, When calls are made to the city expressing concern for unhoused people, SFPD remains the primary agency dispatched in response; and

WHEREAS, A report issued by the Budget and Legislative Analyst’s Office (BLA) in May 2016 found that police officers dispatched to incidents related to quality of life laws produced limited results given the increase in homelessness on the streets; the BLA subsequently recommended that the Board of Supervisors should implement a new strategy to address these issues that shifts response to quality of life incidents away from the Police Department to other City agencies including the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing; and
WHEREAS, Currently, San Franciscans are advised to call the Police Non-Emergency line for homelessness-related concerns such as encampments blocking the sidewalk or to contact 311 for concerns about social distancing compliance in encampments; and

WHEREAS, In recent years San Francisco has relied more heavily on 311 to address homeless encampments, which has led to a sharp increase in encampments being “removed” or moved rather than the unhoused being supported with placements or services; and

WHEREAS, Alternative models such as Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets or “CAHOOTS,” a mobile crisis intervention response and support team located in Eugene, Oregon in which health workers, instead of police, act as first responders, already provide a framework for an alternative to police response to homelessness; and

WHEREAS, In January 2020, the San Francisco Police Commission adopted a Resolution urging the creation of a stakeholder group that would make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors, Mayor’s Office, and appropriate commissions on how to transform our response to homelessness from one led by law enforcement into one led by trained health and human services workers based on exploring alternatives to a police response that exist in the United States and other countries; and

WHEREAS, The Police Commission further urged that the stakeholder group would identify funding sources, appropriate dispatch protocol, necessary system changes and appropriate service model to move from a police response to a more effective health and human services response to homelessness; and

WHEREAS, San Francisco is already exploring alternatives to police response to psychiatric crisis in public spaces by establishing the Street Crisis Response Team (SCRT); the program provides rapid, trauma-informed response to calls for service for people experiencing psychiatric crisis in public spaces in order to reduce law enforcement encounters and unnecessary emergency room use; the program has already successfully diverted more
than 79 calls for service from SFPD during its pilot period and demonstrated that utilizing a
service-based interdisciplinary team in response to street crisis is a powerful and effective
model; and

WHEREAS, The city’s newly created SCRT by design and plan does not respond to
dispatch radio codes 910 (check on well being), 915 (homeless encampment), 916
(suspicious person in a vehicle), 917 (suspicious person), 919 (sit/lie ordinance violations),
and 920 (aggressive panhandling) leaving no current alternative other than a police response;
and

WHEREAS, The Compassionate Alternative Response Team (CART) proposal
provides a framework for CART to respond to C-Priority Calls involving unhoused people in
the City, on the street, or in temporary shelters including dispatch radio codes 800 (mentally
disturbed person) that SCRT does not have capacity to respond to, 801 (person attempting
suicide), 910 (check on well being), 915 (homeless encampment), 916 (suspicious person in a
vehicle), 917 (suspicious person), 919 (sit/Lie ordinance violations), and 920 (aggressive
panhandling) 24 hours a day 7 days a week; and

WHEREAS, The CART model is made up of two components, the first being CART
Dispatch Response, which provides a specialized police-alternative to calls involving
unhoused people in crisis; CART Dispatch Response also establishes a new hotline for CART
and create a CART specific dispatch code; and

WHEREAS, The second component of CART, the Street Response, would serve,
engage, and problem solve with housed San Franciscans and businesses around
homelessness; and

WHEREAS, CART, being informed by a recent survey of homeless in San Francisco,
would hire Crisis Response Staff as well as Community Engagement Staff distinguishable
from law enforcement with backgrounds and lived experiences with homelessness, poverty,
crisis response, and the provision of services, and would seek to hire response staff that match the racial and LGBTQ demographics of the unhoused clients being served; and

WHEREAS, CART would be funded and staffed 24 hours a day / 7 days a week; and

WHEREAS, The two-prong scope of the CART program will divert a significant number of homelessness-related calls away from SFPD, while building capacity within San Francisco’s neighborhoods to de-escalate and compassionately resolve homelessness-related conflicts, thereby reducing the total number of homelessness-related calls made to dispatch, reducing police interactions with those experiencing homelessness, and improving outcomes for those on the streets; and

WHEREAS, The CART response focuses on the well-being of the unhoused, an approach that is foundational to the CAHOOTS model, and will affirm the civil rights of those experiencing homelessness, as well as problem-solve issues faced by the housed and by businesses; and

WHEREAS, It is recommended that CART be funded by a diversion of funds from various carceral system budgets, which could be achieved by cost-savings associated with implementing a non-police response; the BLA estimates that the City currently spends $18.5 million on police responses to homelessness, the CART model would replace these services at an estimated cost of $6.8 million, which would provide the city with a projected $11 million cost savings; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors concurs with the Police Commission’s recommendation that the City must transform our response to street homelessness from one led by law enforcement into one led by trained health and human services workers; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors supports the framework of the Compassionate Alternative Response Team that dramatically expands the City’s capacity to respond to street homelessness through revising dispatch response; and, be it
FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors urges the Mayor to include additional funding for homeless outreach.
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June 10, 2021 Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee - RECOMMENDED

June 22, 2021 Board of Supervisors - ADOPTED
   Ayes: 11 - Chan, Haney, Mandelman, Mar, Melgar, Peskin, Preston, Ronen, Safai, Stefani and Walton

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED on 6/22/2021 by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.

Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board

London N. Breed
Mayor

Date Approved
7/2/2021