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Moving Forward to Fund the Fight Against Homelessness

Acting on a motion by Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Sheila Kuehl, the Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 to seek a change in state law that would keep all options open to fund the fight against homelessness.

“To address the profundity of the crisis and the depth of poverty and homelessness in the county, we have to do more,” Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said during Tuesday’s Board meeting, where more than 150 members of the public testified in support of his motion.

“It won’t get better unless we have significant intervention,” he added. “Each member of this Board has said repeatedly that one-time funding isn’t sufficient. Now it’s time to get on with the rigorous exploration of the kind of funding that would be necessary.”

With 46,874 people living on the streets of Los Angeles County on any given day – up 5.6 percent from last year – Supervisor Ridley-Thomas called homelessness “the most compelling crisis that confronts us.” He added the County is “uniquely positioned and, therefore, specifically obliged” to take action because of its massive social services, health and public safety infrastructure.

Since adopting a sweeping set of strategies February to address the worsening crisis, the Board has been weighing options for funding. This includes redirecting Measure B revenue, or imposing a parcel tax, a marijuana tax, a half-cent sales tax, or a half-percent tax on personal income exceeding \$1 million a year.

A recent poll found 76 percent of likely voters favor the last option – a “dramatic level of support,” pollster David Binder told the Board. The Board, however, does not currently have the authority to put such an initiative on the November ballot. Supervisors Ridley-Thomas and Kuehl’s motion, which passed with the support

of Supervisor Hilda Solis, launches the County's efforts to seek that authority from the state Legislature and Governor.

"Our actions show that the Board is strongly committed to finding the long-term funding needed to implement the County's innovative and comprehensive Homelessness Initiative," Supervisor Kuehl said. "The friendly amendment I introduced this week also allows us to evaluate the interaction of this possible County tax with a new state bond proposal which could build housing in the County."

The Board also approved Tuesday a measure by Supervisors Solis and Don Knabe that would delve into how the County uses existing funding to serve the homeless. Supervisor Ridley-Thomas expressed support, saying, "It continues our long-term efforts to always ensure we are leveraging existing resources as effectively as possible."

More than 150 people testified before the Board to support continued efforts to address the homelessness crisis. Steve Renahana of the nonprofit Shelter Partnership told the Board: "Thank you for your leadership in passing a comprehensive set of strategies to address homelessness in the County, and thank you even more for beginning the heavy lifting of providing the resources that are necessary to implement those strategies."

Marsha Temple, executive director of the nonprofit Integrated Recovery Network, added, "The cost of doing nothing is too high, both in terms of funding and human misery."

"I'm so proud that you always remember who you're working for," said "Sweet" Alice Harris, an advocate for the homeless. "I'm glad you didn't let God down. Thank you."

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