

Commentary | California partnerships are key to combating homeless crisis

By **Kevin L. Faulconer & Richard C. Gentry**

APRIL 20, 2018, 2:30 PM

New programs have created thousands of housing opportunities in the last three years for homeless individuals, families and veterans in San Diego.

The right things are happening to address the homelessness crisis in our region — but we need to do more of them. And we can't continue to do them alone. Additional funding is critical.

State lawmakers have taken a significant step forward to address this challenge with Assembly Bill (AB) 3171, which the Assembly Committee on Housing and Community Development will consider on April 25. The hearing comes on the heels of a new state audit that calls on Sacramento to invest more in homelessness and play a larger role in solving the problem.

AB 3171 would direct \$1.5 billion in unencumbered state resources to tackle California's homeless emergency. When matched with local funds, cities can amplify their efforts and create new effective solutions.

This bill will make a difference for people like Melvyna, a retired nurse with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. She was homeless and living in a shelter for close to a year until she regained her independence at Talmadge Gateway, a 59-unit affordable housing project for homeless seniors in City Heights.

The long-term solution to homelessness is providing permanent homes for families and individuals like Melvyna. That is why combining state and local resources to create a meaningful pool of funding is so important.

A bipartisan group of state and local elected leaders, including each of the city of San Diego's state Assemblymembers — Todd Gloria, Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, Brian Maienschein and Shirley Weber — support this legislation. The mayors of California's 11 largest cities, including San Diego, are also united and advocated for AB 3171 in meetings this month with Governor Jerry Brown, Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, Senate President Pro Tem Toni Atkins and other legislative leaders.

The bill comes as California cities have been stepping up to reduce homelessness, including adding permanent rental housing with supportive services; short-term assistance known as rapid rehousing; shelter diversion programs; bridge housing; and navigation centers.

These types of programs are the foundation of our "Connect, Support and House" strategy — connect people to our care network with temporary relief from the streets, support them with services and workforce training, and help them find a permanent home. These efforts also support the city's "Housing SD" plan to make homes more affordable for all San Diegans.

The city of San Diego is now seen as a leader for its innovative approaches. Our Safe Parking Program is providing security and services for individuals living in their vehicles. The Housing Navigation Center, projected to open later this year, will provide a centralized location to access services people need to gain stability in their lives and exit homelessness. And San Diego's bridge shelters, which have helped hundreds of individuals and families, served as a model for new homeless programs recently announced in Los Angeles.

AB 3171 will help support and expand upon this progress. It also would complement HOUSING FIRST — SAN DIEGO, the San Diego Housing Commission's (SDHC) homelessness action plan.

The first three years of the action plan have created housing for close to 3,000 homeless San Diegans. The latest phase of the plan, which launched in July, will direct \$79.7 million in federal, city and SDHC resources to provide housing opportunities to an additional 3,000 homeless individuals. Imagine what could be accomplished if those funds were matched by the state.

For example, rapid rehousing was instrumental to the success of Housing Our Heroes, the collaborative initiative by the city and SDHC that helped more than 1,000 homeless veterans secure rental homes.

To date, SDHC has awarded more than \$39 million toward the new construction of 500 rental housing units with supportive services. An additional 253 affordable rental units for homeless individuals have been created through SDHC's acquisition and rehabilitation of properties, such as the 72 studio units at the historic Hotel Churchill in downtown San Diego.

San Diego's unified approach to addressing homelessness, based on the national "housing first" model, is helping people move off the streets and into homes every day. We have more work to do, and state funds through AB 3171 would provide needed resources to help build on this momentum.

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