



October 7, 2024

## Working Toward More Humane and Effective Encampment Resolution in Alameda County

Esteemed Alameda County Board of Supervisors:

The Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless (ACHCH) Commission, the governing board of the Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless program, stands for the health of people experiencing homelessness and for health and justice in all our communities. We firmly believe that encampment resolution must be carried out and centered around the health and well-being of unsheltered persons and provide effective results for those being displaced.

There are federal ([United States Interagency Council on Homelessness - USICH](#)) and state ([Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative - UCSF - BHHI](#)) best practices and standards for how encampment resolution should be effectively, safely, and justly carried out. Additionally, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council (NHCHC) issued a Policy Brief, [Temporary Supported Communities: Strategies for Serving Unsheltered People](#), this Brief addressed the harm that arrests and encampment sweeps have on people experiencing homelessness and provides recommendations for more constructively responding to unsheltered homelessness.

When these standards and guidance are not followed, the result is increased death and morbidity and problems are not solved, generating a “whack-a-mole” cycle of policy and conditions that serve no-one’s interests.

According to the most recent Alameda County [homeless mortality report](#), between 2018 and 2022 1,506 Alameda County residents died while experiencing homelessness. The age-adjusted mortality rate for people experiencing homelessness in Alameda County in 2022 was 2,983 homeless deaths per 100,000, **or 5.4 times that of the general population** of the County. For all causes of death, mortality rates are many times higher for people experiencing homelessness than the general population.

### Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless Commission

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Last month's brutal and uncoordinated sweeps of the largely elder, disabled and Oakland-born, Black unhoused persons in the MLK/23<sup>rd</sup> block was emblematic of the **wrong way** to resolve encampments:

- There was no City-led planning with County, community or residents before the sweeps.
- Extremely limited shelter offerings were made available, which were not accessible to those with mobility and other accommodation needs.
- People's possessions, including expensive and vital durable medical equipment like electric wheelchairs, were roundly destroyed and disposed of without opportunity for storage.
- Although dozens of community members (such as West Oakland Punks with Lunch's Executive Director, Ale del Pinal) played a heroic role in directly supporting and helping residents, they were subject to arrest by Oakland Police Department arbitrarily enforcing a new "safe work zone" ordinance.

The ACHCH Commission is deeply disturbed by jurisdictions such as the City of Oakland issuing Executive Orders ([Executive Order 2024.pdf \(dropbox.com\)](#)) that result in harmful, traumatic and impractical sweeps against the most vulnerable and fragile of their own constituents – residents experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

The harms that took place at MLK/23<sup>rd</sup> were partially mitigated through a swift, intensive, and sustained on-the-ground response from Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless leadership. ACHCH leaders and staff identified and supported the needs of medically vulnerable individuals - including people with dementia, injuries, and serious illness - and connected them to appropriate health and housing resources. Without this support, many of these individuals would have ended up in local hospitals or displaced to other street settings, disconnected from their care managers and health providers and at risk of worsening illness, injury or even death.

We call upon the County of Alameda to make a forceful and just stand around "sweeps" of unsheltered persons any and everywhere in this County by requiring that all County funded support of such activities be aligned with [State](#) and [Federal standards](#) and best practices. A shining example of this is the County of Los Angeles-led [Pathway Home](#) partnership with local jurisdictions and unincorporated communities to effectively and humanely resolve encampments.

ACHCH Commission members would be happy to schedule a meeting with relevant County officials and the Board of Supervisors to further discuss and collaboratively prevent this sort of traumatic and harmful displacement from happening again in future encampment sweeps. We want to protect our unhoused communities from further harm and **will not support our HCH program** to participate in sweeps that do not follow the [USICH](#) and [BHHI](#) guidances.



Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Laura Guzman, Chair  
Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless Commission  
On behalf of the ACHCH Commission.

Cc:

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