



MINIMUM SUGGESTED DONATION TWO DOLLARS.

STREET SHEET IS SOLD BY HOMELESS AND LOW-INCOME VENDORS WHO KEEP 100% OF THE PROCEEDS.

STREET SHEET IS READER SUPPORTED, ADVERTISING FREE, AND AIMS TO LIFT UP THE VOICES OF THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY IN SAN FRANCISCO.

STREET SHEET



CURRENTLY ALSO DISTRIBUTED BY HOMEWARD STREET JOURNAL VENDORS IN SACRAMENTO



in this issue

THREAT OF SWEEPS LOOMS IN SF **2**

SAC'S SAFE GROUND CAMP ENDS LEASE **3**

GOVERNOR NEWSOM ORDERS CAMP CLEARING **4**

LAWSUIT AGAINST SF TO CONTINUE DESPITE RULING **5**

LET DOWN BY SOCIAL SERVICES **6**

MORE UNWELCOME CHANGES FOR PSH TENANTS **7**

BECOME A VENDOR

MAKE MONEY AND HELP END HOMELESSNESS!

TO SIGN UP VISIT OUR OFFICE AT 280 TURK STREET FROM 10AM-4PM MONDAY-THURSDAYS AND 10AM-NOON ON FRIDAYS

“AGGRESSIVE” SWEEPS LOOM IN SF AFTER GRANTS PASS DECISION

On a rainy day in 2021, I witnessed San Francisco workers throw away a woman’s leukemia medication during an encampment sweep. They also forced her to move without offering her a shelter bed, in violation of City policies and an ordinance requiring the City to offer shelter before it can clear encampments.

When the Coalition on Homelessness filed a lawsuit against the City in 2022 over this practice, we provided documentation that San Francisco had cited and arrested more than 3,000 unhoused people without first offering shelter and illegally trashed their belongings, including medicines. The City never contested these facts. As a result, the federal district court determined that we are likely to succeed and granted a preliminary injunction. Under the federal injunction, San Francisco could clear encampments if it made a genuine offer of available shelter to those who had nowhere else to go. Thanks to our lawsuit, San Francisco has reopened the shelter waitlist and increased shelter and housing placements.

But in June, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Grants Pass v. Johnson, which barred cities from citing and arresting people for sleeping outside when no shelter is available. At a recent campaign event, Mayor London Breed promised to “be very aggressive and assertive in moving encampments, which may even include criminal penalties.”

That would be a mistake. As the past few years have shown, we make progress as a city only when we work diligently to move people into affordable housing or emergency shelter.

During a typical sweep operation, a unit averaging 18 City workers from six City departments—including police officers and firefighters—arrive at an encampment and order people to move. They stand and watch as unhoused people scramble to collect their belongings and leave as quickly as possible. A few hours later, when the City workers find out which shelter beds are available—if there are any—they tell a few lucky people and usually transport them to shelter. Others are out of luck.

Encampment sweeps violate human

rights and undermine trust between outreach workers and unhoused individuals. They’re also expensive and ineffective, costing over \$5 million per year that could be better spent on housing. In the past, when San Francisco actually carried out thoughtful encampment resolutions in which outreach workers took the time to assess needs and worked with residents over a couple weeks, most moved into permanent housing or shelter and many were placed in treatment. With more aggressive sweeps, only about 35% are placed and just in temporary shelter.

Meanwhile, housed San Franciscans are frustrated by the effects of thousands living on the streets without sanitation, their health rapidly deteriorating.

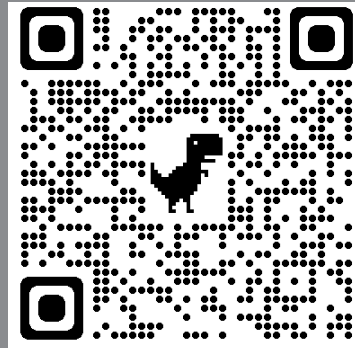
Penalizing our neighbors won’t reduce homelessness in San Francisco or make tents disappear. In fact, issuing fines unhoused people can’t pay and arresting them for sleeping outside when they have nowhere else to go only makes it harder for them to get off the streets. The research is clear on this.

If you are constantly moved around while the government seizes or destroys the documents you need to confirm your identity and prove your eligibility for assistance, it becomes nearly impossible to apply for limited services or to keep in contact with an outreach worker who finally has an appropriate placement to offer. A criminal record, warrant, or unpaid court fine often pose additional barriers to securing benefits, employment, and permanent housing.

Providing a safe place to sleep gives people an opportunity to stabilize and rebuild their lives. Centering skilled outreach workers who know their clients and can navigate the bureaucracy leads to much better outcomes than disruptive sweeps for unhoused individuals. One great example is the Public Health department’s focus on the Castro District leading to near comprehensive placement of unhoused neighbors there.

Instead, the Supreme Court just made homeless people’s chance at achieving housing security even more of a long shot.

KEEP STREET SHEET IN PRINT!



go to streetsheet.org and click DONATE

VOLUNTEER WITH US!

PHOTOGRAPHERS
VIDEOGRAPHERS
TRANSLATORS
COMIC ARTISTS
NEWSPAPER LAYOUT
WEBSITE
MAINTENANCE
GRAPHIC DESIGNERS
INTERNS
WRITERS
COPYEDITORS

DONATE EQUIPMENT!

LAPTOPS
DIGITAL CAMERAS
AUDIO RECORDERS
SOUND EQUIPMENT

CONTACT:

TJJOHNSTON@COHSF.ORG

COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS

The STREET SHEET is a project of the Coalition on Homelessness. The Coalition on Homelessness organizes poor and homeless people to create permanent solutions to poverty while protecting the civil and human rights of those forced to remain on the streets.

Our organizing is based on extensive peer outreach, and the information gathered directly drives the Coalition’s work. We do not bring our agenda to poor and homeless people: they bring their agendas to us.

STREET SHEET STAFF

The Street Sheet is a publication of the Coalition on Homelessness. Some stories are collectively written, and some stories have individual authors. But whoever sets fingers to keyboard, all stories are formed by the collective work of dozens of volunteers, and our outreach to hundreds of homeless people.

Editor: TJ Johnston
Artistic Spellcaster: Quiver Watts

Cover Art: Coleen Boodleman

Contributors: Isidore Mika Székely Manes-Dragan, Jack Bragen, Jordan Davis, Marisa Kendall/Cal Matters, Mike Blake/REUTERS

ORGANIZE WITH US

HOUSING JUSTICE WORKING GROUP TUESDAYS @ NOON

The Housing Justice Workgroup is working toward a San Francisco in which every human being can have and maintain decent, habitable, safe, and secure housing. This meeting is in English and Spanish and open to everyone! Email mcarrera@cohsf.org to get involved!



HUMAN RIGHTS WORKING GROUP WEDNESDAYS @12:30

The Human Rights Workgroup has been doing some serious heavy lifting on these issues: conducting direct research, outreach to people on the streets, running multiple campaigns, developing policy, staging direct actions, capturing media attention, and so much more. All those down for the cause are welcome to join! Email lpierce@cohsf.org

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS!

Street Sheet is published and distributed on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples. We recognize and honor the ongoing presence and stewardship of the original people of this land. We recognize that homelessness can not truly be ended until this land is returned to its original stewards.

SAFE GROUND'S CAMP ENDS LEASE OVER LACK OF SUPPORT AMID RECORD HEAT WAVE

STORY AND PHOTO BY ISIDORE MIKA SZÉKELY MANES-DRAGAN

Residents of Camp Resolution stand behind Anthony Prince in front of the gate, Photograph by Isidore Mika Székely Manes-Dragan

Three weeks after the City of Sacramento stopped water delivery to Camp Resolution, and one week after camp residents announced that they would resist an unwanted inspection, camp members are now being forced to terminate their lease.

The residents at the self-governing homeless encampment, which the homeless advocacy organization Safe Ground established in 2022, staged a press conference on July 18 outside their campsite. A visit from City inspectors was scheduled for 1 p.m. that same day.

Anthony Prince, attorney for the camp and for the Sacramento Homeless Union, and Crystal Sanchez, president of the Sacramento Homeless Union, spoke at the press conference.

At the press conference, Prince said that he suspected that the City wanted to sell or give away the property to a third party.

"We are opposed to this," Prince said. "The lease agreement that was signed a year ago specifically grants the residents of this camp the right to remain here and restrains the City of Sacramento from closing this site until everyone is provided individual, durable, and permanent housing."

Prince and Sanchez also declared opposition to an inspection by the Sacramento Water Board and the Department of Community Resources scheduled for 1 p.m. that same day, arguing that the inspection is merely a pretext to justify the camp's eviction. Prince added that the City didn't respect privacy concerns without advance notice.

"Our objection today is there is no notice," Prince said. "It would constitute an invasion of privacy. We were not involved in any way shape or form.

Apparently there were discussions with the water board, City of Sacramento, Sacramento Safe Ground, and the city council members."

Prince added that the camp would be willing to work with the city on terms of the inspection.

"We are willing to cooperate," Prince said. "Please don't report that we don't want an inspection. We do. But it has to be organized, it has to be planned. If they all sat down and said we need to do this, we need to be included."

When the inspection team arrived at 1 p.m., Prince greeted them across the street before they had a chance to enter the guarded gates. He shook hands with two team members, including a police officer, but Bryan Pedro of the Community Resources Department had other things in mind.

Anthony Prince is unable to make an agreement with Brian Pedro, from the Department of Community Resources, Photograph by Isidore Mika Székely Manes-Dragan

Pedro insisted to Prince that Safe Ground board director Mark Merin, who also held the lease, gave him explicit permission to inspect the property. Prince demanded proof. Pedro showed the press an email that Merin purportedly sent. The email, time-stamped at 12:47 p.m. on July 18, read: "After the press conference I saw two folks guarding the gate, they informed me they would not allow the inspection to go forward. I informed the city that the inspection would not be permitted today, Gus Martinez (City Attorney) said they would appear and then issue a warrant for inspection. Best, Mark."

Then Prince insisted on proof of anything corroborating this email, at which time Pedro called off the inspection.

On July 24, Safe Ground announced that it was unable to maintain terms of the lease, which means it will termi-

nate it on August 1. Camp Resolution and its advocates have not publicly responded.

In a letter to camp residents, Merin listed multiple reasons for the termination in bullet points. He wrote:

Some of the barriers which have led the Safe Ground Board of Directors to come to this conclusion include the following:

- + The site needs a water supply and electricity which cannot be supplied without some substantial City financial support, which we have been advised the City cannot provide;

- + Restrictions imposed by the Regional Water Board on the use of the property, excluding residents from half of the property (the unpaved portion), has created significant divisions among the residents which can only be resolved by pursuit of a completely revised variance by the City which we have been advised the City is not interested in pursuing;

- + No liability insurance can be secured by Safe Ground to protect it from liability for damages which could occur from any number of accidents possible on the property; and

- + The excessive heat and anticipated inclement weather makes injury more likely in the absence of water and electricity supplies.

This marks a dramatic reversal from June 11, when the camp successfully renewed its lease. But shortly thereafter, the City announced removing water and sanitation support from numerous encampments, including Camp Resolution, citing a lack of available funding.

The removal of this support came during a month where the region approached or met record daily high temperatures. In Sacramento alone, two people have died this month due to

heat exposure: Steve "Snoop" Easley, who was homeless, and Kevin Gerhardt, who didn't have air conditioning in his home. . On July 23, water distribution was temporarily restored, but only until the August 1 termination date..

STATE, U.N. RECOGNIZES HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER

John Stiefel, a water, sanitation and hygiene consultant in San Francisco, told Street Sheet that the U.N. sets a bare minimum standard for living for everyone, under one of its sustainable development goals to "achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all."

The international community's minimum benchmark is 15 liters of potable water per person per day, Stiefel continued. Also, waiting for and collecting water should not take more than 30 minutes per day on a round trip, he added.

"In a post-pandemic/post-emergency context like SF or Sacramento, it is 50 liters per person, per day, of potable drinking water," Stiefel said, citing recommended water standards under the Sphere Standards handbook.

Stiefel also referenced the state water board's own guidelines, which recognizes the human right to water under state law that Jerry Brown signed in 2012.

'CONSTRUCTED EVICTION'

After the July 18 presser, Prince described what the City committed to the media as a "constructed eviction."

"It's a historic lease, they can't take the camp down, and they can't make the conditions so bad that people just leave," Prince said. "That's when your landlord doesn't give you an eviction notice, but they turn off the heat and they turn off the gas, ya know what I'm saying? And it makes it impossible to stay there. When you worsen the conditions and force people to go."

"We've already had people leave here because it's intolerable for them: The temperature in those trailers is 120 degrees, you'll die from that, and out here it's not much better," Prince continued. "And where's the air conditioning? How come they brought in trailers that were lacking the original equipment? And how come we can't get electricity so we can get some kind of relief out there? How come they haven't brought in a portable cooling system? Into this camp, which they have? How come none of these steps have been taken? And how come we're paying the city manager over half a million dollars a year to manage the city when he can't even manage to take care of fifty people who are homeless out here in a city sanctioned encampment?"

The City is taking a lot of political heat for attempting to close Camp Resolution and other encampments. But that's nothing compared to the actual heat unhoused Sacramentans are braving.



GAVIN NEWSOM ORDERS STATE AGENCIES TO MOVE HOMELESS PEOPLE OUT OF CAMPS— BUT TO WHERE?

MARISA KENDALL,
CAL MATTERS

Gov. Gavin Newsom ordered state agencies to remove homeless camps throughout California on July 25, his first major show of force since the Supreme Court granted state and local authorities more power to clear encampments.

Newsom's executive order mandates that state agencies and departments adopt policies to clear camps on state property. It also encourages local governments to do the same.

"This executive order directs state agencies to move urgently to address dangerous encampments while supporting and assisting the individuals living in them — and provides guidance for cities and counties to do the same," Newsom said in a news release. "The state has been hard at work to address this crisis on our streets. There are simply no more excuses. It's time for everyone to do their part."

The move comes almost a month after the U.S. Supreme Court upended six years of protections for residents of homeless encampments in California and other western states. Previously, cities were prohibited from punishing people for sleeping outside if they had nowhere else to go. As a result, local courts ordered several cities, including San Francisco, to halt or pause encampment sweeps.

Reversing that precedent in *Grants Pass v. Johnson* in June, the justices found it is not unconstitutional for a city to ban homeless encampments, even if there is no shelter available. The ruling, which Newsom cheered, gives city leaders broad authority to crack down on camps.

In Los Angeles, Mayor Karen Bass, who opposed the *Grants Pass* ruling, also was critical of Newsom's new order.

"Strategies that just move people along from one neighborhood to the next or give citations instead of housing do not work," she said in an emailed statement. "We thank the Governor for his partnership thus far and hope that he will continue collaboration on strategies that work."

Some of Bass' peers were more supportive.

"We're eager to work with the state to responsibly and quickly remove encampments from state property in San Jose, especially those adjacent to neighborhoods and in dangerous areas along our freeways and on- and off-ramps," San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan said in a statement.

Mayor Todd Gloria of San Diego, on behalf of a coalition of mayors from the state's 13 largest cities, said he welcomed the governor's "renewed direction and sense of urgency."

Republicans lauded the order. "It's about damn time!" Senate Minority Leader Brian Jones, of San Diego, said in a statement.

Business interests also applauded the governor for taking action.

"Getting our many thousands of unhoused residents indoors and out of unsafe, unhealthy and inhumane outdoor encampments is critical to ending California's homelessness crisis," Jim Wunderman, President and CEO of the business-backed public policy group the Bay Area Council, said in an emailed statement.

Per Newsom's new order, state agencies are to model their encampment policies around one that Caltrans has used for several years to remove camps on highway on and off ramps, under overpasses and on other land maintained by the transit agency. State agencies should warn residents at least 48 hours before clearing a camp. They also are required to store residents' belongings for at least 60 days, and to request services for displaced residents from local organizations. If an encampment poses an "imminent threat" to life, health, safety or infrastructure, the agency can remove a camp immediately.

Caltrans has cleared 11,188 encampments since July 2021, according to the governor's office. Newsom has personally attended some of those cleanups, wearing a baseball cap and gloves to help pick up trash left behind.



But Caltrans has faced backlash for the way it handles encampment cleanups. In 2020, the agency agreed to pay \$5.5 million to settle a lawsuit that accused it of destroying property belonging to homeless Alameda County residents.

While the most visible encampments on state land tend to be under the purview of Caltrans, Newsom's order also could force agencies such as state parks and the Department of Fish and Wildlife to remove homeless encampments. Newsom's office did not provide an estimate as to how many people camp in those jurisdictions.

"I don't know if it will fundamentally shift anything," Benjamin Henwood, director of the USC Center for Homelessness, Housing and Health Equity Research, said of Newsom's order. "I guess we'll see."

The agency that manages California's state parks said it "stands ready" to support Newsom's efforts.

"We will continue to partner with our state and local agencies to address homeless encampments on state parks' property and their impacts on natural and cultural resources while remaining compassionate and respectful of Californians experiencing homelessness," California State Parks spokesperson Jo Biswas said in an emailed statement.

Newsom took a softer tone with local governments, urging them to voluntarily adopt policies similar to the one used by Caltrans. Some cities already had

planned to ramp up efforts to clear encampments in the wake of the *Grants Pass* decision. San Francisco Mayor London Breed said earlier this month that the city will launch a "very aggressive" crackdown in August, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Newsom also promised the state, via the California Interagency Council on Homelessness, will provide guidance and technical assistance to help local leaders set up programs. But the order does not provide new funds to create housing or shelters.

"It's fine to talk about clearing encampments,

but it begs the question of where people will go," Henwood said.

California cities and counties reported having about 71,000 emergency shelter and transitional housing beds last year. The state would need more than twice that number to accommodate the more than 181,000 homeless residents who live in California.

And the problem is compounded when encampments are on state property, because unlike cities, agencies such as state parks don't run homeless shelters.

Newsom's order says state agencies should reach out to local organizations and request services for people displaced from camps. But it doesn't require a state agency to find them housing.

"Because the state isn't providing resources to make sure those people have somewhere else to go, where they're going to go is into cities, into communities, into neighborhoods," said

"It's fine to talk about clearing encampments, but it begs the question of where people will go."

**BENJAMIN HENWOOD,
DIRECTOR, USC CENTER
FOR HOMELESSNESS**

STATE
LESS

Eric Tars, legal director for the National Homelessness Law Center.

Clearing, also known as “sweeping,” encampments is a controversial strategy for dealing with homelessness. Groups who work with homeless communities say sweeps sever connections between camp residents and caseworkers – ultimately making it harder for them to get housing.

Without moving people into housing, all sweeps do is make homelessness less visible without actually solving the problem, Assemblymember Alex Lee, a Democrat from Milpitas, said on X in response to Newsom’s order.

“You get your highway off ramp clean for a moment only,” he said.

It’s unclear how the order will be enforced, and whether there will be any penalties for cities and counties that don’t ramp up efforts to clear homeless camps. Newsom could withhold funding from local governments that he feels are not meeting his expectations, as he’s done in the past. In 2022, he briefly rescinded \$1 billion from cities and counties after accusing them of failing to take big enough steps to reduce homelessness.

Last month, Newsom’s office clawed back \$10 million that had been allocated to San Diego County to set up 150 tiny homes for homeless residents. The county took too long to come up with a plan for the tiny homes, according to the governor’s office. Those 150 tiny homes were supposed to be part of a larger effort to deploy 1,200 state-funded tiny homes throughout California. In May, CalMatters reported that delays and about-faces had stymied the program, and only 150 of the small dwellings had been purchased.

Originally published in calmatters.org

POST-GRANTS PASS, LAWSUIT AGAINST SAN FRANCISCO TO CONTINUE. HERE’S WHY.

TJ JOHNSTON

Arresting and ticketing people for sleeping outdoors, even when no shelter is available, is not unconstitutional, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on June 28.

In doing so, the court’s conservative majority overturned previous decisions maintaining that *Martin v. Boise*, a case that removed such criminal penalties for acts of homelessness in the absence of shelter and protected unhoused people’s constitutional rights against cruel and unusual punishment.

So does that mean the arguments made by the Coalition on Homelessness and seven unhoused plaintiffs in their lawsuit against the City and County of San Francisco are gone, and the case is basically over? And since a federal district judge lifted part of the preliminary injunction, can the City continue the removal of unsheltered folks’ property?

Not necessarily, according to their lawyers. In a joint statement, the American Civil Liberties Union-Northern California and the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights in the Bay Area announced that the lawsuit against the City will proceed.

While the lawyers cited *Martin v. Boise* as a basis for the lawsuit, it’s only one of 13 claims in their case. Several others remain, including other constitutional claims as well as state and federal laws. The trial is scheduled for May 2025.

Plaintiffs accuse the City of violating both the U.S. and California constitutions. Legal experts agree that while both constitutions are similar, the state charter is broader in scope. It also informs a human rights focus on the same rights already outlined in the U.S. Constitution, and that could be a key to the advocates winning the case.

The plaintiffs also allege that the City discriminates against people with disabilities, and that its agencies deprive unhoused San Franciscans of their constitutional rights. The following summarizes the lawyers’ claims and the grounds on which they’re based.

CRUEL AND UNUSUAL PUNISHMENT. The Eighth Amendment, which bans cruel and unusual punishment, was at the core of the *Martin* and *Grants Pass* cases, which the Coalition’s lawyers cited in the lawsuit. The attorneys argue that the lack of available shelter compels unhoused people to violate several laws just to survive, and that the City’s enforcement places those who perform simple survival acts of

sleeping and lying in public at risk of breaking the law. According to the lawsuit, they are essentially punished for being homeless, which violates the Eighth Amendment.

However, the California Constitution goes further than the U.S. Constitution: It protects people against cruel or unusual punishment. Here’s where its focus on human rights comes into play: The lawsuit says that by punishing people for homelessness-related acts, the City is not “treat[ing] its [residents] with respect for their intrinsic worth as human beings” without probable cause.

UNREASONABLE SEARCH AND SEIZURE. The City is violating unhoused people’s Fourth Amendment rights—which protect against unreasonable search and seizure—without probable cause, according to the lawsuit. Because people lack housing and shelter, they are continually stopped, searched, seized, investigated, arrested and “moved along” based on anti-lodging laws and public sleeping bans, the suit argues.

This claim also cites a 2011 case against the city of Los Angeles, where the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that an unhoused person’s property is protected under the Fourth and 14th amendments.

California’s equivalent to the Fourth Amendment—Article I, Section 13—offers more expansive protections. Attorneys referenced a 1985 case where a court found that section has “independent and more exacting standards” than the U.S. Constitution. They maintained that enforcing anti-sleeping laws also violated this section of the California Constitution.

PROPERTY DESTRUCTION. Under both the federal Fourth Amendment and California’s Article I, Section 13, the plaintiffs’ lawyers said that City workers’ destroying belongings in encampment sweeps pose a “persistent and imminent threat” to unhoused residents. San Francisco Public Works staff at encampment operations also ignore their department’s written policy when they don’t “bag and tag” property for residents to retrieve within 90 days, they argue.

This department policy applies except in cases for abandoned property, perishables, trash or items posing a public health or safety risk, or evidence of a crime. But workers make no distinction of which property is worth saving and dispose of them wholesale, according to the lawsuit.

DUE PROCESS/EXPOSURE TO A STATE-CREATED DANGER. “The fundamentals of due process are notice and an opportunity to be heard prior to a deprivation of property,” plaintiffs’ lawyers wrote in the filing. They argue that people aren’t given warning when their belongings are removed and have no opportunity to contest the seizure. This violates federal and state protections under the 14th Amendment and Article I, Section 7(a), respectively. Furthermore, the City endangers residents’ physical and mental health by taking away their survival gear used to protect and shelter from the elements, plaintiffs’ lawyers argue.

CONSPIRACY TO DEPRIVE RIGHTS. The law cited in this claim has quite a history attached to it. In 1871, Congress enacted U.S. Code, Section 1983 as a response to Ku Klux Klan activity in Reconstruction-era southern states. Black people were given the right to sue government officials who violate their rights “under color of state law.” Also, the plaintiffs who challenged school segregation in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case, which integrated public schools nationwide, invoked this particular section.

According to the lawsuit, the identified City agencies in this case acted “with one another to target unhoused people for enforcement and property destruction in violation of their constitutional rights.”

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. This allegation is specific to unhoused plaintiff Teresa Sandoval. In the lawsuit, lawyers said that City workers disposed of Sandoval’s prosthetic limbs during a sweep. In that incident, workers violated the Americans with Disabilities Act and a similar California code by failing to provide adequate time, notice and assistance before clearing her camp, as well as meeting her specific needs by identifying appropriate shelter that meets them. Of San Francisco’s homeless population, 39% report a disabling condition, according to the City’s most recent point-in-time count in 2022.

Laura Riley, the clinical director at Berkeley Law, said that this is something that cities should address.

“I think understanding how people with disabilities need different or potentially more notice when they are going to take property, or move people, or assess what shelter is appropriate for them and housing needs, is important,” she said.

ASSESSING THE SYSTEM THAT ASSESSES MY DISABILITY

JACK BRAGEN

As a disclaimer, I'd like to emphasize that this piece does not offer proven facts, but merely opinions based on my own experience. And in that respect, it's not unlike most of my other work.

I collect my information and draw conclusions through seeing the details in Contra Costa County, where I live. It seems that social service systems, administered by counties, are not designed to make poor people into highly successful people. And at best guess, other counties in California are essentially the same.

The aims of the social services systems are to sustain people, to keep the peace, to keep costs down, and to prevent disruptions in the lives of the good working taxpayers.

The social services systems do provide help. But they're not here to make you into a stellar achiever. They will provide varied levels of assistance, and in return for that you must give them information, and you must submit to various types of controls.

The first things the county wants are your personal information and history. When they have all of your data, they can fit you into one of their categories of people with varying needs. For example, there is the category of people in and out of jail, involved with drugs, violence and other crime. There is the category of disabled people unable to take care of themselves, who need many services. There is the category of the working poor. And there are several other categories. I don't know them all. But it seems to me that the counties definitely want to put people in categories.

What we sort of have is like a caste system, one in which you're at a certain level or in a certain category, and it can be very hard to climb any higher than that. In some instances, I have been on

the verge of success, and at that point, services are withdrawn under the premise I don't need the help anymore. At that point it becomes very hard not to backslide.

The treatment system for mentally ill people seems to have ways of pulling me back in. I might be successful up to a point, and then something happens to me, and it screws everything up, and I become desperate for more help. This results in more services but also more restrictions and becoming more encumbered by the help I'm getting.

My mental health condition is enough to keep me coming

back. I periodically get flare ups of my mental health symptoms, and I need more help during those times. The services I'm getting are a big help with these periodic flare ups.

My housing and income are mostly subsidized by the government. In return for this, I need to stay out of trouble, document my earnings, and continue my mental health treatment, which includes medication and counseling. I'm not being substantially helped to improve my life circumstances. But so far, I haven't been kicked out onto the street either. I hope it remains that way. I would like something better. But the systems don't provide that.

It amounts to this: The system can only do so much, and if I want things to be better, it is up to me.

People experiencing poverty and living with a disability frequently jump through hoops to obtain income and housing. Periodically we must prove our need by completing paperwork and examinations.

That's not to say that the county government is staffed by horrible people: Many are here to help. Some might get too complacent, concerned mostly about collecting their paychecks while not working

too hard.

Nineteenth century politician Robert G. Ingersoll once wrote of Abraham Lincoln—to whom many mistakenly credit the quote—“Nearly all men can stand the test of adversity, but if you really want to test a man's character, give him power.” Aside from the misattribution and highly gendered language, that point should be well taken.

I have seen police officers abuse their power. In the distant past I've seen people in the helping professions abuse their positions. Currently I'm working with a mental health agency staffed with very dedicated and good people.

Here's what scares me: If I were to have a relapse of acute symptoms of psychosis, it could damage my life circumstances and thereby could ruin my life. It isn't safe to get sick. Once I'm not at the helm and not handling my personal responsibilities in a substantial manner, I fear that everything would turn around and I'd be in a hole that I couldn't dig my way out of.

I find that it's no longer safe to relapse. If you have a mental health condition and are not independently wealthy, you had better keep on top of that condition. When the staff of government agencies or nonprofits learn about someone's relapse, they might “move in for the kill”—figuratively. This is where social workers can too easily disrupt and ruin other people's lives, if only through pure error and carelessness!

A well-meaning caregiver came within a hair's breadth of signing me up for the wrong service, and it could have ended up changing my category for the worse. Social service system workers might sometimes operate solely on the limited information available to them, and might not question an action that would inadvertently and improperly recategorize their

clients.

From what I've seen, the mental health treatment system has not improved in the past thirty years. It looks like a depletion of voluntary services. I have also seen the disappearance of the mental health self-help movement in Contra Costa County. What happened?

The mental health survivor self-help movement hasn't disappeared entirely. It seems to exist within the context of the written word such as the magazine called “Mad In America.” Also, yours truly writes about mental health.

And yet I don't know any activists who are defiant against the mental health treatment systems. There might be valid reasons for this.

The modern “second generation antipsychotics,” according to one doctor, do more to block brain function than the older, “first generation antipsychotics.” If you are taking heavy doses of these newer drugs, it is likely you could be much more shut down, mentally, than with the earlier drugs.

The mental health treatment system has agendas other than your success in life; treatment systems don't offer anything better for voluntary patients than they did thirty years ago; surviving as a disabled person is tough, and you periodically must prove you merit the benefits you get from the government; the consumer self-help movement is not what it was.

None of the above should make us happy. We might have to find alternative methods of getting the help that many of us are entitled to in pursuit of any life success.

Jack Bragen lives and writes in Martinez, California, and is author of “Instructions for Dealing with Schizophrenia: A Self-Help Manual,” as well as three fiction/science fiction collections.

People experiencing poverty and living with a disability frequently jump through hoops to obtain income and housing. Periodically we must prove our need by completing paperwork and examinations.

If I were to have a relapse of acute symptoms of psychosis, it could damage my life circumstances and thereby could ruin my life. It isn't safe to get sick.

PSH TENANTS SEE ANOTHER POLICY CHANGE WITHOUT THEIR INPUT

JORDAN DAVIS

Last year, I joined several former and current permanent supportive housing tenants, as well as an attorney from the Eviction Defense Collaborative, in presenting possible solutions to the eviction crisis in PSH to the Homelessness Oversight Commission. We worked off a draft of a document that detailed best practices from the Department Of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH), which consulted only PSH providers. This was only one example where tenants were never “in the room where it happens.”

We were told that there was not much the commission could do, because most of its functions were under contract from housing providers, and therefore, it would be too hard to establish uniform minimum standards to prevent evictions and to treat PSH tenants with the same autonomy as tenants in other forms of housing. The following month, the Homelessness Oversight Commission heard from providers who claimed in their presentation that uniform policies were a bridge too far.

One year later, I don't see any significant progress, and I'm now afraid that tenants' rights might even regress. I have been living under some fairly infantilizing and authoritarian rules for years, and I feel that I am at a breaking point, because we often have no place to turn when our rights are violated. However, I have seen HSH exercise its authority when it wanted to pass a uniform policy. We did not come

out better for it.

It was the beginning of Pride Weekend on June 28, when many PSH tenants were being impacted by activities at Civic Center. On our doors, we got a notice from HSH posted about a policy that it drafted this spring. The notice was dated and signed on May 2, but only reached us seven weeks later, during a weekend where everyone was distracted by Pride festivities. The notice directed us to sign off on new leasing terms by August 1, which was barely a month away. If that is not—as the kids say—“sus,” then I don't know what is.

The new policy concerned grounds for termination of a housing subsidy for not following program rules. As you might recall, there is a municipal ordinance where permanent supportive housing tenants pay no more than 30% of their income towards rent, which implies that rent should only ever exceed 30% of a tenant's income if the tenant fails to recertify their income. This is a necessary evil to make the policy workable. Most of the clauses in this policy are already in our leases, but several red flags emerged.

One clause that required benefits be directed to a third-party payee that deducts a large chunk of my disability check to pay the landlord before the tenant receives the rest. I find this requirement extremely ableist, as I've pointed out in a previous column. Another clause involved the expansion of housing

quality inspections into permanent supportive housing, something that is already required in Section 8 and other public housing. Given that failing habitability inspections for minor issues, such as stray hair dye on a bathtub or shoes under the bed, are often used to build an eviction case, I really believe that we need to better understand how these inspections are going to impact us. We need tenant advocates living in buildings subsidized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to be able to consult on this.

Furthermore, the new policy creates a Subsidy Termination Appeals Committee consisting of people who work for housing providers, as well as people with lived experience with housing insecurity. Why is this our first time hearing about this? What is the precise makeup of this committee, and what are the qualifications to join? How do you get on this committee? It just seems like they want to pull this over our heads.

It was only from other Tenderloin Housing Clinic tenants that the Homelessness Oversight Committee—the panel that monitors HSH—learn about this new policy. The next committee meeting is on August 1, which will be too late for it to act. I'm sick of us being treated like second-class citizens.

In late 2018, HSH notified my fellow tenants and me of changes to the wellness check policy. Previously,

we were allowed to opt out of wellness checks, but they wanted to take away our option to opt out without meaningful tenant outreach. At that time, the HSH commission didn't exist, and I was on the SRO Task Force. Imagine serving on an advisory backwater with only one forum that was able to hear this issue. Fortunately, I was able to call for an HSH presentation on the issue. While, we apparently can now still opt out of wellness checks, we shouldn't have this late notice.

The reason why we have a Homelessness Oversight Commission in the first place was because of the Chronicle exposé on the busted SROs used as permanent supportive housing. While I think there needs to be standardized policies for permanent supportive housing, these policies must center tenants' needs and autonomy and require some public process. Any policy change that will affect permanent supportive housing tenants should be presented in a public forum, and the City must go above and beyond notification requirements under the Brown Act and have the agenda and proposed policy needs posted on our doors. Nothing about us without us.

Jordan Davis (she/they) is a long-term permanent supportive housing tenant who successfully fought for rent reductions to 30% of income for thousands of tenants. She can be reached at 30rightnow@gmail.com

CONTRIBUTE TO
STREET
SHEET

WRITING: Write about your experience of homelessness in San Francisco, about policies you think the City should put in place or change, your opinion on local issues, or about something newsworthy happening in your neighborhood!

ARTWORK: Help transform ART into ACTION by designing artwork for STREET SHEET! We especially love art that uplifts homeless people, celebrates the power of community organizing, or calls out abuses of power!

PHOTOGRAPHY: Have a keen eye for beauty? Love capturing powerful moments at events? Have a photo of a Street Sheet vendor you'd like to share? We would love to run your photos in Street Sheet!

VISIT WWW.STREETSHEET.ORG/SUBMIT-YOUR-WRITING/

OR BRING SUBMISSIONS TO 280 TURK STREET TO BE CONSIDERED
PIECES ASSIGNED BY THE EDITOR MAY OFFER PAYMENT, ASK FOR DETAILS!

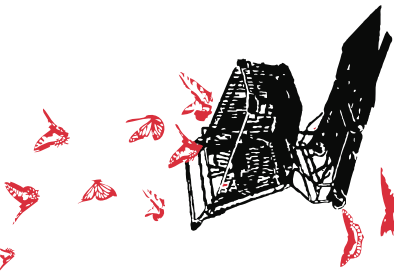
SAVE THE DATE THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 12



NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
 U.S. POSTAGE
 PAID
 PERMIT NO. 3481
 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94188

Coalition On Homelessness
 280 Turk Street
 San Francisco, CA 94102
 415.346.3740
 www.cohsf.org
 streetsheetsf@gmail.com

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Coalition on
 Homelessness
 San Francisco

MISSING PERSON!!!

ROOSTER, I LOVE YOU. PLEASE REACH OUT. I'LL HELP. 303-941-8833

