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STREET SHEET

A small line drawing of a person standing on a purple staircase that leads up to the right. The person is holding a bag or bundle. The staircase is positioned to the right of the main title.

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migration is beautiful

THE CITY SETS DRUG RAIDS IN MOTION, RAISES CONCERNS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND RISE IN OVERDOSES

LUPE VELEZ

Mayor Daniel Lurie is delivering on his promise to address the overdose crisis through well coordinated criminalization efforts, much to the worry of drug policy reformers and harm reduction advocates. Throughout his campaign last year, he was vocal about the fentanyl crisis, framing overdoses as the most pressing issue his administration would confront. He stated during his inaugural speech, "Widespread drug dealing, public drug use and constantly seeing people in crisis has robbed us of our sense of decency and security." He has since passed the Fentanyl State of Emergency Ordinance through the Board of Supervisors, stood up a Sixth Street "triage center," and most recently, set in motion drug raids across the city.

Is it possible the same energy and resources expended on the drug raids and police-riddled "triage center" could be better spent on harm reduction, treatment on demand and housing first initiatives? Tried and failed criminalization efforts have done nothing to mitigate the overdose crisis, and it is antithetical to believe ramping up arrests and police presence would have the opposite effect. Last year, the number of overdose deaths in the city dropped 22% to 633, according to a report from the Chief Medical Examiner's Office.

Local San Francisco social justice organizations like the Coalition on Homelessness are concerned about the human rights violations taking place during drug raids like the one at Jefferson Square Park that took

place on February 27. When the San Francisco Police Department entered the scene, one officer announced, "Everyone is under arrest for being in the park."

The tenor of City officials responding to the crisis is also cause for concern. Lurie tweeted on March 4, "And if you are dealing drugs in this city, we are coming after you." San Francisco Police Chief Bill Scott echoed the mayor's talking points in a recent ABC7 News interview. told CBS News 7, "The message is really simple: We're going to come after you if you're dealing," he said. "People that are out using drugs in public: That's also illegal." The mayor's and SFPD's unwavering devotion to arrests highlights issues of rising incarceration rates and increased overdoses: A 2023 Brown University study linked a rise in overdose deaths three weeks after police seized drugs in specific areas.

Despite the City's claims that it is primarily targeting drug dealers, data from the Public Defender's Office shows that of the 80 people arrested at Jefferson Square, 29 people were booked for other charges such as loitering or for controlled substance offenses while others were charged for possession of drug paraphernalia. As the City gears up to continue policing drug use, it is failing the people who would benefit most from drug treatment.

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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.

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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.

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!

DECARCERATE SACRAMENTO LEADS A COMMUNITY WIN AS JAIL EXPANSION IS PUT ON HOLD

CATHLEEN
WILLIAMS

In May 2024, the police got a call reporting that a man was lying outside an EV charging station with his head on the curb. When the police officers pulled up and got out of their car, they tried to get the man to move. He whispered, "Help me, help me... ambulance." The man's voice was so weak it is barely audible on the officer's body-cam footage, which was produced as evidence in a lawsuit against the City of Sacramento and Sacramento County.

David Kent Barefield was not taken to a hospital, but to the Sacramento jail. He could not walk, or even stand; he was dying. Stuffed into and then pulled from the police car, he was bodily dragged from the car into the jail and, over the next three hours, helpless and incoherent, he was dragged through the booking area, as staff mocked him for "playing possum." At some point, he lost consciousness. By the time he reached fingerprinting, he was dead. A later investigation indicated that he died of an overdose that an application of Narcan would have reversed.

Mr. Barefield never received medical attention, according to his family's attorney in the lawsuit. When asked if he was medically cleared for booking, a nurse replied, "He's just old and homeless."

In fact, Mr. Barefield's vulnerability is typical of jail populations across the country. He was African-American: nationally, 35% of jail prisoners are Black, far in excess of their proportion of local populations.

He was unhousted: a study from Yale University and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs found the rate of recent homelessness among U.S. jail inmates to be 15.3%, which is approximately 7.5 to 11.3 times higher than that found in the general population. And like many unhousted, Mr. Barefield shuttled between homelessness and incarceration. Nationally, recently incarcerated people are 10 times more likely to be unhousted than the general population.

THE COMMUNITY SAYS NO

On July 31, 2018, prisoners in the Sacramento County jail system, with the assistance of counsel from Disability Rights California, Prison Law Office,

**"The Board of Supervisor's decision to delay jail expansion is a testament to the power of community mobilization... We need people to stay engaged and continue pushing for real alternatives that prioritize care over incarceration."
– Decarcerate Sacramento.**

and Cooley LLP, filed the Mays lawsuit against the county for the brutal and inhumane conditions in the jail. This class action lawsuit alleged that the County unconstitutionally failed to provide basic mental health and medical care to prisoners, along with other claims.

This year, on February 26, community members crowded into the chamber of the Sacramento Board of Supervisors to testify against the Board's drive to expand the jail through construction of a 100-bed annex that will cost as much as \$2 billion over a period of 30 years.

The opposition is led by the organization Decarcerate Sacramento, which has been fighting the expansion of the jail for more than five years, supplying expert testimony, organizing neighborhoods, and pressuring the Board to devote the community's precious resources to expand community-based treatment and support instead of expanding the jail. Finally, the opposition carried the day, backed by a consultant's report that exposed the wasteful and counter-productive proposal. The Board voted to "pause" the expansion, pending further study. Opponents of the jail plan saw this as a win—still, they anticipate more work and struggle ahead.

The testimony at the hearing challenged the Board's use of the Mays' consent decree as justification for jail expansion:

"It was not the outdated building but the sadistic behavior of the guards who treat people as less than human, as not worthy of dignity, sometimes not even worthy of living another day." Courtney Hanson.

"The Mays Consent Decree was intended to require the county to treat inmates well, value their health. The County has cynically warped it into a justification for a billion dollar expansion which would not address the main concerns of Mays and would instead give a massive gift, a shiny new toy, to the

very entity, the Sheriff's Department, that got sued for mistreating inmates." Dylan Hoy-Bianchi.

"Focus on fixing the conditions causing inmates to suffer." Dylan Hoy Bianchi.

At the hearing, Decarcerate Sacramento organizer Christopher Camilo Car-

bajal-Cabarjal attributed the deadly conditions at the jail not to the facility itself, but rather to the its deeply engrained culture of devaluing human life and disregarding suffering – the casual and deadly brutality that cost Mr. Barefield his life.

"The crisis isn't the jail—it's the harm inflicted on people inside," Mr. Carbajal-Cabarjal said. "People call us from behind those walls, sharing stories of preventable deaths, medical neglect, and an under-resourced mental health system leaving individuals to suffer or self-harm."

According to Mary Perrien, a Mays consent decree medical expert, every patient she interviewed was placed at an inadequate level of care, many facing immediate harm.

"Expanding the jail won't solve these failures—it will only reinforce them," she said. "More beds mean more suffering, not solutions. The Sheriff's Department has a documented history of ignoring court orders and delaying life-saving treatment. Simply put, you cannot build your way out of human rights violations."

As organizer Carbajal-Cabarjal emphasized in his closing remarks, "And let's talk about cost—\$2 billion over 30 years. Supervisors, community members here today, those watching online: I pose this question, what could you do with \$2 billion?" He proposed affordable housing, fund community-based mental health services and violence prevention initiatives, among other alternatives. expand youth programs, create honest jobs, and provide violence prevention initiatives.

"We could choose care over cages," Carbajal-Cabarjal said. "Do note, a new jail isn't on that list—and it shouldn't be on yours."



UNHOUSED FAMILIES' IMPENDING EXIT TO STREETS AVERTED

TJ JOHNSTON

Time was running out for a pair of families who were faced with being kicked out of the St. Joseph's Family Shelter in San Francisco when their request for an extended stay was denied.

Those unhoused families—one, a Honduran couple with two children, and the other, a Peruvian single mother with one—were informed last week by the Mission District shelter that they must leave by 5 p.m. on March 10, or the shelter will call the police on them.

Thanks to the efforts of Faith in Action Bay Area, they were able to get their denial overturned.

On that day, the religious activist group brought attention to the families' plight at a press conference outside the Leonard R. Flynn Elementary School, where the children attend. They were among several groups—including homeless families, United Educators of San Francisco, and allies of the unhoused community—calling for the City to rescind the evictions.

The looming eviction came to a shock to the families, who are among the 900 people in the family shelter system. Less than two weeks earlier, they met with Mayor Daniel Lurie, who promised them that the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) would hold off on evictions as long as the families who meet with case managers show signs of progress.

Still, the department proceeded with the eviction under threat of arrest. This comes on the heels of a City policy change that limits shelter stays to 90 days plus 30-day extensions upon the family's request.

"They say that there's no more time," Vilma A., the Honduran mother facing eviction, said at the press conference. "They say that our time is over."

Faith in Action cried foul, saying that the families' due process rights are being violated.

Under City law, shelter residents are allowed the right to a hearing challenging evictions with the assistance of a shelter client advocate. Typically, the Eviction Defense Collaborative represents clients in those hearings.

But on a department FAQ sheet, HSH is telling families who receive eviction notices to email HSH directly.

Advocates are demanding more transparency in the granting of shelter extensions, as well as increasing the number of housing subsidies.

NEED MORE TIME IN SHELTER?

FAMILY SHELTER EXTENSION FACTS

If your family needs to stay in the shelter longer, you might qualify for an extension!

How Extensions Work

- Up to 3 Extensions: You can get up to three extensions one month at a time after your initial eviction date.
- Must be looking for housing: You need to work with a case manager, follow shelter rules, and show proof you are looking for housing.
- More Time After 3 Extensions: If you still need shelter, HSH can approve more time.
- Who Can't Get an Extension? If you say no to a housing offer or shelter placement without a good reason, you may not get an extension unless you have a move-in date.

How Do Extensions Get Approved?

Request extension from your Case Manager:

- For 14-day stays → Meet 7 days before your stay ends.
- For 90-day stays → Meet 30 days before your stay ends.
- If you don't have a plan to leave, the case manager checks if you can get an extension.

What If My Request is Denied?

Denied? Here's What to Do:

- You can ask to get back on the Family Shelter Waitlist by calling a Family Access Point within 14 days.
- If you think the decision is unfair, you can file a complaint.

Can I Appeal a Denied Extension?

Yes! You can:

1. Follow the shelter's complaint process.
2. Still not happy? Email HSH at HSHgrievances@sfgov.org to exercise your rights!

¿NECESITA MÁS TIEMPO EN EL REFUGIO?

DATOS SOBRE LA EXTENSIÓN DEL REFUGIO FAMILIAR

Si su familia necesita permanecer en el refugio por más tiempo, ¿podría calificar para una extensión!

Cómo funcionan las extensiones

- Hasta 3 extensiones: puede obtener hasta tres extensiones de un mes a la vez después de su fecha de desalojo inicial.
- Debe estar buscando vivienda: debe trabajar con un administrador de casos, seguir las reglas del refugio y mostrar pruebas de que está buscando vivienda.
- Más tiempo después de 3 extensiones: si aún necesita refugio, HSH puede aprobar más tiempo.
- ¿Quién no puede obtener una extensión? Si rechaza una oferta de vivienda o una colocación en un refugio sin una buena razón, es posible que no obtenga una extensión a menos que tenga una fecha de mudanza.

¿Cómo se aprueban las extensiones?

Solicita una extensión a tu administrador de casos:

- Para estadías de 14 días → Reúnete 7 días antes de que finalice tu estadía.
- Para estadías de 90 días → Reúnete 30 días antes de que finalice tu estadía.
- Si no tienes un plan para irte, el administrador de casos verifica si puedes obtener una extensión.

¿Qué pasa si se rechaza mi solicitud?

¿Se rechaza? Esto es lo que debes hacer:

- Puedes solicitar volver a la lista de espera del refugio familiar llamando a un punto de acceso familiar dentro de los 14 días.
- Si crees que la decisión es injusta, puedes presentar una queja.

¿Puedo apelar una extensión denegada?

¡Sí! Puedes:

1. Seguir el proceso de quejas del refugio.
2. ¿Aún no estás satisfecho? ¡Envía un correo electrónico a HSH a HSHgrievances@sfgov.org para ejercer tus derechos!

Source/Fuente de información: SF Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing

HUMANITARIANISM AND COMMITMENT TO FAMILIES IN THE COMMUNITY FROM SAN FRANCISCO

Our hearts felt sad and very sorry to hear so many cases of homeless families with various problems of depression, anxiety and even mental imbalance. This situation is terrible, so many children with worry in their souls and hearts so fragile and innocent that instead of thinking about playing or socializing at school, their thoughts are on how we will spend the night the day we do not have a roof over our heads.

At the family shelters we received eviction letters in December, a decision made by the director of homelessness and housing here in San Francisco. They made those decisions without taking into account our voices that are being silenced to certain extents, they did not facilitate a community process where they collected all of our opinions or recommendations from all the families who live here. For these reasons we were forced to take action and demand the right to the stability of decent housing.

We have presented these complaints directly to the new mayor of San Francisco and what we ask for is sufficient time to stay in the shelter. We ask that we work together to form a great humanitarian team for all these families. We ask that you please approve the 175 subsidies that we are requesting to be able to stabilize ourselves with great responsibility and struggle. Everything is in the hands of the mayor.

We look forward to continuing to dialogue with each of you as great leaders in government to rigorously stop these evictions that are happening in family shelters. We want to emphasize that our children are suffering a lot from these changes made unnecessarily, remember that these children are the future and progress of San Francisco.

WE WANT OUR CHILDREN TO GROW UP SAFE AND HEALTHY. We know that they have the solution to this great problem. Let's fight and work together for a better community with great commitment and dedication to families. We propose to form a committee of resistance and justice for the well-being of all of us.

Sincerely,

Andrea Bulnes Huane, Maritza Salinas, Helen Merlo, Maria Zavala, Veronica Aguilar.

HUMANITARISMO Y COMPROMISO CON LAS FAMILIAS DE LA COMUNIDAD DE SAN FRANCISCO

Nuestros corazones sienten mucha tristeza al escuchar tantos casos de familias sin hogar con diversidad de problemas de depresión, ansiedad y llegando al desequilibrio mental. Es terrible esta situación tantos niños con preocupación en sus almas y sus corazones tan frágiles e inocentes que en lugar de pensar en jugar o socializar en el colegio, están pensando en cómo pasarán la noche y el día sin tener un techo donde dormir.

En los refugios nosotras recibimos una carta de desalojo en el mes de diciembre, decisión que tomó la directora del desamparo y la vivienda aquí en San Francisco. Realizó esas decisiones sin tomar en cuenta nuestras voces que están siendo silenciadas con ciertas extensiones, no hicieron un proceso comunitario donde ellos colectan, recogen nuestras opiniones o recomendaciones de todas las familias que vivimos aquí. Por estas razones nos vimos forzados a tomar acción y demandar a la ciudad por el derecho a la estabilidad de una vivienda digna.

Nosotros hemos presentado estas denuncias directamente al nuevo alcalde de San Francisco y lo que pedimos es tiempo suficiente de estadía en el shelter. Pedimos trabajar juntos formando un gran equipo humanitario para todas estas familias, por lo que pedimos por favor que aprueben los 175 subsidios que estamos solicitando para poder estabilizarnos con gran responsabilidad y lucha. Todo está en manos del alcalde.

Esperamos continuar dialogando con cada uno de ustedes como grandes líderes en el gobierno. Para detener rigurosamente estos desalojos que están pasando en los albergues familiares. Queremos enfatizar que nuestros hijos están sufriendo bastante por estos cambios realizados innecesariamente, recuerden que estos niños son el futuro y progreso de San Francisco.

QUEREMOS QUE NUESTROS NIÑOS CREZCAN SANOS Y SALUDABLES.

Sabemos que tienen la solución a este gran problema luchemos y trabajemos juntos para una mejor comunidad con gran compromiso y entrega hacia las familias. Proponemos formar un comité de resistencia y justicia para el bienestar de todos nosotros.

Sinceramente,

Andrea Bulnes Huane, Maritza Salinas, Helen Merlo, Maria Zavala, Veronica Aguilar.

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!

'LOOK, THERE'S NOWHERE ELSE TO GO': INSIDE CALIFORNIA'S CRACKDOWN ON HOMELESS CAMPS

FULL STORY
AVAILABLE
ONLINE

MARISA KENDALL AND KATIE ANASTAS, CALMATTERS

It's been eight months since the U.S. Supreme Court fundamentally changed how cities in California and beyond can respond to homeless encampments, allowing them to clear camps and arrest people for sleeping outside — even when there's nowhere else to sleep.

The July ruling in the case *Grants Pass v. Johnson* upended six years of protections for unhoused people. It was a radical change, and it came as many Californians, from small business owners to Gov. Gavin Newsom, were fed up with regularly seeing tent camps that stretched for blocks, human feces smeared on sidewalks and people injecting drugs in the open. Once the Supreme Court gave the green light, even liberal strongholds such as San Francisco were quick to start removing camps — despite a collective outcry from activists supporting the rights of homeless Californians.

What has that meant for people living outside?

CalMatters spent four months interviewing experts, requesting data and making a dozen visits to encampments in San Francisco and Fresno to document enforcement efforts and follow the unhoused people displaced when their camps were cleared. Our public media partner, KPBS, did extensive reporting and visits to encampments in San Diego.

Experts agree clearing or "sweeping" encampments alone can't end homelessness. But here's what we did see over and over as a result of sweeps in those cities: people becoming more likely to lose touch with support services, people losing essential items they need to get into housing (such as birth certificates) or to survive the elements (such as tents) and people still stuck on the streets — sometimes in new locations.

In some cases, cities try to pair enforcement with offers of a shelter bed or other services. But shelter is generally in short supply, and the types of programs available often don't work for everyone on the street.

Cities are continuing with enforcement, anyway. Here's what that looks like.

San Francisco

Linda Vazquez sat cross-legged on the sidewalk during an afternoon last fall, with two dogs in her lap and her hands cuffed behind her back. A police officer stood over her.

Beside her, balanced on a camp stove, sat the pot of chicharrones she'd been cooking for lunch.

Vazquez, 52, was clearly upset. "Because I did so bad," she yelled sarcastically at the officer, who was citing her for "unauthorized lodging," a misdemeanor under California's penal code. "This is the biggest crime ever."

The police didn't end up taking Vazquez to jail, and instead gave her a slip of paper with a date to show up in court. They did confiscate the tarp she was sheltering under as "evidence," making it harder for her to survive on the street.

The citation was Vazquez's second in two weeks.

Within hours, Vazquez was back, setting up camp in the same spot — a block that

had essentially become hers. Vazquez was known throughout the neighborhood, always surrounded by dogs and friends. On any given day, you might find her cooking meals to share, giving away blankets and other provisions to her unhoused neighbors or hitting people who caused trouble on the block with a blast of water from her Super Soaker squirt gun. At night, she watched horror movies on a tablet in her tent.

Vazquez continued to camp there for the



An unhoused man carries a tarp and some of his belongings across Polk Street during a homeless encampment sweep in San Francisco on Nov. 15, 2024. Unhoused people on Cedar Street are forced to move their shelters and belongings on a regular basis by San Francisco city workers. Photo by Junggho Kim for CalMatters

next three months and received at least one more citation.

"I said, 'look, there's nowhere else to go,'" Vazquez said. "All the other places are doing the same thing. So where do you want me to go? Where do you want me to hide out?"

A California native, Vazquez grew up bouncing between Modesto, Santa Cruz, Gilroy, Monterey and other places as her mother found work on different farms. Her life took a turn for the worse in her 20s when, she says, her former partner became abusive. She fled to San Francisco in 1998, and for the past few years has been bouncing between the street, shelters and subsidized housing placements.

Encampment removals in Vazquez's neighborhood — a handful of alleys that run between Van Ness Avenue and Larkin Street at the edge of San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood — have fallen into a predictable rhythm. There are sweeps nearly every Monday and Friday, regular as clockwork.

CalMatters visited that area about twice a week for five weeks last fall. During that time, city outreach teams spoke with people camping there 138 times, according to Jackie Thornhill, spokesperson for the city's Department of Emergency Management. They placed people in shelter 27 times, and placed one person in permanent housing. Police made 16 arrests.

On most days during that five-week span, CalMatters saw several people camped on each block, despite the frequent sweeps. Their reasons for living on the street varied. Many couldn't stand being in a shelter. One man said he once saw a fellow shelter resident get raped, and since then, he's avoided those facili-

ties at all costs. A woman CalMatters spoke with said she already had housing in a city-funded SRO, but she's a victim of domestic violence, and her abuser found out where she lives. Now, she doesn't feel safe going back.

A recent CalMatters investigation revealed that many California shelters are a purgatory — plagued by unsanitary and unsafe conditions, and operating with next-to-no oversight.

tant piece, she said.

To David Schmitz, a 60-year-old photographer who lives in an apartment overlooking the street where Vazquez camps, the encampment sweeps have made a difference. When he first moved in, about four months earlier, it was common to see at least a dozen tents on the street. People frequently urinated against his garage door, he said.

On the November afternoon that he spoke to CalMatters, the city had just finished a clean-up that left the street spotless — not a tent or piece of trash in sight. Schmitz said he'd never seen it so clean.

"I was euphoric," he said. "I was like, this is amazing. This is what it could be like, you know. If it were like this...I would see my neighbors more. It wouldn't be such an apocalyptic feeling to come out here."

Not everyone caught camping gets cited or arrested. Police typically give people citations if they have pitched a tent or strung up a tarp, like Vazquez did, to use as shelter, but not if they are sleeping in the open on just a blanket, said Sgt. J. Ellison with the police department's Healthy Streets Operation Center.

Ellison sees Vazquez frequently because many of the city's shelter and transitional housing programs won't allow all of Vazquez's dogs. She has three, and she's unwilling to give any up.

"I can't leave them," Vazquez said, "because I've had them since they were the size of my hand."

Instead, nearly every Monday and Friday, Vazquez and her friends packed up everything they owned and moved around the corner, waiting there until the police and other city personnel left and they could return.

On a recent rainy Monday afternoon, Vazquez was sick, huddling in a small tent with a hairdryer on (using jumper cables to siphon power from a nearby street light) to keep warm. The city came three days earlier and took her larger, gray tent, tarps, portable heater and other belongings, she said. It was raining then, too, and Vazquez said she stood outside in the rain for hours until a friend could give her a new tent. All her clothes got soaked — as did the two paper camping citations that told her when she was supposed to appear in court.

The city was coming again that afternoon to clear the street.

"I don't have no energy at all," Vazquez said, sniffing and coughing. "But I have to move."

Not long after, Vazquez found a hotel in San Francisco that agreed to take her and her three dogs. A room there costs \$70 a day — money Vazquez pays with her disability benefits. She found the place on her own, without the city's help, she said.

Vazquez isn't sure how long she'll be able to keep up with the payments. But she has a more pressing concern: The hotel is making her leave temporarily, so that it doesn't have to grant her tenant's rights.

Where will she go until she can return?

"I guess I'm going to be in a tent for three days," she said. "And then I'm going to come back."

Many people opt to sleep on the street and try to be gone in the morning before the city shows up to kick them out.

It's not uncommon for as many as a dozen city workers to participate in an encampment removal, including police, fire department paramedics and staff from the city's Department of Emergency Management, Homeless Outreach Team and Encampment Resolution Team.

That work is coordinated by Mary Ellen Carroll, executive director of the city's Department of Emergency Management. The goal, she said, is to clean up and offer people services.

"Sometimes people will get up and move around and come back after," said Carroll, who was on site as her team cleaned up encampments in Vazquez's neighborhood on a Friday afternoon last fall. "But...it's a matter of consistency, to just keep coming and addressing."

On that Friday, Carroll's team spoke with 13 people camping in the alleyways between Van Ness and Larkin. None of them accepted a shelter bed. From January through early November 2024, her team engaged with people in that area 930 times, and referred people to shelter 180 times. In another 47 cases, the person already had housing or shelter.

Typically, only between 20% and 30% of people accept a shelter bed when it's offered, according to the city.

With those low placement numbers, and with people returning over and over to camp on the same streets, are the city's efforts helping?

"I think that it is helping, overall," Carroll said. Clearing encampments is just part of a broader strategy that includes outreach and services, but it's an impor-

MENTAL HEALTH PATIENTS ARE PEOPLE, TOO. I WISH THE PSYCHIATRY PROFESSION FEELS THE SAME WAY.

JACK BRAGEN

My first psychotic episode was a risk to life and limb, my biggest test up to that point, my family's big test and a precursor to what was to come in the succeeding 43 years and running.

In some respects, a second or third psychotic break isn't as hard as the first. When I had my first extreme psychotic episode, I had no notion of what was happening to me. Consequently, I created grave danger.

When you have a brain disorder, many will believe you are on drugs, and they will see you through a dehumanizing filter and conclude you are not a person. When a psychiatrist sees a person exhibiting psychotic symptoms, often they react by medicating and, if needed, restraining them.

A person who develops something that organized medicine considers a brain disorder doesn't receive respect for their personhood, not from the public and not from treatment professionals. A person receiving psych treatment is within an unacknowledged minority. Psychosis itself is a grave danger to people and property, and it can put an individual on a bad trajectory for their ensuing time on this Earth. And the attitudes of most Americans toward mentally ill people make life much harder than it needs to be.

In 1982, when I received a diagnosis and prognosis from the head of inpatient psychiatry at Kaiser Permanente Martinez, my mother was devastated, and I didn't believe the doctor. Over a span of decades, I discovered that I truly needed treatment, and still do. Yet, I also realized that prescribers often invalidate the minds and hearts of patients receiving medication.

I need medication and someone to prescribe it more than they need me. I have to take my meds and take my lumps just like anyone.

Still, psychiatrists presume too much about their patients, which creates a significant barrier to patients accepting treatment that is widely overlooked.

The verbal output of our minds and hearts, in other words what we say, is taken in the context of the nonsense spoken by a crazy person. Thus, we aren't heard.

The prevailing attitude among psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners' attitudes toward patients is that our minds, bodies and lives don't matter. Our mental capabilities go unrecognized, and our opinions are devalued.

We are given medications that in the long run are often the ruin of our old age. We aren't giving any kind of "informed consent." When we aren't being told what the meds will do to our minds and bodies in the long term, this is not "informed." When we are required to take them, we haven't given our "consent."

Psychiatrists and medical doctors have power over us. As patients, we are at a legal disadvantage and a practical disadvantage if the doctor refuses a prescription or orders a prescription for something we can't tolerate.

I have told psychiatric practitioners outright, "I'm not taking this." I might be allowed a certain number of refusals. If I refuse everything or refuse to take an antipsychotic in general, the psychiatrist will quit, leaving me without a psychiatrist. In turn, I'm automatically labelled a

noncompliant mentally ill person, and treated like a criminal, which can lead to homelessness.

As patients, we are obligated to work with the prescriber, whether we like it or not. If we have an issue with a specific medication, we must negotiate a solution with them in the hopes that they value our well being.

When a psychiatrist prescribes a controlled substance, they aren't doing us a favor. Yet psychiatrists I've known will prescribe drugs that would be considered illicit without a prescription. Without the psychiatrist's Rx, this can cause legal jeopardy for the consumer.

A psychiatrist once said in a group, "Valium is good for schizophrenics."

Valium and other benzodiazepines, like numerous other prescription medications, affect driving adversely. In this age of medical disclaimers, this isn't the psychiatrist's problem, as they wouldn't be liable if someone taking Valium got in a crash.

Psychiatrists have much discretion as to which antipsychotics to prescribe us. I have taken antipsychotics with truly unbearable side effects. I had to urgently tell the psychiatrist what was happening to me. Usually, they revert to the earlier drug, because I'd been able to tolerate that. If it isn't broken, don't fix it, as the saying goes.

But psychiatrists often seem to be uncaring about us suffering side effects. Many years ago, I had

complained about a dry mouth, and the doctor suggested hard candy. Another time, I complained of blurred vision, so the same psychiatrist suggested reading glasses. I was only 20 years old—reading glasses were not in my plans at that age.

Psychiatrists are not necessarily looking out for our best interest. A lot of their duty is about preventing us from causing disruptions in society. They have devalued our lives, and this filters down to the prescription pad. Psychiatrists and other doctors will prescribe drugs that are a danger, often glossing over the risk.

Celebrities or wealthy clients who see a psychiatrist will receive preferential treatment compared with low income or middle-class patients. If a famous singer needs to be able to perform, this presumably entails a superior level of psychiatry. You can't go on stage while doped-up on Haldol. If you are a movie star, the power dynamic with a psychiatrist would be the reverse of what an ordinary person would experience: A multimillionaire can fire a psychiatrist in a second and hire a new one a few minutes later.

Everyone I know uses Medicare and/or Medicaid to pay for psychiatric care. So almost universally, the treatment we receive will be structured in a certain way. The mental health treatment systems are designed to impose restrictions and controls upon the mentally ill population.

Lower income people, middle class and below have to take what is dished out for us. And while this is sometimes painful, what choice do we have?

Jack Bragen is an East Bay-based, independently published author whose books are available on lulu.com.

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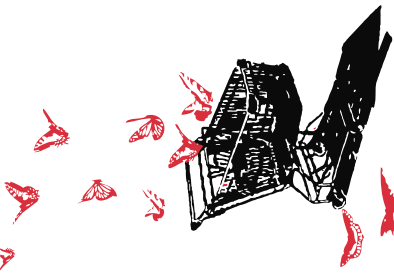
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