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To: CityClerk <CityClerk@longbeach.gov>

Subject: 12/11/18 Testimony re Everyone Home Report to City Council Members and Mayor Garcia

"EVERYONE HOME"

Housing, p. 13:

“The Housing Authority has the voucher capacity and funding to house approximately 7,200 households within Long Beach. However, nearly 550 households have qualified and completed the application for a voucher but cannot find a unit available to them. Many unit advertisements state that “No Section 8” will be accepted. They remain precariously housed, and can fall into homelessness, during their housing search. Vouchers expire in 180 days, which means a person with a voucher who cannot find a unit within 180 days loses the voucher. The average time to find a unit is five months for those who do find housing. We estimate an additional need of nearly 2,400 units that will accept subsidies.”

I think giving Section 8 housing vouchers as a part of the solution to homelessness is a very bad idea. As stated in the report, few who have qualified for them get housing. This is not only because of opposition from landlords but because of the nature of Section 8 vouchers and their requirements. Sorry, but homeless people or those living in shelters just don't fit Section 8.

The Housing Authority application itself is a bear. It requires documentation and records few transient people can provide. Those unfamiliar with the Housing Authority do not understand that all application entries are checked and that the ability of the Housing Authority to nail discrepancies makes Big Brother look like a distant cousin. So people give the answers they think will pass and get kicked out on the first go-round when their answers are found wanting.

If a family does get a voucher and finds a potential landlord, then the rental application must past muster. Those applications showing a spotty rental history or poor rental references do not pass go. Most applications also require a background check which uncovers criminal records and evictions. This is another eliminator.

If a family with a homeless history passes all these hurdles and gets an apartment , the Section 8 voucher struggle is not over. Strict rules of behavior apply, specially regarding substance use. Section 8 is federal, so no marijuana, not even medical. In addition, no letting other family members or friends move in with you. This too, can make you loose your voucher. Though it may be culturally appropriate or just a humanitarian gesture, if the Housing Authority catches a Section 8 tenant allowing others to stay for more than just a very short time, out they go! How is this discovered? Neighbors call the Housing Authority all the time to tell, or the rental manager does. Why should the manager take on that hassle when the Housing Authority will take care of it?

Those who are just getting over the trauma of homelessness may have difficulty following all the apartment building rules like when you can do your laundry, where you can smoke and getting out the trash, things other renters take for granted and complain about mightily when not observed correctly. There is no grace period for those who have been homeless to get up to speed on gracious living.

So all the while that the homeless or recently homeless are assigned the Section 8 vouchers that were not designed for them and which they often cannot use or hold onto, those who do qualify and have been on the Section 8 list for years and years are cheated from their chance at a decent living space. I believe that this is unethical. It is just one more way Section 8 vouchers are siphoned away from the intended target group for other uses. There are other instances of this going on right now in Long Beach but that is another subject.

Of course it's easy to blame the landlords who resist renting to those with poor rental histories, criminal and or drug use records or unacceptable habits. What I have found to be the landlords greatest gripe to be since I have been on Section 8, after I became disabled eighteen years ago, is the inspection. If you have heard complaints from landlords who are angry about the city inspection, triple that for the Housing Authority inspection. I have seen that check list and I myself think it is reasonable. I asked a friend who happens to be a landlord why he will not make his rentals Section 8. He told me that the Housing Authority inspection dictates upgrades that would cost too much and force him to raise the rents. I asked if those improvements did not make to property more valuable and he told me no. Another friend of mine who is a Realtor has a colleague who does rentals. He asked her if she would consider Section 8 and was told "Not even for my own mother." Of course there are exceptions, but I think that the Housing Authority of Long Beach has a long way to go to entice landlords to accept Section 8 even for those considered to be solid tenants, much less those who have been homeless.

The report states, " We estimate an additional need of nearly 2,400 units that will accept subsidies." I do not see how that can happen with Section 8 vouchers given to the homeless or recently homeless population. Create for them their own voucher program and let Section 8 housing vouchers go to those for whom they are intended and who are spending many long years waiting for them. Those families have been vetted and are ready to go!

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