



**THE OAKLAND, BERKELEY/ ALAMEDA COUNTY CoC
Spring Community Meeting Agenda
Wednesday, April 24, 2024
8:30am – 4:00pm**

**Location: California Endowment 2000 Franklin Street, Oakland, CA 94612
Zoom Link: bit.ly/eohspringcommunitymeeting
Meeting ID: 815 5981 9707
Passcode: 381241**

Written Public Comment Form

This form may be completed by and submitted to Homebase at alameda@homebaseccc.org.
Written comments will be posted to the Everyone Home webpage.

Name:	Christoverre Kohler
Affiliation:	
Person with Lived Experience?	Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>

Comments:

A requirement for committee seat that a person is committed to the "racial equity" concept is preventative in terms of that concept being so ambiguous and/or specifically ideological in nature.



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Name:	Sabyl Landrum and Brigitte Nicoletti
Affiliation:	East Bay Community Law Center
Person with Lived Experience?	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/>

Comments:

Please see attached

**Public Comment from Sabyl Landrum and Brigitte Nicoletti
The Oakland, Berkeley/Alameda County CoC Spring Community Meeting
April 24, 2024**

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Continuum of Care membership community. We are Alameda County residents and Staff Attorneys in the Homelessness subunit at East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC). EBCLC is a woman of color led and woman of color centered organization, and we are also the largest provider of free legal services in Alameda County. We believe that when we invest in the vision, strategies, and solutions of women of color, we center dignity, uplift families, and advance systems-change work that transforms all communities.

According to the 2022 Point in Time count, Black residents are disproportionately represented among those experiencing homelessness, making up nearly 43% of the County's unhoused population while representing only 10% of the County population at large. Further, 40% of women experiencing homelessness reported a history of domestic violence and abuse. The intersection of homelessness and abuse often results in complex trauma conditions expressed as hypervigilance, anger, and distrust.

We preface this letter with the acknowledgment that the voices of those who are unhoused, and thereby directly impacted, should be centered. We are only relaying what we have taken away from working with unhoused individuals in Alameda County. We cannot fully convey what those experiencing homelessness are encountering and they will have valuable input and ideas while being in the best position to identify what they need. However, based on our experience and what we have learned from our clients, we put forward the following areas for focus and growth:

1. there is a need for greater transparency and accountability around the services provided to the unhoused community;
2. there needs to be a streamlined and trauma-informed grievance process for unhoused residents to engage in in relation to service provision; and,
3. all services must be inclusive and accessible.

Many of our clients come to us once the system has failed them repeatedly. We hear similar stories time and time again and these stories inform our recommended areas for focus and growth. From our observations at EBCLC, it is imperative that organizations and individuals providing services and outreach operate in a manner that recognizes the trauma individuals experiencing homelessness have faced. This commitment must be more than performative and involve action.

Greater Transparency and Accountability

KQED reported that since 2020, Alameda County has allocated more than \$200 million to address homelessness. At a state level, in the last five years, over \$24 billion was allocated to address homelessness. Some of this money was allocated through an Encampment Resolution fund and some to the Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention program – neither with data for a statewide audit to even analyze if these programs have been effective. While the statewide audit did not look specifically at Alameda County, the County has declared a homelessness state of emergency which exempts it from many requirements and safeguards that protect the unhoused and leaves the county and service providers often immune from liability for negligence or wrongdoing.

Clients come to us, some after experiencing homelessness for years, expressing distress that they see others being given vouchers or being permanently housed while they, in some cases, are not even yet considered document ready. Some are in programs that are supposed to assist them in obtaining documents and in navigating a housing search. Others are on the streets because there are no programs

that are accessible to their disability related needs or because they were otherwise exited from programs without having been housed.

Under the Continuum of Care intake guidelines, it is our understanding that individuals are supposed to be informed of their priority levels for obtaining shelter and permanent housing; yet individuals frequently come to us with no idea of how they are being prioritized. From their perspective, it seems random, haphazard, and perhaps corrupt why some of their neighbors receive vouchers or are housed while they remain on the street. Some were even promised vouchers if they surrendered their safe haven vehicle or tent to enter a shelter or transitional housing program, and after months or even years, never received a voucher, and were sometimes terminated from these programs and forced to return to the streets, now without their vehicle, survival gear or community they left behind with the expectation they would be offered permanent housing or a voucher. In some cases, there is even public record of public officials or organizations promising a voucher or permanent housing to all recipients. Once back on the street it is not surprising these individuals are now reluctant to abandon their belongings, survival gear or vehicles again to enter a program similar to ones that previously subjected them to trauma, and for what appears to be a likely empty promise of housing.

Cities in receipt of Encampment Resolution or other funding have gone on record saying all individuals in specific encampment communities will receive supportive services and permanent housing placement. Yet years later that is often not the case, with some individuals still not “document ready.” Once a promise is made and residents have relied on that promise to make decisions, there should be more accountability and transparency of process. Residents should understand just how they are being prioritized. And assessments should be consistent. A resident should not have completely different results depending on who is conducting an assessment, but our understanding is that is often the case. Further, assessments should take care to accurately assess for disability. From our experience, disabilities are not always captured in assessments, and in some cases, individuals experiencing mental health disabilities and expressing symptoms of that disability are instead documented as being resistant to services or may not have a documented assessment at all. And representations to unhoused individuals that they will receive vouchers or permanent housing, once made, should be honored. In summary, procedures should be in place to ensure transparency and to track commitments by providers to funders and to unhoused individuals to ensure those commitments are met.

Trauma-Informed Grievance Process

The Coordinated Entry Grievance Policy, effective May 1, 2021, is currently up for review, with a review required by April 30, 2024. It is our experience at EBCLC that the grievance policy has been largely ineffective and has not been properly implemented.

For example, we have yet to speak to a client who is aware they can appeal the outcome of a grievance with the County Office of Homeless Care and Coordination (OHCC), nor do they know how to go about it. Many of our clients have not been afforded a way to file a grievance with the organization they have a grievance with. One client who stated they did escalate their grievance to the County level was never contacted about their grievance. While some organizations are doing a good job of having grievance forms readily available for participants, others are reportedly directing participants to lodge their grievance with the individual they have a grievance with. In some programs grievance forms are not readily available. Because grievances are often handled first with the provider, there is often no clear way of knowing if all grievances are being recorded or responded to, but in most cases brought to our attention, participants were not provided a written response to their grievance, nor were they told they could appeal to OHCC or to HUD.

While it is understandable that the County would expect providers and participants to engage in resolving grievances before escalating to OHCC, perhaps there should be a process whereby all grievances are lodged with OHCC, with the expectation that the provider and participant first engage to resolve. A clear, user friendly, neutral point of lodging a grievance could go a long way in establishing trust in the process and ensuring all grievances are actually addressed. It is absolutely unacceptable to direct someone to an employee they believe harmed them as the point of contact to express their grievance – and this has happened!

Once a grievance is received, a participant's complaint should be received from a position that the incidents were experienced by the participant as described. Even if there was a misunderstanding or where there is a dispute of facts, care should be taken to acknowledge that the participant is expressing how they experienced what happened. If, after an investigation (which must include speaking with the unhoused individual, the service provider, and any relevant witnesses), there is no finding of wrongdoing, a resolution of the grievance should incorporate a way of addressing the participant's concern and acknowledging the experience of the grievant. For example, even if there was no wrongdoing by a service provider, perhaps the way in which an incident occurred was not trauma-informed. Many of the grievances that come to us, for example, involve staff members of transitional housing programs or shelter programs walking in on females while in a state of undress. The rules may allow for entry into a room or cabin or other space, but perhaps the rule can be modified to provide notice of a time of entry, or perhaps there could be time allowed for the participant to get dressed and come to the door to let someone in instead of a staff member knocking on a door and entering seconds later. And even if the staff member didn't violate policy, there should be an acknowledgement that the intrusion while the participant was undressed had to be uncomfortable and it is understandable the person feels violated, with a plan to avoid that type of intrusion from happening again.

Inclusive Accessible Services

From our observation, it is the most vulnerable individuals with the most complex trauma that are frequently left behind. We are shocked at how often individuals are told there is nothing more that can be done. We are dismayed at frequently hearing that when individuals have a trauma response, or are approached at a time they cannot be receptive to outreach, or are otherwise triggered, they are in a sense forgotten. Individuals who need the most support are often left behind – terminated from programs, deemed service resistant, and/or are abandoned seemingly because they are deemed too difficult or challenging. Everyone deserves the safety and security of being housed. There are times where in our role as attorneys we have inadvertently triggered a client and it takes time for the relationship to heal. Our response is to keep showing up and letting clients know we are there when they are ready. We don't just write them off as resistant to our services. We would expect the same, if not more, from providers who are part of the continuum of care. And we would expect extra effort be extended to the most complex of cases. The reality is that many programs are not accessible to individuals with disabilities, whether the disabilities are physical, mental, and/or developmental in nature.

The COC guidelines do not require participation in a shelter or transitional housing program to be eligible for housing, and HUD guidelines only require the person be unhoused or considered chronically unhoused, and be disabled, to qualify for many emergency housing programs and subsidies. However, in practice, individuals not in a place to participate in a program, or who have past experiences of trauma from having participated in a transitional housing program, are left without any real pathway to permanent housing. The intake process, prioritization process, and the process for placing folks into permanent housing needs to be modified to ensure the most vulnerable individuals who are often labeled as "difficult" or "service resistant" are able to get the support they need, especially if those individuals are saying they want permanent housing but are unable to participate in the existing programs due to past trauma. There also needs to be a process in place to help individuals who have lost trust with specific

service providers because of past trauma or from mistakes – clients report paperwork being lost, extension requests not filed, applications being dropped because of turnover or other reasons – and to redirect them to alternate providers when possible.

While we appreciate the challenges everyone is facing to combat the cycle of poverty and homelessness, as a County we can and should be better!

Thank you for this opportunity to make comment and feel free to reach out to discuss further.

Sabyl Landrum
Senior Staff Attorney

Brigitte Nicoletti
Staff Attorney



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Name:	Debra Polfus
Affiliation:	Rescue Scapist
Person with Lived Experience?	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/>

Comments:

I see him every day as I start my walk. He is a large Black man, barefoot in all weather. He lives on a filthy mattress, and he has been there a long time.

Hundreds of people pass him every day, I've never seen anyone give him a kind word or offer to help, even in some small way.

If the measure of any society is found in how it treats it's most vulnerable members, how will we be judged?

I've heard several people speak of this man as if he is trash. He is anything but. When I ask 'where is he supposed to go?,' they say they don't care, "just not here." What they mean is somewhere they don't have to look at him.

Last week I gave him socks. It's a start.