



Homeless Commission

ACTION CALENDAR
September 10, 2019

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager

Submitted by: Kelly Wallace, Interim Director, Health, Housing & Community Services Department

Subject: Companion Report: Health Study to be Conducted by the Public Health Division to Gather Data on Health Conditions, Health Disparities and Mortality Rates of Berkeley's Homeless

RECOMMENDATION

The Homeless Commission's recommendation to conduct a study on the health conditions, disparities, and mortality rates of Berkeley's homeless population addresses important issues within the City. Staff greatly appreciate the Commission's continued advocacy for the unhoused and their suggestions to gather as much relevant information as possible. Therefore, staff recommend asking Alameda County to explore the feasibility of recording homelessness as a data point in death records and/or making investments to begin tracking this information locally.

FISCAL IMPACT OF RECOMMENDATION:

None.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The Homeless Commission has submitted a report for the September 10, 2019 Council Action Calendar requesting that the City's Public Health Division "conduct a study gathering data on health conditions, health disparities and mortality rates of Berkeley's homeless for the last five years," and provides specific parameters for the content and recommendations in this report.

While this is important information and staff appreciate the Homeless Commission's continued efforts to support the unhoused in Berkeley, City staff are currently unable to report on health issues as related to cause of death because "homelessness" is not systematically included as a data point in County death records. Occasionally, homelessness may be listed on a Coroner's report, for example, but posthumously verifying housing status is difficult and fraught with bias. The same is true for the City's Office of Vital Statistics, which tracks deaths locally for the previous two years (the Homeless Commission asks for five years of data).

It is also important to note that there is not capacity within current Public Health staffing to undertake a health survey of all homeless individuals within Berkeley. Unfortunately, without substantial investment in additional City resources, these recommendations are not possible to execute.

BACKGROUND

On June 12, 2019, the Homeless Commission recommended as follows:

Action: M/S/C Hill/ Marasovic That Council direct that the City Division of Public Health conduct a study, gathering data on health conditions, health disparities and mortality rates of Berkeley's homeless for the last five years. Such recommendation includes compiling information on Berkeley's homeless including persons living in shelters, in vehicles, on the streets, and any other location not intended for human habitation and who move between these settings. Such study shall include data on specific health conditions and make a comparative analysis between the homeless and Berkeley's general population and shall include demographics such as race, age, gender and known disability. Such study shall include how long the homeless person has lived on the streets and/or in shelters and attempt to track back the nature of their various residences for five years as is feasible.

Data for mortality rates among Berkeley's homeless shall also be gathered for the last five years. The mortality rates shall be examined for persons living in shelters, in vehicles, on the streets, and any other location not intended for human habitation and who move between these settings. The cause of death shall be identified and demographics such as race, age, gender and known disability compiled. Tracking the housing status of the persons, for the last five years, shall be identified as is feasible. If feasible, the length of residence in Berkeley shall be identified. A comparative analysis with the general population shall be made. To the extent feasible and within legal constraints, whether or not the deceased individual was under the care of a medical provider shall be identified.

All personal information shall be redacted so as to comply with federal, state and local laws as to the study of both health conditions and mortality rates of the homeless.

Recommendations shall be made to improve the health conditions of the homeless and decrease the mortality rates of homeless persons. Recommendations, within the City Division of Public Health's purview, shall be made initially by them and return to Council where further recommendations can be made. Council shall provide the opportunity for the Homeless Commission, any other relevant commission and the public, to weigh in on recommendations following the release of the data/study.

Vote: Ayes: Behm-Steinberg, Hill, Kealoha-Blake, Marasovic, Mulligan
Noes: None. *Abstain:* None. *Absent:* Hirpara (excused).

Action: M/S/C Hill/Marasovic to submit the report as amended and to authorize the Chair to present on behalf of the Commission on the report.

Vote: Ayes: Behm-Steinberg, Hill, Kealoha-Blake, Marasovic
Noes: None. *Abstain:* None. *Absent:* Hirpara (excused), Mulligan.

The Homeless Commission has submitted an accompanying report for the September 10, 2019 action calendar formally making this recommendation to Council.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are no identifiable environmental impacts associated with this recommendation.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

No data sources exist to respond to the Homeless Commission's request.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

Council could consider formally requesting that the County Coroner's office begin recording an individual's housing status, including homelessness, at the point of death, and/or could invest additional resources for the City's Office of Vital Statistics to perform this task locally. The cost of such an investment is unknown at this time.

CONTACT PERSON

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