Los Angeles County Homelessness Research

Focus Groups Conducted December 13 – 16, 2021

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Focus group details

December 13: Encino	Democrats & Independents, men, White, 45-74
	Democrats & Independents, mixed gender, Latino, 25-64
December 15: Pasadena	Republicans, Democrats & Independents, women, White, 45-74
	Republicans, Democrats & Independents, mixed gender, Chinese, 25-64
December 17: Los Angeles (West Side)	Democrats & Independents, mixed gender, mixed ethnicity, 22-34
	Democrats & Independents, mixed gender, African American, 25-64

Sources of voter frustration

✓ Homelessness is seen as by far the most pressing issue facing Los Angeles County.

✓ There is a sense of revulsion and in some cases fear, but also compassion: people want homeless individuals to get the assistance they need.

✓ The sense of futility and frustration is driven in part by the perceived failure of HHH.

✓ The sense is that the County is content to "manage the problem" instead of solve it.

✓ Voters are keenly aware of widely varying approaches to homelessness from city to city, with particular ire directed toward the City of LA.

"Inconsistency within the County of Los Angeles. We had a huge problem within the City, but elsewhere you don't see these problems. You get the impression that the city is lenient on these issues. I don't understand why." --White male voter

"I've been here 35 Years, and the past 5 years, the degradation of life in LA is exponential, and I don't see an end. The politicians are dufuses." –White male voter

"I run into one or two every day, and I wonder: this is someone's son. Did he refuse help? How can you help them? We're failing them." -Latino voter

"They don't have a plan. They just transport people to a certain area. I don't know if there's a bigger plan." –Chinese voter

Impressions of the homeless population and desired solutions

✓ Voters tend to naturally segment the homeless population into four categories:

- Those with serious mental health issues
- Those with drug addiction issues
- Those who are otherwise healthy and capable of work but prefer to live outside
- Those who have simply fallen on hard times due to the economy.

✓ Most believe that those with serious mental health and addiction issues comprise half or more of the County's homeless population.

✓ Largely because of this, there's a sense that any viable solution will need to compel people in these situations to seek help.

✓ Voters tend to lump homelessness in with criminal justice reform issues as part of a growing sense that we've become "too lenient."

"Unless we stop the drugs, homelessness isn't going anywhere. 90 percent is drugs." -Latino voter

"The drug addicts want to sit on the street on the corner. We can't help them. I've got one in the middle of my street. The police come and take him and put him in jail. And two days later, he's back out ." –White female voter

"I would say like 40 to 50 percent [have serious mental health challenges]. Just because they've been there for so long, right? It's a mental health thing." -Millennial voter.

"When I was young, there were still mental hospitals. It's like, 'I'm sorry, you're crazy.' So they go off with the people with the white coats, and they were in a hospital. And it wasn't like they could just roll in the streets because there was a place to take them and keep them there." –White male voter

"People are taking advantage of no bail. They're doing the crime, getting arrested then doing it again." -African American voter

Opportunities for a central authority

✓ There is currently a complete lack of faith in City and County government to address homelessness.

✓ Voters are very receptive to the idea of some kind of central authority that can coordinate efforts and **enact accountability** among the various entities working on homelessness.

✓ Any connection to existing elected officials or bureaucracies makes voters less supportive of the idea.

✓ They are more supportive when it is seen as driven by service-providers working on-the-ground, with involvement from those who have experienced homelessness.

✓ There's no sense that homelessness can be completely eradicated, but simply providing clear, identifiable goals (like reducing homelessness 50 percent in 5 years) represents an improvement over the status quo.

✓ Ultimately voters will want to see specific action items and get a better sense of the approach that this entity would take.

"The plan is HHH, but we're 5 years in and it hasn't made a difference. You've got to follow the money and hold people accountable. It's just the red tape and who's taking, who's skimming." –African American voter

"I like it, because I think the issue is less creating a larger pot of money than it is about being more exacting about how that's spent and then having accountability." -Millennial voter

"If it's executed well, it would work." -Millennial voter

"It gives you a tangible goal. Not just give them money and whatever happens." -African American voter

"It's kind of appealing that it's an independent organization outside of government. If you put it in the private sector, you can get shit done instead of going through government. Everything is stalled. Money doesn't go to the right areas." -White female voter

"I would support it. At least we're trying to do something. I want a whole group of people to be accountable." -African American voter