

Written Public
Comment(s) for **Item No. 4**



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January 18, 2024

Hon. President Warren Slocum, Hon. Vice President David Canepa, and Members of the Board of Supervisors
County of San Mateo
400 County Center
Redwood City, CA 94063

RE: Letter of Support for *Hopeful Horizons: Empowering Lives Initiative*

Dear Hon. President Slocum, Hon. Vice President Canepa, and Members of the Board of Supervisors,

For seven decades, the San Mateo County Economic Development Association (SAMCEDA) has been a leading voice for the economic engine that is San Mateo County. SAMCEDA believes in the power of a strong economy driven by an appreciation of what that engine provides to our ecosystem on the Peninsula.

By working with employers of all sizes and industries, engaging with our public sector and our elected leadership, recognizing that we have 21 individual jurisdictions (20 cities and one county) and collaborating and communicating with the Chambers of Commerce, non-profit organizations and our educational institutions, SAMCEDA tackles the most difficult challenges through goal-oriented solutions.

On behalf of SAMCEDA, we support the proposed new Chapter 3.109 of Title 3 of the San Mateo County Ordinance Code, *Hopeful Horizons: Empowering Lives Initiative*. This would provide shelter at an available *Shelter Location* to those experiencing homelessness and prohibits unregulated encampments on public property in San Mateo County.

The County has and continues to be a leader on housing and homelessness issues. The Board of Supervisors, County Executive, and your teams work tirelessly to support our most vulnerable and this ordinance will strengthen your efforts.

We appreciate your consideration of this vital ordinance for those experiencing homelessness.

Sincerely,

Rosanne Foust
President & CEO, SAMCEDA

From: [Cathy Baird](#)
To: [CEO BoardFeedback](#)
Subject: Item 4: Hopeful Horizons - please delay the vote
Date: Sunday, January 21, 2024 3:48:14 PM

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Supervisors:

The Encampment Ordinance would criminalize homelessness in unincorporated San Mateo County by enabling the County to clear encampments anytime a shelter bed is available. This is not necessary for health and safety of encampments, since concerns such as substance use and fire hazards are already criminalized. We should not define homelessness itself as criminal, since homelessness is primarily a problem caused by the high cost of housing.

(https://homelessness.ucsf.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/CASPEH_Report_62023.pdf and <https://mtcdrive.app.box.com/s/nei8x775oi5m47mqhu8ctpyyqria2v3/file/794888675969>)

Though the ordinance intends to help unhoused residents access available shelter, several provisions would enable the County to uproot residents' lives without providing adequate support or services. Please consider these changes:

- Define "shelter bed" as a private bedroom, not a bed in a congregate shelter. Forcing unhoused residents into congregate shelters in which they do not feel safe may cause further trauma without addressing the core causes of homelessness, the shortage of affordable homes.
- Require outreach to be performed by unarmed peer-support specialists and other trained civilians, **not law enforcement personnel**.
- Provide clarity about storage of personal items. Ninety days of storage does not account for the amount of time a formerly unhoused person needs to become stable and self-sufficient. Also, how will storage be funded? Hopefully, individuals themselves will not have to pay the fees to get their belongings out of storage.
- Provide concrete requirements to comply with the County's Language Access Policy (not just "cognizant of potential language barriers").
- Require the County to release public notices for which any individual can sign up to receive updates on when and where encampment clearances are occurring.

San Mateo County has made significant progress to provide incentives for unsheltered individuals to be housed by creating genuinely desirable housing options such as the Navigation Center and Project Homekey. The County will most effectively solve the homelessness crisis by ensuring safe and affordable housing options are available to all residents.

Please delay your vote on this ordinance to take the time to consider NOT criminalizing homelessness and adding County accountability to the measure. Thanks.

Cathy Baird
San Carlos

From: [Kira Willow](#)
To: [CEO BoardFeedback](#)
Subject: Comment on Hopeful Horizons initiative, agenda item 4 for Jan 23, 2024
Date: Monday, January 22, 2024 11:07:18 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of San Mateo County. Unless you recognize the sender's email address and know the content is safe, do not click links, open attachments or reply.

There are many reasons people choose encampments over shelters and I'm grateful for the empathy shown by the authors in recognizing several of them. I'd like to encourage you to take that empathy a step further, though, as I believe it will show that there are better approaches to help people move into shelters.

This ordinance will be impacting people who are simply trying to make the best decisions for themselves. Other laws exist, such as the recent example of CARE court, for people who can't make choices to care for themselves. This ordinance, then, would only be necessary for people who have made a reasonable decision that an encampment is better for them than a shelter.

There are many reasons a shelter may not be adequate for a particular unhoused person, including religious requirements or needing to stay with loved ones. Anyone would choose to stay in a tent if the alternative is to lose access to the things or people that mean the most to you and help you want to continue living. The ordinance makes space for some of these realities, but can't possibly account for all of them. Anyone who slips through the cracks faces the threat of prosecution for having something else more important to them than a roof over their head.

Studies, like one from 2019 by Herring, Yarborough and Alatorre, show that this ordinance will make life harder for unhoused people, and won't help move them into shelters. Instead, I encourage you to continue improving our shelter system and removing the barriers that keep it from being a good option for many of our county's unhoused residents. Provide a roof that doesn't take away the most important things in their lives and they won't need to be coerced into choosing it.

Thank you,
-Kira Willow