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February 4, 2016

The Honorable Senator Carol Liu
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5097
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SB 876 (Liu) Homelessness
Notice of Opposition**

Dear Senator Liu:

The League of California Cities regrets to inform you of our opposition to your SB 876. As we conveyed to your staff at our recent meeting, we view this measure as preempting local authority to address important issues affecting public health and safety in public spaces and on private property that is held open to the public, including not limited to, plazas, courtyards, parking lots, sidewalks, public transportation facilities, public buildings, shopping centers and parks. We recognize that this measure is well intentioned; however, local agencies must continue to be able to protect the public, health, safety and welfare of their communities. Moreover, we do not believe this measure will make a positive impact in the effort to address chronic homelessness.

Homelessness is a pervasive problem affecting many communities across our state. As a result, many local governments, non-profits and social service providers are trying various creative solutions to get people housed and into the treatment programs they need to permanently get off of the streets. Last fall, the League formed a statewide working group of city officials and staff who are tackling the problem to share best practices and receive input on what is needed to make additional progress with strategies that best serve local needs. The consensus was clear: legislation that seeks to combat homelessness should focus on solutions and provide resources that help get people off of the streets and into shelter and housing.

The key to getting people off of the streets is to provide more shelter, permanent housing beds and accompanying social services such as mental health treatment, job training, addiction counseling, etc. Cities and other local agencies need more funding and flexibility to provide these proven programs. Additionally, these services should be provided as a coordinated effort. We have heard from members of our working group that many cities have formed special task forces on homelessness that combine city, county, law enforcement, social service providers and non-profits all working together to come up with creative ways they can partner and address the homeless problem.

In our discussions with local officials who are working on a daily basis on these issues, the consensus was clear. Removing local enforcement authority as you propose in SB 876 will do

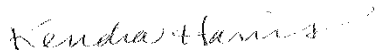
nothing to help the problem, and would actually undermine existing efforts. SB 876 contains no solutions for ending homelessness. In fact, the bill on page 3, line 16, specifically states, “Passing this Act will not reduce homelessness.” Removing local authority could exacerbate the problem by removing incentives for some to take advantage of existing resources and services being offered. For example, some local jurisdictions host legal clinics where homeless clinic participants can have citations and related fines removed from their records in exchange for community service and for taking advantage of housing and other services.

While we oppose this measure’s approach, the League is committed to supporting efforts across the state and in our communities that address the homeless issue in a constructive manner. In that vein, we are encouraged by Senator de León’s recent “No Place Like Home” proposal that will provide much needed funding for housing for the mentally ill homeless, and augmentations to existing shelter resources. We look forward to supporting such efforts to develop resources to provide affordable housing and services to actually serve our chronically homeless and help them get off of the streets.

The League is genuinely interested in finding workable solutions to this growing problem. We appreciate the meeting we had with your staff where we expressed our concerns, and we look forward to continued discussions.

If you have any questions or if I can be of any assistance, please call me at (916) 658-8250.

Sincerely,



Kendra Harris
Legislative Representative

Cc: Chair and Members, Senate Committee on Transportation and Housing
Alison Dinmore, Consultant, Senate Committee on Transportation and Housing
Doug Yoakam, Housing Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus