
SENATE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Senator María Elena Durazo, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 654
Author: Caloza
Version: 4/21/25

Hearing Date: 7/16/25
Fiscal: Yes
Consultant: Peterson

HOMELESSNESS RESOURCE TELEPHONE SYSTEM

Requires the County of Los Angeles to establish a homelessness resource telephone system to receive telephone calls regarding individuals experiencing, or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Background

California's homelessness crisis. In its December 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimated 187,084 Californians are experiencing homelessness, and California accounts for 24% of all people experiencing homelessness in the United States.

2-1-1 phone system. The Federal Communications Commission designated 2-1-1 in 2000 as a nationwide number to obtain information and referrals to health and human services programs. In response to the Federal Communications Commission designating 2-1-1 as the number to obtain information and referrals, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) issued Decision 03-02-029 (Decision) in 2002. This Decision determined that 2-1-1 services were to be rolled out by counties and created administrative procedures for implementing 2-1-1 dialing in California. In order to be able to provide information and referral services, organizations must apply to the CPUC for authority to use the 2-1-1 code. In 2003, Los Angeles became the first county granted such authority. Since then, the CPUC has authorized 2-1-1 dialing services in 53 of California's 58 counties, covering 99.3% of California's population.

Most of the contacts to the 2-1-1 network are from people looking for help to meet their basic needs such as food, housing, and transportation. During emergencies and natural disasters, 2-1-1 also provides critical public information, including information on shelters, evacuations, food distribution, utility outages, and road closures. However, due to staffing needs, the increased call volume during emergencies can overwhelm the system and lead to people being unable to access 2-1-1 services. This was the case in February 2024 when winter storms caused damage throughout the Los Angeles region. According to one report, "more than 12,500 calls came through from February 1 through February 13, but with just 13 operators, they were only able to answer 38% of them." The year before, 211 LA, the nonprofit funded by the city and county of Los Angeles that operates the 2-1-1 line, outlined major operational challenges from the 2022-23 winter shelter season, including having only "one-third of the resources necessary to handle the call volume."¹ Many people who are unhoused call 2-1-1 to be referred to shelter and other resources.

¹ <https://laist.com/news/housing-homelessness/211-emergency-winter-shelter-long-wait-times>

The author wants LA County to create a dedicated phone line for homelessness services.

Proposed Law

Assembly Bill 654 requires the County of Los Angeles to establish a homelessness resource telephone system to receive telephone calls regarding individuals experiencing, or at risk of experiencing homelessness to provide those individuals resources.

Comments

1. Purpose of the bill. According to the author, “Los Angeles County is the epicenter of our homelessness crisis and our residents are desperate for more solutions and a coordinated response for how to help our most vulnerable. AB 654 provides local governments with a new tool - a dedicated homelessness response line managed by direct service providers - to ensure that people experiencing or at risk of homelessness can be connected to services more efficiently. This bill is a commonsense step to close a critical gap in our homelessness response systems and improve outcomes for some of our most vulnerable residents.”

2. Necessary? AB 654 requires Los Angeles County to create a homeless-specific telephone system. However, Los Angeles can already procure its own phone systems. In fact, it already has. Los Angeles County contracts with nonprofit to provide a 211 phone number that people can contract regarding many county services, including homelessness. It does not appear that LA County needs legislative authority to operate another phone system specific to homelessness. The current 211 system appears overwhelmed by call volume, which argues as much for giving more resources to the existing system as it does for diverting resources to create an entirely new one. Whether this new phone system duplicates or supplements its existing systems is something Los Angeles County residents can assess for themselves locally.

3. Mandate. The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local governments for the costs of new or expanded state mandated local programs. Because AB 654 imposes new duties on local agencies, Legislative Counsel says it imposes a new state mandate. The measure states that if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill imposes a reimbursable mandate, then reimbursement must be made pursuant to existing statutory provisions.

AB 654 not only overrides local decisionmaking, but because it is a state mandate, the state could be on the hook for financing the phone system without any clear plan in place for when the County will do so, how much it will cost, or how it will measure the system’s effectiveness. Should the rest of the state pay for a phone system that Los Angeles County create on its own?

4. Special legislation. Section 16 of Article IV of the California Constitution prohibits special legislation when a general law can apply. AB 654 contains findings and declarations explaining the need for legislation that applies only to the County of Los Angeles because of unique circumstances facing the County of Los Angeles with regard to homelessness.

5. Incoming! The Senate Rules Committee has ordered a double referral of AB 654: first to the Committee on Human Services, which approved AB 654 at its June 30th hearing on a vote of 4-1, and second to the Committee on Local Government.

Assembly Actions

Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee:	11-0
Assembly Communications and Conveyance Committee:	8-2
Assembly Appropriations Committee:	12-2
Assembly Floor:	61-14

Support and Opposition (7/11/25)

Support: Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Supervisor Hilda Solis

Opposition: 2-1-1 Humboldt Info and Resource Ctr

211 Alameda
 211 California
 211 LA County
 211 San Diego
 Community Action Partnership of Kern
 Community Link Capitol Region
 Contra Costa Crisis Center
 Eden I&r, INC.
 Family Resource Center
 Help Central INC / Butte-glenn 211
 Inland Southern California United Way
 Interface Children & Family Services
 Nevada Sierra Connecting Point Public Authority
 Orange County United Way
 United Way Bay Area
 United Way Fresno and Madera Counties
 United Way Fresno Madera Counties
 United Way Monterey County
 United Way of Northern California
 United Way of Stanislaus County
 United Way of Tulare County
 United Way Tulare County
 United Ways of California

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