

Date of Hearing: June 24, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Matt Haney, Chair

SCR 131 (Blakespear) – As Amended April 6, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 34-0

SUBJECT: Housing: unsheltered homelessness

SUMMARY: This resolution urges the Governor, relevant state agencies, and all local governments to adopt an urgent and coordinated approach to both end and prevent unsheltered homelessness statewide through the full activation of interim and permanent strategies, as well as interventions to prevent individuals and families from falling into unsheltered homelessness, and fund all interventions and reforms that prioritize housing unsheltered Californians.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal-ICH) with the purpose of coordinating the state’s response to homelessness by utilizing Housing First practices. (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 8255)
- 2) Requires agencies and departments administering state programs created on or after July 1, 2017 to incorporate the core components of Housing First. (WIC 8255)
- 3) Defines “Housing First” to mean the evidence-based model that uses housing as a tool, rather than a reward, for recovery and that centers on providing or connecting homeless people to permanent housing as quickly as possible. Housing First providers offer services as needed and requested on a voluntary basis and that do not make housing contingent on participation in services. (WIC 8255)
- 4) Defines, among other things, the “core components of Housing First” to mean:
 - a) Acceptance of referrals directly from shelters, street outreach, drop-in centers, and other parts of crisis response systems frequented by vulnerable people experiencing homelessness;
 - b) Supportive services that emphasize engagement and problem-solving over therapeutic goals and service plans that are highly tenant-driven without predetermined goals;
 - c) Participation in services or program compliance is not a condition of permanent housing tenancy;
 - d) Tenants have a lease and all the rights and responsibilities of tenancy, as outlined in California’s Civil, Health and Safety, and Government codes; and
 - e) The use of alcohol or drugs in and of itself, without other lease violations, is not a reason for eviction. (WIC 8255)

FISCAL EFFECT: None.

COMMENTS:

Author's Statement: According to the author, "It is the duty of the State of California to protect the health and welfare of all its residents, including those experiencing homelessness. More than 123,000 Californians sleep unsheltered each night on sidewalks, in public parks, under freeway overpasses, and in riverbeds with no access to privacy, safety, or sanitation. The longer a person remains unsheltered, the more difficult it becomes for them to stabilize and enter permanent housing, and the more likely they are to suffer preventable illness, trauma, or death. The Interagency Council on Homelessness set a goal to increase the share of unsheltered individuals entering shelter or housing from 42% to 70% by 2027, with the aim of ensuring all unsheltered people access housing pathways. This goal cannot be reached without scaling up state investments for flexible funding, such as the Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention program, to pair with other state, federal, and local funding that serves people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. State, regional, and local governments must coordinate limited resources to fund long-term and interim solutions to ensure that our streets are no longer the landing place for people experiencing housing insecurity."

The High Cost of Housing: The high cost of housing is the cause of homelessness in California. Other states with higher rates of overdose but lower costs of housing report much lower rates of homelessness. For example, West Virginia leads overdose deaths per capita but has one of the lowest homelessness rates in the country. A study by the National Low Income Housing Coalition found that West Virginia has 50 affordable and available rental homes for every 100 extremely-low-income households, more than double the number that California has. A family in West Virginia can afford a two-bedroom rental on less than \$17 an hour – the second-lowest figure in the nation. In California, a family would need more than \$40 per hour to be able to afford an average two-bedroom rental.

California needs an additional 2.5 million units of housing to meet the state's need, including 643,352 for very low-income households and 394,910 for lower income households. Since 2018, California has permitted 890,000 units of new housing, with 126,000 of those being low- and very low-income units. The Legislature has passed major legislation in recent years to allow affordable housing to be built on almost any site in the state. However, the lack of housing overall and in particular the continued lack of sufficient affordable housing is a problem that is decades in the making.

Millions of Californians, who are disproportionately lower income and people of color, must make hard decisions about paying for housing at the expense of food, health care, child care, and transportation—one in three households in the state doesn't earn enough money to meet their basic needs. Currently, according to HDIS data, for every five individuals who access homelessness services in California, only one is housed each year, leaving four unhoused.

California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness (CASPEH): The University of California, San Francisco Benioff Housing and Homelessness Institute conducted the CASPEH, the largest representative study of homelessness since the mid-1990s and the first large-scale representative study to use mixed methods (surveys and in-depth interviews). They administered questionnaires to nearly 3,200 participants and conducted in-depth interviews with 365 participants. Their report provides evidence to help shape the state's policy response to

homelessness. The median age of participants was 47 (range 18-89). Participants who report a Black (26%) or Native American or Indigenous identity (12%) were overrepresented compared to the overall California population. Thirty-five percent of participants identified as Latino/x.

The report found that people experiencing homelessness in California are Californians. Nine out of ten participants lost their last housing in California; 75% of participants lived in the same county as their last housing.

The median monthly household income in the six months prior to homelessness across all CASPEH participants was \$960. Almost all participants met criteria to be considered “extremely low-income” or making less than 30% of the Area Median Income. Participants’ inability to afford housing was both the underlying cause of homelessness and the primary barrier to their returning to housing. Evidence and interviews with people who are experiencing homelessness show that a small amount of shallow subsidy could keep people from falling into homelessness. This finding was true throughout California, not only in the high-cost coastal regions.

Twenty percent of participants who reported current regular substance use indicated that they wanted treatment, but were unable to receive it. Evidence shows that substance use treatment is most effective among those who choose to engage with it. A higher proportion of individuals who used substances regularly live in unsheltered environments. There is a need for increased access for those who want it, particularly those in unsheltered settings. Promising models for low-barrier, outreach-focused services (including medication treatment) should be expanded.

Shelters: Shelters are a stopgap measure and cannot fully resolve homelessness. According to a recent investigative report by CalMatters, local governments have spent nearly \$1 billion on shelters since 2018. The number of beds doubled since 2018 from 27,000 to 61,000. Between 2018 and 2024, annual shelter death rates tripled – a total of 2,007 people died in that time period, which is nearly twice as many deaths as in California jails during the same period. Shelters are often unsafe and unsanitary places to stay. Many shelters have barriers to entry and prevent people from bringing their possessions, partners, and pets. According to HDIS data collected on shelter exits, fewer than one in four people, about 22%, are able to find housing when they leave a shelter.

Shelters are a costly and ineffective permanent solution to homelessness. The City of New York, the City of Portland and Multnomah County, and the state of Massachusetts have adopted a right to shelter. A right to shelter is a legal mandate that requires local governments to provide emergency shelter to anyone experiencing homelessness. This approach to homelessness has had decidedly mixed results. In the City of New York, the unsheltered population is 4,294 out of 91,897 homeless people. Although many people are housed in New York, they are still homeless because they are living in temporary shelters or transitional housing. Some people have been living in shelters for years with no solution for permanent housing. This approach is also expensive and requires that resources for affordable housing go toward maintaining emergency shelters and not toward building supportive housing or for affordable housing. New York City spends \$1.7 billion a year to maintain its shelter system, which is \$30,000 per individual per year.

Arguments in Support: According to Leading Age, “SCR 131 appropriately underscores the importance of coordinated efforts to address unsheltered homelessness and the need for expanded housing opportunities. By elevating housing as a core part of the response, the resolution supports approaches grounded in stability, dignity, and long-term well-being for vulnerable populations, including older

adults. These goals closely align with the mission of nonprofit affordable senior housing providers working every day to help older Californians remain safely housed in their communities.”

Arguments in Opposition: None on file.

Committee Amendments: The author requested the Committee take the amendments below:

Amendment 1:

On page 2, between lines 37 and 38, insert:

WHEREAS, Achieving this goal will require scaling interventions that demonstrate measurable outcomes, including interim housing, rapid rehousing, permanent housing, and coordinated entry systems that prioritize individuals based on need; and

Amendment 2:

On page 3, between lines 6 and 7, insert:

WHEREAS, Public funding must be focused on data-driven solutions, ensuring resources are directed toward programs that demonstrably reduce unsheltered homelessness and

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Bay Area Council
LeadingAge California

Opposition

None on file.

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