



Bakersfield-Kern Regional Homeless Collaborative
1115 Truxtun Ave., Fifth Floor
Bakersfield, CA 93301

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Delivered via Electronic Mail and U.S.P.S.

November 4, 2022

Dear Governor Newsom,

Our Continuum of Care and County learned the state is placing a hold on the remaining third round of Homelessness Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) grants. This decision significantly impacts our community, as it halts a number of highly successful programs and innovative projects already in progress.

We share your frustration that the work of achieving a state where homelessness is rare and brief is slow going. However, the rise of homelessness has been decades in the making and was exacerbated by the impacts of Covid. Stopping our initial progress midstream only reduces the momentum we've started to gain toward our goals.

Despite limited resources and tremendous challenges, we have made progress on local projects that show much promise.

We are proud of our low recidivism rates, demonstrating that, once housed, our vulnerable neighbors heal, recover and remain stable. Our work has been recognized at the national level, and other communities have sought to learn from the work of the Bakersfield/Kern CoC.

We have created more than 500 new emergency shelter beds since 2020 and helped more than 300 individuals find permanent housing during the pandemic. Our region's first Safe Camping site has already housed 10 people since opening in June 2022, and countless more projects are innovating how we offer Behavioral Health services to those experiencing homelessness.

Kern County is no stranger to testing novel solutions to homelessness. New Tiny Homes are scheduled to become available in 2023, and we have recently amended land use designations to facilitate higher-

density residential redevelopment. These new initiatives are supported by federal and state grant sources, including the HHAP program.

Pausing HHAP 3 funding will negatively impact the Bakersfield/Kern CoC by:

- **Delaying the housing of nearly 200 homeless households:** Our communities have experienced vacancy rates below 2 percent for the past eighteen months. Without the availability of housing, our system's throughput halts. System outflow decreases, and the Length of Time experiencing homelessness increases. HHAP3 funds were intended to provide landlord incentives that help more than 160 voucher holders in Kern County move into permanent housing.
- **Stalling a high-performing project that is solving youth homelessness:** We have seen a 60-65 percent housing rate for youth experiencing homelessness through a project that provides outreach, case management and scattered-site emergency shelter for youth. Without HHAP3 funding, this project will be suspended.
- **Halting a new innovation project designed to improve access to services:** Our region includes a high number of rural communities that lack the homeless services available in urban areas. HHAP 3 funding was planned to enable a multidisciplinary team approach between our Coordinated Entry and Street Outreach to ensure individuals and households in rural communities have equitable access to services and resources. With HHAP3 funding on hold, this project will not begin.
- **Discontinuing services for rural Kern County:** HHAP Round 1 funded the creation of a rural navigation center in Delano. As the third largest county, geographically, we must provide services to individuals experiencing homelessness in areas beyond metropolitan Bakersfield. Without HHAP3 funding, Delano Navigation Center is anticipated to close. This will additionally reduce or eliminate rural transportation, daycare transportation, and outreach services.

Given Kern County/Bakersfield's situation, we request the following:

- BKRHC immediately be provided a seat at the table to discuss the work of addressing homelessness
- Resume HHAP 3 grant agreements
- Delay HHAP 4 applications, which are in progress
- Revise the criteria for bonus funding, as current criteria incentivize conservative goals. We recommend incentivizing more significant goals in fewer measurement areas
- Acknowledge that the root causes of homelessness are not under the control of CoCs and work with us to mutually address them

Halting work that is already in progress is not an effective way to achieve the results we all seek regarding homelessness.

Our HHAP 3 strategies were developed through tremendous collaboration between our CoC, the City of Bakersfield and Kern County. Our neighbors experiencing homelessness will suffer if we do not receive the \$1.9 million in HHAP 3 funds we have been allocated.

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Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and requests. I can be reached at anna.laven@bkrhc.org or 310-592-8557 for any questions you or your staff may have.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
Anna Laven
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Dr. Anna Laven
Executive Director
Bakersfield Kern Regional Homeless Collaborative

CC: Lourdes M. Castro Ramirez, MA – Secretary, BCSH
State Senator Shannon Grove
State Senator Melissa Hurtado
Assemblymember Vince Fong
Assemblymember Rudy Salas
Kern County Board of Supervisors
Mayor Karen Goh
Bakersfield City Council
BKRHC Executive Board
BKRHC Governing Board