

DECISION PACKAGE

CONTINUATION OF ENHANCED RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS PILOT PROGRAM

The Enhanced Response Pilot Program was initiated by the City in June 2019 as an enhanced response to the impact of homelessness not only on individuals experiencing homelessness but also on residents and our local community. The City sought a variety of creative and novel efforts ranging from innovative policing, amending the municipal code, and utilizing the criminal justice system as tools to house homeless defendants. Homeless defendant cases represent a significant portion of the total criminal cases the City Prosecutor Division of the City Attorney's Office handles. In addition, many of these defendants are diagnosed with mental illnesses, so they must be supervised by the mental health court. Many of Redondo's most problematic homeless individuals are now housed as a result of these tailored responses to problems raised by residents.

Previous efforts to address the impact of homeless defendant cases primarily focused on offering needed services to the homeless and providing a path out of homelessness. The Pilot Program enhanced this basic response, by including a focus on the impact on residents and our local community as well as providing early access to services and incentivizing the offers of these services to homeless defendants.

The first step was to accurately determine the impact on the local community and what was most concerning to the residents. There was an increase in complaints to City officials and it was important to reach out to the residents to determine the most acute areas of concern in order to formulate appropriate strategies to effectively address those concerns. Since June of 2019, City Attorney Michael Webb, Senior Deputy City Prosecutor Anastasia Papadakis, Quality of Life Prosecutor Joy Abaquin and Quality of Life Officer Keith Turner met with all residents who had complained to the Mayor or City Council and who were willing to meet about the homeless. Although this effort is temporarily suspended due to Safer at Home orders, the team is still willing to do so.

What was discovered through these meetings was invaluable. Namely, it confirmed our belief that there are three categories of homeless individuals that create a disproportionate impact on the local community. Those categories are 1) those with chronic mental illness, 2) those with drug addictions, and 3) habitual offenders who live on the street committing crimes of opportunity. Homeless individuals in these categories are often unwilling or unable to accept services designed to help remove them from homelessness.

Furthermore, for those that commit crimes, County Jail is a revolving door due to overcrowding. Studies have found that a typical jail sentence for criminal activity does not address the common issues associated with homelessness like chronic mental illness and substance abuse.

The second step was to formulate appropriate strategies to address these community impacts. As a direct result, the prosecution of individuals experiencing homelessness was modified to effectively and demonstratively curtail the cycle of drug, alcohol, quality of life, and theft offenses being committed. The prosecution has utilized, with marked success, a measured carrot and stick approach. Essentially, the message has been if misdemeanor defendants are willing to accept services and work with either PATH or Lila Omura, Housing Navigator with Harbor Interfaith, towards being housed, then their cases will be diverted and potentially dismissed. If not, then punishment will be sought to deter the continuing impact on the community. Currently, Lila Omura has primarily been coming to court, but we also intend to expand the program by amending our contract with PATH to include PATH's appearances in court.

The prosecution has incorporated Lila Omura into its program by having her attend court hearings at least once a month. She is able to conduct her outreach at court, meeting individuals for the first time to begin the process of services and housing connections. She is also instrumental in assisting with structuring court orders based on an individuals' needs. For example, if one of the homeless misdemeanor defendants can afford a phone, but has not been following through with meetings to assist in securing their own housing, the court will order that individual to obtain a phone in order to communicate with Lila Omura and follow-through on meetings between court dates.

Lila Omura has been attending court appearances since August of last year. The success by incorporating her into the prosecution process has been truly remarkable. For example, December 9th was a designated day of what has informally become known as "Homeless Court." 15 individuals were set on the court calendar to appear on their misdemeanor cases in order to meet with Lila Omura to address status on their cases. This is a population that historically does not appear on scheduled court dates, which leads to warrants being issued. However, on this day, 14 of the 15 individuals appeared in court and were willing to work to improve their status by seeking mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, and eventually housing.

Furthermore, the "Homeless Court" days only picked up momentum as time went on. By March 11, 2020 there were 20 scheduled individuals on calendar for court. 19 of the 20 appeared. As of that date, one of the individuals was on the brink of obtaining housing while another two had been placed into housing since the last February court date. It has been incredibly beneficial to consolidate homeless cases into one day and allow focused attention on this vulnerable population by virtue of having cooperation with all the parties involved, most especially the individuals experiencing homelessness.

Another recent example of this coordinated effort is from November of last year. An individual with a history of alcoholism, twenty-six (26) arrests since June of 2018, over fifteen (15) convictions for public intoxication, and multiple prior DUIs was placed in a hospital for a rehabilitative detox program. This individual finally accepted detox as a condition of probation as part of the prosecutor's offer in lieu of significant time in County Jail. The fact that he accepted treatment is a direct result of the coordination between the prosecution, the defense, the police department, the court and the herculean effort on the part of Lila Omura to get him into treatment.

On February 6, 2020, which was a scheduled “Homeless Court” day, the same individual was present in court having completed his detox and residential treatment program. His appearance was truly astounding compared to the mental and physical state prior to treatment. After completing the detox program, he remains in emergency housing until he receives permanent housing. All those present for “Homeless Court,” most notably the participants, were able to see the incredible turnaround that this individual undertook to change the direction of his life. His success was the best form of encouragement to participants by his marked turnaround by working the tools that were provided to him.

More success stories include the following:

One individual had resisted services and cycled in and out of custody since the early 1990’s. His crimes ranged from the more serious in the 1990’s to petty drug and court order violation offenses more recently. Since he started routinely taking medication and accepted services through a local Full Partnership Service (FSP), he has remained crime free and has stabilized. He is currently awaiting permanent housing. His participation in “Homeless Court” facilitated his housing status since part of the program helps identify prior criminal convictions that need to be addressed by the participants attorney. This would not have been as quickly identified had he not been participating in “Homeless Court.”

A couple experiencing homelessness was able to get housing together after a long time waiting and living in their van. While they both had previously sporadically worked with Lila Omura, things came to a head when the male picked up multiple criminal cases within a few months. In the face of serious jail time, we were able to negotiate to have the individual released so that he would not miss out on his housing opportunity with his significant other. Since then, he has had good progress reports and has stayed out of trouble.

A young individual who is affected by both developmental disabilities as well as substance abuse has been homeless, on and off, since 2013. With family support and a desire for drug treatment, she is currently receiving treatment in a facility and attending therapy. Detox and treatment are court orders that she will have to comply with in order to receive the benefit of her drug cases being dismissed. As of April 16, 2020 she was doing incredibly well in her treatment facility and understood that her continued progress was dependent on her positive standing with her court cases.

Another individual who was actually identified by a resident in one of the preliminary meetings has been participating in “Homeless Court” since October, 2019. After dutifully coming to court and maintaining contact with Lila Omura, he finally accepted housing in March, 2020. He had been chronically homeless for over two decades.

On October 3rd of last year, we reunited an individual with his family in another state, and Mayor Brand received the following letter from his mother (shared with her permission):

“Dear Mayor Brand,

I am writing to thank the Redondo Beach Police Department, City Prosecutor’s Office, and Harbor Interfaith Services for the assistance these organizations provided my son who has been homeless for more than three years, and left his home here in (State withheld for privacy) with no explanation. There was concern that he was dealing with mental illness, but there was never an official diagnosis. The LAPD located him and contacted me to inform me of his location, but lost contact with him after his release from the local mental hospital. It was soon learned that he had been arrested in Redondo Beach for trespassing after he had been sitting outside of City Hall for an extended period of time. RBPD Officer Turner contacted me to confirm that I knew him, to which I stated I was his mother and had been praying for his safety. Officer Turner eased my concerns by stating that efforts were being made to reunite him with his family.

He had become ill due to heat exposure and was hospitalized for nearly a week. He is currently in a mental hospital in Redondo Beach, and is for the first time in many years finally accepting the court-ordered treatment. I was able to speak to my son, which had I not done in almost two years. I fully believe this progress is due to the Redondo Beach Police Department, City Prosecutor’s Office, and with the assistance of Harbor Interfaith Services, who has been kind enough to share with me his success stories. I hope and believe that he will be well enough to come home after completing his treatment, which would not have been possible had it not been for the care and kindness he has received.

Homelessness is a challenge everywhere, and when you find people who are willing to help return a loved one to their family, it is indeed a blessing. I have thanked Officer Turner, and others within the RBPD many times, but they are much too modest and tell me they are only doing their jobs. This may be true, but the kindness and professionalism they have shown, not to mention the respect they have shown my son despite him being homeless, is appreciated from the bottom of my heart.

Again, thank you, Mayor Brand, for the kindness given my son by the Redondo Beach Police Department, City Prosecutor’s Office, Harbor Interfaith Services, and the City of Redondo Beach.

Sincerely, [name withheld]”

Attending mental health court was another change in the Prosecutor’s Office. Previously, the District Attorney’s Office appeared on all mental health cases in the County. When the number of cases skyrocketed, the District Attorney’s Office could no longer appear on city cases. Redondo prosecutors attend hearings in Hollywood court while most cities waive their appearances. The prosecutors advocate for public safety and ensure that the judges are made aware of our local

issues. For example, a chronically homeless female had several cases in mental health court, and had been treated under the court's jurisdiction for two months. A new case was later filed, and our prosecutors had to fight the pressure from the defense attorney and the judge to dismiss the new case. When that new case joined her other cases in mental health court, there was a report from the doctors that it was unlikely she would regain competency before the jurisdiction of the original cases would time out, which legally obligates the judge to terminate all cases and release the defendant back to the community. However, our prosecutor objected to terminating and informed the judge of the defendant's history. The judge immediately commented that this was why it was so important to have the City Prosecutors appear on their cases. Instead of dismissing all the cases, the judge kept the new case open, which allowed the defendant to continue treatment for three more months. After two months, she was stabilized enough to allow her to enter a locked-down hospital rather than staying in jail. With her maximum commitment approaching, the judge will have to dismiss the case soon. Normally in Los Angeles County, they would release her to a community-based program. However, during this Emergency, the community-based programs are full and unavailable. Through coordination between the prosecutor, her defense attorney, her treatment team, and Lila Omura, she will be released to an FSP with housing and wrap around mental health services. This discharge plan prevented her from ending back in the street with no medication, food or housing and likely to reoffend.

There is more than anecdotal evidence of the success so far of the Pilot Program. As a result of the Pilot Program, the Police Department has been closely monitoring crime data, arrest data, calls for service, customer satisfaction levels, community concerns and public perception by utilizing some of the advanced technologies that recover raw public sentiment data. After looking at a variety of data sets it is very apparent that, not even a year into the Pilot Program, our actions have decreased our transient related calls for service, increased our customer satisfaction level, increased public perception of safety, decreased our community concern for homelessness, decreased our property crimes, and overall, decreased our Part 1 crimes levels in the City. Moreover, the "Homeless Court" approach has received praise from Judges in the Torrance Superior Court who see its effectiveness, and the judges from mental court value our appearances.

Based on the initial success, I strongly recommend keeping this Pilot Program going.

Fortunately, spearheaded by Councilman Horvath and John LaRock, the City applied for and was awarded a grant from the South Bay Cities Council of Governments to fully fund the program for an additional fiscal year (\$245,287). The award was made in recognition that this Pilot Program is one of the few truly innovative programs trying to address both the causes of homelessness and its effects on the community. With the current Emergency and its impacts in this area, we are very fortunate to be able to continue this Program (at least for one more year).