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June 4, 2024

Governor Newsom  
1021 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Response to May Revision of Proposed 2024-25 State Budget

Dear Governor Newsom,

The Homeless Action Center (HAC) writes to you with our comments on Governor Newsom's May Revision to the proposed 2024-25 state budget. Specifically, we write with concerns about the reversion and reappropriation of the Housing & Disability Advocacy Program (HDAP) funding.

Since 1990 HAC has provided advocacy and legal representation at no cost to disabled, homeless, and very low income people in Alameda County. Our primary service is representing clients in Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) claims. While SSI and SSDI claims are pending, HAC also represents individuals in attaining and retaining General Assistance, CalFresh, Medi-Cal, and CalWORKs. We also provide housing navigation, homeless outreach services, and transitional housing to our clients. HAC holds drop in services four days a week, open to anyone in the community who needs public benefits assistance or has questions. We assist clients and community members to access identity documents like IDs and birth certificates, notary services, supporting connection to medical and mental health care, and referrals to other service providers.

HDAP funding has allowed us to greatly expand our housing services for clients. Through HDAP funding HAC now operates a 7-bed transitional residence called Almost Home. HDAP funding pays for three housing navigators, who are each helping 25 clients at any given time. Our Mending Bridges project reunites formerly incarcerated clients with family members by covering their portion of housing costs to live with family. All of these programs would end without HDAP funding, putting clients back on the streets and with no one to advocate for them to access housing. It would be a crushing blow for our clients and increase the numbers of on the street homeless people.

### **Almost Home**

With HDAP funding, HAC created and now operates Almost Home, brand new safe haven housing with 7 beds. Almost Home is a house on Haste Street in Berkeley managed by HAC staff. Almost Home provides seven SSI legal services clients with temporary, supportive, transitional housing. The goal of the program is to stabilize clients when they are near

completion of the long waiting period for resolution of their SSI case and permanent housing placement through housing case management. Almost Home allows HAC to place some clients in-house, making it even simpler for attorneys to reach them while they work on their cases. Alameda County has an additional Safe Haven temporary housing site, Casa Maria. Casa Maria houses 17 people at a time. Since December 2020 the two Safe Havens have sheltered 106 people, 22 of whom were aged 55 or older. Transitional housing is an important step in the journey to being permanently housed, as it gives clients a chance to reacclimate to being indoors, to learn how to care for a space, and to be ready to succeed in permanent housing. Without HDAP funding Almost Home and Casa Maria would have to close, putting currently housed people back on the street and allowing for no future transitional housing.

Currently all Almost Home and Casa Maria residents are on a pathway to permanent housing. If the HDAP funding is taken away, they will no longer be on a pathway to permanent housing, and they will all have to leave their current temporary housing and be back living on the street.

### **Housing Navigation**

HDAP funding covers three housing navigation positions at HAC. Our housing navigators work closely with SSI clients who are on the coordinated entry list to get them into housing. HAC serves the most chronically homeless and disabled, so that the most in need of help and least able to access help on their own get meaningful access to services. Housing navigators are a part of our outreach team, they regularly meet people where they are at, including on the streets and in encampments. They keep in contact with clients through these visits so when housing opportunities appear they have already built rapport and can more easily locate the unhoused individual to get them into housing. Housing navigators help clients get “document ready”, which requires obtaining extensive documentation such as gathering disability verification, income verification, and identity documentation so when a client is matched with a housing opportunity, there are no barriers to immediate move in. If a person is matched with housing and not “document ready” they may lose that housing opportunity. Once a client decides to accept a match, housing navigators assist with the move in day, including driving the client to the new apartment, helping them move their current possessions in, and driving them to a store to buy necessary new apartment items such as sheets, towels, dishes, and cutlery using Home Stretch funding the housing navigators applied for. Between December 2020 and January 2024, HAC outreach staff navigated 135 disabled, homeless clients into permanent housing. Without HDAP funding, those clients would still be on the streets.

### **Mending Bridges**

Mending Bridges is a pilot program focused on creating a pathway toward housing instead of homelessness for people leaving jail or prison. The program provides a \$600 rental payment to family members, including family of choice, who are able to house SSI Advocacy clients who are experiencing homelessness. Clients must have been involved with the justice system to be eligible. The family member agrees to provide a room in their house or apartment. Mending Bridges pays a one time \$1,000 rehousing payment and then an ongoing \$600 monthly payment while the individual’s SSI is pending. Once their SSI is approved, the client is responsible for the

ongoing \$600 rental payment. The pilot aims to improve the connection between the communities that support formerly incarcerated individuals experiencing homelessness, while reducing the rent burden on the family members who are housing them. The project also provides a staff member to problem solve and make sure that the housing is a good fit for the client and their family. A significant proportion of clients we serve experience homelessness immediately after incarceration, and loss of connection to supportive community such as family; the Mending Bridges program is a way to shift this paradigm. Without this HDAP funded program these individuals would be on the street.

## **Conclusion**

California has experienced an alarming spike in homelessness. There could not be a worse time to cut funding to programs that specifically target the housing needs of people with disabilities. The May Revision proposes cuts to HDAP, one of the only programs focused on preventing homelessness for people with disabilities. We urge the Legislature to reject this proposal. HDAP currently funds three very successful programs just in our one non-profit. The impact of removing this funding across the state would be cruel to the many people who have benefited and will benefit in the future. These HDAP funded programs are working to get people with disabilities off the street and into permanent housing. Taking away the current funding would put these disabled individuals back on the streets and would take away pathways for individuals to secure permanent housing in the future. In a time of an unprecedented homelessness crisis for this State, where the Governor has prioritized moving people out of homelessness, cutting funding that is currently allowing that to happen is nonsensical. HDAP is currently getting people out of tents and into housing, Alameda County has distributed this money in a way that ensures it is being utilized on the ground. Taking back this money will put people on the street and create more red tape and roadblocks before they have hopes of getting back into housing. Money should not be cut for working housing programs, instead all possible programs that get people out of homelessness voluntarily should be funded.

Most notably, this funding was already promised, and HAC's efficiently targeted expansion of services was in reliance on delivery of that funding. To rescind the funding now is unconscionable. HAC pleads with the governor and the state legislature to stop this clawback cruelty.

Sincerely,

/s/

Patricia E. Wall  
Executive Director

Cc: Senator Nancy Skinner  
Senator Steve Glazer  
Senator Aisha Wahab  
Representative Buffy Wicks  
Representative Rebecca Bauer-Kahan  
Representative Mia Bonta

Representative Liz Ortega  
Representative Alex Lee  
Assembly Committee on Budget  
Senate Budget and Fiscal Review  
Committee