



## **California’s Leading Homeless Policy Organizations Say NO to Proposition 36: Measure Likely to Increase Homelessness, Despite What Proponents Claim**

As the leading homeless policy organizations in California, with deep commitments to ending homelessness for the nearly 200,000 people sleeping outside or in shelters on any given night around the state, we stand united in opposition to Proposition 36, which will likely make homelessness worse.

In a cynical and deceptive ploy that plays on voters’ deep concerns about homelessness, proponents of this measure have dubbed it the “Homelessness, Drug Addictions, and Theft Reduction Act.” But absolutely nothing in Prop 36 will alleviate homelessness.

Instead, this measure may make homelessness worse for the following reasons:

- Prop 36 will swell the prison population and increase the pipeline to homelessness. The California criminal justice system incarcerates a higher rate of people than almost any other democracy in the world, traumatizes them, shatters their social and economic connections to their communities, severely restricts their future access to housing and employment, offers woefully inadequate treatment for drug offenses and re-entry services, and discharges people directly into homelessness at alarming rates. According to a recent statewide study of homelessness, 19% of people experiencing homelessness, nearly 35,000 people on any given night, entered homelessness from an institution such as prison or a prolonged jail stay.<sup>1</sup>
- Prop 36 will exacerbate racist outcomes in who experiences homelessness in California. Californians who are Black are almost 9.5 times more likely to be incarcerated than white Californians, while Californians who are indigenous are 6.5 times more likely. These well-documented outcomes<sup>2</sup> contribute to a homeless population that is significantly more Black and Brown than the state overall: approximately 26% of people experiencing homelessness identify as Black compared to 5% of the overall state population.
- Prop 36 will divert badly-needed resources from safety net programs that prevent people from falling into homelessness, and reconnect people to housing. Early estimates show this Proposition will increase costs to Californians by hundreds of million a year, with one estimate putting the cost to local and state government at \$4.5 billion annually. Paying for Prop 36 will almost certainly put discretionary safety net programs on the chopping block, risking housing, mental health, and treatment programs that are shown to actually be effective at reducing crime.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, State investments in the services and housing to end homelessness continue to comprise less than 0.5% of the state’s ongoing budget, and

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<sup>1</sup> Kushel, M., Moore, T., et al. (2023). *Toward a New Understanding: The California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness*. UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative.

<sup>2</sup> Graves, S., (2021). *Racial Disparities in California’s State Prisons Remain Large Despite California’s Justice System Reforms*. California Budget and Policy Center.

<sup>3</sup> Deshpande, M., & Mueller-Smith, M. (June 2022). “Does welfare prevent crime? The criminal justice outcomes of youth removed from SSI.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 137(4): 2263-2307.

may shrink further as Prop 36 forces spending on failed strategies from the “War-on-Drugs” era.

**We strongly urge voters to reject Prop 36 which is rooted in strategies that have failed time and time again to address public safety and which will likely make homelessness worse.**