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Addressing chronic homelessness in San Bernardino County: James Ramos

By James Ramos

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None of us is immune from the possibility of ending up with less than what we woke up with. Homelessness has become a chronic issue in many communities throughout our nation, the state of California and most specifically, here in the County of San Bernardino. Inland Empire communities have witnessed growing populations of homeless individuals, ranging from children and families to youth and even military veterans. In one way or another, we have all been impacted by this growing reality and it's time to work together to end it.

Last year, the Board of Supervisors took the initiative to address homelessness by finding ways to house identified homeless veterans within the County of San Bernardino. The outcomes of this initiative were successful; 401 identified homeless veterans were housed before Thanksgiving and an additional 162 have been housed since then. This was due to the fruitful collaboration of an advisory board composed of several county departments, and community and private partners. Within a year we have confirmed the benefits of working together, planning strategically and implementing tactics to address veteran homelessness. We learned many lessons in our efforts to house homeless veterans and we want to use that knowledge to expand our goal to include other homeless populations within our county.

On Aug. 16, the Board of Supervisors voted to expand last year's initiative and target chronic homelessness, particularly among chronically homeless youth. We were so encouraged by the results brought forward by the county-led initiative that we moved forward to expand the advisory board's goals and strategic initiatives to focus on chronically homeless individuals. A chronically homeless person as defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is either (1) an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more, or (2) an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

Currently, the county has identified 376 individuals as chronically homeless within our boundaries; 31 of them are youth ages 18 to 24. I strongly believe we can break some of the cyclical and chronic patterns of homelessness, especially when we start focusing on our youth.

As co-chair of the Homeless Youth Taskforce for San Bernardino County, I continue to advocate for additional resources to serve our most vulnerable populations. Our homeless youth face increased risks of chronic homelessness, including victimization, anxiety disorders, depression, PTSD and suicide. Too often, youth turn to a life on the streets because they do not have access to resources, adequate support systems or skills to live independently. By providing better support and additional resources we can help reduce the risk of our homeless youth becoming homeless adults.

By taking action today we can continue to be proactive to this issue and finally put an end to homelessness in San Bernardino County. I thank the Board of Supervisors for helping me expand these efforts and I would also like to thank all of the organizations and individuals who fight every day to end homelessness. Ending

homelessness in our county is no easy task, but by addressing the issue one day at a time we know that we can definitely get there.

Supervisor James Ramos is chair of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors. He represents the Third District.

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