Project Earned Respect: Policy and Program Solution for San Francisco Homeless Problem.

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EARNED RESPECT
A PROGRAM TO PREVENT AND END THE HOMELESS ISSUE

This is a proposal and system to help the City of San Francisco and Cities like it to combat the current rise of homelessness. Instead of being extraordinarily specific this program suggestion has been left or drafted as a skeleton or framework by Joel Drotts Juris Doctorate, which then can be added to and built upon by those with the power and authority to do so in government. The Earned Respect program system recognizes that there is a large section of the general public who are either high-functioning homeless or about to become homeless, and due to no fault of their own they have found themselves trying to “hotel-hop,” “couch-surf,” and with only minimal help from the government could finally experience the benefits of permanent and constant housing. This level of homelessness has been mostly ignored and in fact considered “housed” by the current government systems and programs in place. However, this huge population which the government has decided not to help, out of a lack of shortsightedness and understanding of how and when homelessness actually takes place. This is also the largest group of individuals in real need of government or charitable aid, and a group of individuals that are at the most critical point on the homelessness scale. Moreover, it is this group who would experience the greatest bang for the buck benefit compared to the amount of aid given, and this largely invisible group if aided would do the most in the way of homelessness prevention.

Program Attributes and Must Haves:

1. Introduction of “hotel-dollars” tied to food-stamp cards.
2. Only requirements are $200-$300 cash a week and a Cal-fresh Food-stamp Card
3. Immediate aid, no wait, no lists, merely be registered on SF County Cal Fresh Card Program, have $200 or $300 for couples, and receive for weekly room.
4. No social worker, drug program, or overt and UN-needed government intrusion into payers lives, but plenty of resources made available at office if so wanted.
5. No quotas of race, sex, or orientation. Merely have the money, and be currently receiving Cal Fresh Food Stamps.

This system purposes a dollar matching and obstacle removal government program that should be made available, to those individuals capable of paying to the system an amount of $200-$300 a week. The only qualifiers for this program shall be (A) the individual must be receiving government food-stamps, and (B) they can pay to the government office running this program $200.00-$300.00 cash a week. It is for this hardest struggling, most ignored, and largest section of the homeless population which Earned Respect targets for the delivery of the long needed and absent aid they so deserve! This group, which is has been traditionally stuck in between the cracks created by government policies and programs that are unrealistic in their view of homelessness. This large portion of the lowest income gets ignored by a government that insists these people are either “low-income housed,” and refuses to lift a single finger in aid or dollar in help until they degrade to a state of completely without resources or hope and are “completely homeless” all together. This group of not-drug addicts or mental patients is the actual largest segment of the homeless population. However, there is nothing for them as far as useful help or aid, and they are punished for their high-level of functioning, refusals not to just give up on themselves and take to a tent outside. This program promises to reward and help those who help themselves, instead of punishing this group by insisting this group gets worse or on probation/parole, lives outside 24/7, or relegated to a homeless shelter before government aid them in getting better!
This program will address how homelessness truly is, and targets those with the best help exactly when they need it most. The purpose is to offer truly preventative and helpful aid when, where, how, and to whom it will be most effective in reducing the on the street homeless numbers.

One: The Government Must Offer Weekly Rooms for $200-$300

The Government shall create an office or program where at any day of the week an individual can walk into this office and with nothing more than their food-stamp card and $200-$300 receive a guaranteed SRO or hotel room for six nights and seven days. The key to this is the immediacy and little to no on-boarding which should be required for this program. Either people can sign up at the same time they get food-stamp card, or register the first time they use the service. However, the key is quick and easy distribution of the rooms, to those whom are able to pay the $200-$300 which in most cases represents almost 1/2-3/4 of the cost of a weekly hotel room any way. Upon the payment of $200-$300 the government shall deliver to the individual a voucher for one weeks rent of a hotel-room at any number of the various hotels that the government will have contracted with ahead of time. This simple act alone would stunt the growth of homelessness, properly supplement the low income programs already in place, and be the instantaneous sort of stable help that truly reflects how homelessness actually happens. The program would also offer the true stepping stone and social net that is needed by our society.

Two: The Government Can Expand Upon the Programs Already In Place

The City of San Francisco already has programs where they contract with SRO hotels and give those rooms away for free to a certain segment of the homeless population. However, exactly who receives these rooms and upon what grounds is highly confusing and arbitrary. Usually, those lucky enough to receive these free government hotel-rooms are required to either on probation or parole, or forced to live in the dormitory styled homeless shelters for an amount of time of 30 documented days. It is unclear why the government has put these useless and unrealistic requirements on an already struggling population, and continues to insist that these harmful requirements be met before the government decides to help. Moreover, the current programs are not proactive, do nothing to prevent homelessness as it occurs, and merely treat the symptom know as homelessness. This program however, would actually prevent homelessness by ensuring people can stay off the street, remain housed, and are offered a safety valve landing board from which they can begin to reconstruct their lives and better their situation.

Three: The Government Rents the Rooms

The City of San Francisco is more than capable of offering and funding this program, as there are 33,642 hotel-rooms inside city limits (as of September 2012), and according to PKF Consulting there are 215 Hotels in San Francisco, approximately 20,000 of these rooms are within walking distance of the Mo scone Center (Where the homeless are), and can be paid for out of the Hotel Tax which is at 14%. The current hotel tax trust fund pays for grants for the Arts (GFTA), which is a portion of the City’s General Fund. In 2015 the fund paid nearly $10.3M was shared by 213 cultural groups and arts activities. This program once implemented would merely cause the City to match the dollar amount if needed, and guarantee those capable of scraping together $200-$300 of their own on weekly basis a room and a roof.
Residences for $800-$1,000 a month inside City Limits!

At present getting housing is a long and hard process, which is full of arbitrary favoritism, and any number of ways that people get picked, or more commonly left out of getting housing. At the same time the rental increases have completely decimated the lowest income San Francisco citizens, and yet there is not a single program that is readily available to offer the sort of help most needed to the sort of people who need it most and can benefit from it best. This program would catch and carry those people that have been and will be priced out of their apartments, as greedy landlords find ever increasing loopholes to remove rent controlled tenants from their homes in order to charge 2 to sometimes 5 times the rent. This program also acknowledges that up until about three years ago, it was possible to find a studio apartment for about $800-$1000 a month. They wouldn't be the best or nicest studio apartments, but it would be a roof and four walls at least. However, today you'd be hard pressed to find even SRO single rooms, with shared bathrooms, and no kitchen in them for about $800-$1000 a month. Meaning rents have gone up very fast, while jobs and wages have actually greatly gone down (At least for those people in this low income job range.).

$15.00 x 40 hours x 4 weeks= $2,400 gross (Not the fault of those in this group.)

For these reasons there has been a huge up-tick in the homeless population, and a large change in the demographic, needs, and problems of the current homeless population. It is exactly the inability to get a studio for about $800-$1000 a month, which needs to be addressed. Why this specific price range and target demographic? It's because $15.00 x 40 hours x 4 weeks= $2,400. That's gross by the way, and assuming people are lucky enough to get paid $15.00 an hour. At the same time one must take into consideration ones ability to come up with first and last months rent, which is a huge obstacle to many people who can afford the $1000.00 a month studio apartments, if they even existed. What's worse is now SRO residential hotels, have taken to begin to now do credit checks, ask for large deposits, and are on the average about $400 a week or $1,600 a month. Moreover, there is absolutely no regulation or help in this space from the local government, which more or less simple bends to the will of the wealthy hotel and building owners wishes. Meanwhile, you have more and more San Francisco citizens falling into this income and living space zone.

These are not the troubled tent dwellers you see on the street, AT LEAST NOT YET. What generally happens is these people can only maintain this hotel hopping, large security deposits, booked room, and corrupt and unhelpful building owners for so long, and then it catches up to them, they lose their sources of income, and then they end up on the street. It can not be explained or overstated strong enough just how hard it is to attempt to regain any footing what-so-ever once a person is on the street completely, and the mere act of showering, having clean clothes, access to a computer to job search, and a bed to sleep in so as to be well rested for work are in of themselves often hours long processes to obtain (If not days). For this reason, the government and society has a hugely vested interest in keeping as many people in this area or economic and residential zone housed in a steady place as long as possible, so they may begin to build their lives and experience upward social and financial mobility. The alternative is always much more costly to all parties involved, including Joe-blows tax payer who doesn't even realize it.
**Government Oversight and Regulation is Needed**

Moreover, the government’s involvement would help people to obtain permanent housing faster, by possibly placing program participants into rooms that if they make rent weekly four times will get to finally keep their rooms. At current every hotel illegally either tosses the residents out or makes them change rooms right before the 32 day cut off that transmutes a transient hotel-room into a residential one. This is due to the complete lack of oversight and policing of this frequently violated law, which the government leaves to be policed by non-profits, and tenants with enough time and know how to file actions in small claims court to press their own rights. With government involvement the stock of available weekly residential hotel-rooms could and would be monitored, could be grown or shrunk depending upon needs, make the rooms readily findable and accessible, and would prevent the new and corrupt tactics the landlords of these hotels often deploy to prevent people from gaining permanent housing, as well as prevent the over-charging and financial draining of the most financially vulnerable and unable to withstand financial hardships in our society.

**Creation of Hotel Dollars**

By making the requirements simply $200 for a single person, or $300 for couples or people with children, what the City would create a truly fair and equitable program that is not based upon sex, color, age, or sexual orientation. By making the only two qualifiers the money to pay for a week, and a food-stamp card to track and prove financial need this program would be the fairest ever created. Moreover, the government could utilize the food-stamp cards for greater control, tracking of program users use patterns to better allocate funding, track popularity, and in general create greater ease of use in this new program. By adding the dollars paid by the payer in need of housing and any matching dollars required to pay for a weekly room to the payers food-stamp card, the government could ensure the dollars get delivered to the hotels, while giving the payer a say in the quality of the rooms. This could be done by adding a “hotel dollars” system which only the government may/can convert and exchange for real dollars.

Creating “hotel-dollars” spendable at only participating hotels which are transformed and cashed by this government office, the government office will be given a secondary level of control over both the quality of the hotels, the treatment of the residents, as well as a fail-safe on the tenants to spend the money where and how it was supposed to be spent. This program could and would also create another layer for fraud protection, should unscrupulous individuals seek to game the system once in place. There may well be additional uses for the use of hotel-dollars that are as of yet unrealized or understood.

As stated above the City of San Francisco has approximately 33,000 hotel-rooms in San Francisco. However, due to cost, lack of proper ID, unfair deposits charged in addition to the boarding costs, lack of being able to locate residential rooms, over-booking, day 31 mandatory room moves, landlord prejudices or arbitrary “right to refuse customers,” unfair SRO hotel rules, refusals to rent to couples, time/energy in locating available room, lack of credit-card, and a whole laundry list of issues and problems that are added to the burdens faced by individuals that are stuck in this economic and living conditions bracket. That's on top of having to deal with crime, possible police harassment, economic prejudice, and dealing with their own feelings of dignity and self-worth associated with seeing so much wealth (Such as is present in San Francisco) and knowing it has or is passed you by.
This large group of homeless individuals are largely employed at least part time, or are capable of acquiring a certain amount of money on a weekly basis to aid themselves in ensuring they could or would be housed. As stated, the government currently and wrongly calls these individuals housed, and more often than not those individuals surviving at this level of existence are only capable of doing so for a short period of time before the lack of true real help, difficulties and costs in maintaining even this level of existence, and lack of immediately available resources for the completely ignored group finally over takes them and they degrade to a level where they can no longer find a roof for the night, lose their jobs or meager incomes, and succumb to finally becoming what the government considers homeless. However, more often than not had there been a minimal amount of targeted aid for this group of people made available, their degradation into complete homelessness could had been avoided and therefore a less costly and more dignifying way to solve the issue by all stakeholders and parties involved. This system or proposed program lays out exactly how and when homeless advocates and governments can actually deliver the most beneficial aid to this group of high-functioning individuals, about to be homeless, part time homeless, most ignored, but definitely the actual largest segment of the homeless population in the City of San Francisco and across the country.