POLICY POTENTIAL: EXAMINING ALTERNATIVE POLICY SOLUTIONS TO MITIGATING CALIFORNIA’S HOMELESSNESS CRISIS

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This thesis studies the ways that California is attempting to mitigate homelessness through implementation of public policy solutions. It is difficult to understand on face value why one of the wealthiest states in the nation also has some of the highest rates of homelessness. Thus, this work was borne out of a desire to better understand the relationship between homelessness and public policy and what solutions may be possible to mitigate homelessness through policy in the future. Chapter 1 and 2 introduce the topic of homelessness and provide a review of relevant literature regarding homelessness as a general issue, the physical and mental health implications of homelessness, the criminalization of homelessness, how public policy addresses homelessness, and homelessness in California. Chapter 3 discusses the research design and two research questions for the paper which broadly question what kinds of solutions have been effective in mitigating homelessness and what political and policy changes are necessary to increase affordable housing in California in the future. Chapter 4 and 5 provide an in-depth analysis of the results of the Research Questions and attempt to provide answers to the questions above through data collection and interviews. Ultimately, public policy relating to homelessness requires a Housing First approach in which housing is seen as the first priority in any mitigation strategy. The thesis adds to the study of public policy in the United States relating to marginalized populations, and prompts further inquiries into how the California might continue to reform its homeless mitigation strategies.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This undergraduate honors thesis examines the issue of how public policy in California addresses homelessness, especially in regard to the issue areas of housing, criminalization, and health. Homelessness policy, and specifically how policy attempts to influence homelessness mitigation in California, is important to study because currently California is home approximately one third of the entire homeless population of the United States and little has been done at the state level to address what has been declared as an ongoing state crisis. Focusing on housing, criminalization and health are worthy of study because of the ways they interact to exacerbate or increase cycles of homelessness. All these issue areas are interconnected and help to form the landscape contemporary homelessness.

In this thesis, I address two important research questions. First, what kinds of alternative housing solutions have been effective in decreasing homelessness in California broadly, and cities specifically? Second, what political and policy changes are necessary to increase affordable housing in California?

To answer Research Question 1, I will examine several alternative models of affordable housing or transitional housing being implemented in California today including Safe Parking Programs, Tiny Homes, and Project Roomkey. Additionally, I also examine the way that municipal ordinances have led to the need for these kinds of programs in this section. A throughout analysis of the Safe Parking Programs run by New Beginnings Counseling Center in Santa Barbara, Dreams for Change in San Diego and the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority in the greater Los Angeles area is conducted to examine what
kinds of services these programs offer and how they are similar and different. Additionally, I also gather data from Point in Time Surveys conducted in Santa Barbara, Los Angeles and San Diego to contextualize each Safe Parking Program given the state of homelessness in each city. Subsequently, a cursory examination of Tiny Homes and Project Roomkey is provided to see what new kinds of policy or programs may be going forward.

The results of Research Question 1 indicate that while programs like Safe Parking, Tiny Homes, and Project Roomkey represent important steps in the pursuit of a housing first model, the most successful ones combine other resources with the element of housing. Currently, the roadblocks which exist to perpetuate cycles of homelessness are too great to be combated with shelter alone. For example, criminalization ordinances which can inflict monetary and even criminal record charges for living while homeless exist which can make it nearly impossible for someone to keep up with the costs of living even in an alternative form of transitional housing like an RV. However, the increase in public policy initiatives like Project Roomkey and Tiny Homes show the slow acceptance of a Housing First model. As these continue to expand, it will prove important that their data is accurately reported and made public so that scholars and policy makers can actually see what kinds of impacts these programs have on the homelessness in cities and across California.

To answer Research Question 2, I reached out to homeless advocates who specifically work with Safe Parking Programs to better understand what other factors exist in blocking the availability of affordable housing. In speaking with experts Cassie Roach of New Beginnings Counseling Center and Teresa Smith of Dreams for Change, I found that while other factors may exist, a general lack of housing continues to be, in their eyes,
the biggest obstacle to solving homelessness. Both see housing as a human right and while other policy changes might support their goal to help and house as many clients as possible, currently there is not enough housing infrastructure for individuals experiencing homelessness.

This thesis begins with a review of the literature on homelessness in general, the intersection between physical and mental health and homelessness, the criminalization of homelessness, how public policy addresses homelessness, and homelessness in California (Chapter 2). Then, the paper posits research questions (Chapter 3) and provides results to both research questions (Chapters 4 and 5). The paper is then concluded and provides suggestions for future scholarship (Chapter 6). A Bibliography (Chapter 7), Appendices (Chapter 8), and my Vita (Chapter 9) complete the thesis.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1: Homelessness, General Discussion

Homelessness exists as both a cause and consequence of poverty, and as a failure of social structures and government to support vulnerable populations in society. Historically, government analysis of homelessness only examined homeless populations in relation to national economic and health trends such as the Great Depression of the 1930s and the de-institutionalization of mental health facilities in the 1970s. However, recent literature and analysis by academic and government entities recognize a change in the way homelessness exists in the United States since the 1980s. Specifically, structural economic and social trends, individual-level determinants, and public policy all play a role in how and why people become homeless (Evans et al., 2019). Understanding twentieth century homelessness requires several important distinctions in terms of defining different homeless populations. Homeless populations today can be split into several categories. The first category are those considered “chronically” homeless, individuals who have been homeless between 1-5 years. Chronic homeless individuals tend to be disproportionately single males, elderly, experience one or more disabilities, and often have chronic conditions such as mental health, alcohol or drug problems (Burt 2003). Chronic homeless populations are what many believe is typical of homeless populations. However, since the 2008 financial crisis, increases in the second category of homeless populations, “at-risk” homeless persons, have become more common.

At-risk homeless persons include populations who are vulnerable to experiencing any level of homelessness due to multiple risk factors. These factors include, but are not
limited to, the inability for people to engage in housing and labour markets, obtain economic capital, participate in institutions, maintain relationships, and access health services. Any of these factors when combined constitute determinants of individuals being at-risk to becoming homeless (Batterham, 2017). At-risk homeless populations differ from chronic homelessness in that they may not be what is considered homeless yet, but due to social structures and determinant trends might become homeless if no intervention occurs. For example, someone in an at-risk population may be facing eviction, live in unsafe home environment like victims of domestic violence, be an ethnic minority, or someone with low levels of education (Batterham, 2017). Both chronic and at-risk homeless populations are often discussed in homeless policy and homeless literature. However, to fully understand all current types of homelessness, a third category should be included. Recent classifications of homeless populations also describe “unsheltered” homelessness as another categorization. Unsheltered homeless populations includes those living on the streets, in parks, or other areas not intended for human habitation. Unsheltered homeless people are also significantly more likely than sheltered homeless people to experience health challenges, violence and trauma, and longer episodes of homelessness. Unsheltered homeless people also interact more frequently with law enforcement and emergency health services than people in shelters (Gabriel & Ciudad-Real, 2020). Though chronically homeless people can also be considered within the unsheltered homeless category, unsheltered homeless people are not limited to chronically homeless populations. Though chronic, at-risk, and unsheltered homeless populations differ in key areas, they are all...
evidence of a combined failure of government policy and ingrained social structures to provide adequate relief for vulnerable populations.

2.1.1: Homelessness, Demographics: Gender, Race, Age, National Origin

Current homelessness trends in the United States differ across multiple demographic areas. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in 2019 seventeen out of every 10,000 people or 567,715 individuals in the United States, were experiencing homelessness on a given night. Among overall homeless populations, individuals make up 70% of people experiencing homelessness, while 30% were minors and families. Regarding gender, it is estimated that 60% of all people experiencing homelessness are male. Subsequently, women are the second largest gender population among homeless persons, then transgender populations, and finally gender non-conforming populations. While it is estimated that on any given day 202,623 single homeless adults are over the age of 50, research and public policy finds that unaccompanied youth are considered a highly vulnerable group. Unaccompanied youth make up about 6% of homeless populations. Other highly vulnerable populations include unsheltered homeless persons, which represent 37% of all homeless populations across. Of that 37%, 1 in 2 are individuals. Chronically homeless individuals make up 17% of homeless populations. Once thought to be an especially vulnerable population, U.S. Veterans now only make up 7% of overall homeless populations. This marks a 50% decline in homelessness for U.S. Veterans in the past decade.

Homeless demographics by race indicate that Pacific Islanders and Native Americans are the most likely race to experience homelessness, when considering their
portion of the overall population (State of Homelessness: 2020 Edition, 2020). For Pacific Islanders and Native Americans, each group’s share of homeless populations is more than double their share of the general population. This is slightly lower for African American and Hispanic populations. African Americans are estimated to be 40% of overall the homeless population but make up only 13% of the overall population. The case is even more severe for Hispanics who make up 21% of homeless populations but only 18% of the overall population. White and Asian people are significantly underrepresented compared to other races. Figure 1 from the National Alliance to End Homelessness gives a visual representation of the immense racial disparities present among homeless populations for minority populations as described above.

2.1.2: Homelessness, Students Discussion

One group often omitted from national homelessness discussions are homeless students. Students experiencing homelessness are often excluded from national data sets
including data from HUD because of a tendency by national data on homelessness to exclude people who are considered to be “doubled up.” Doubled up is when multiple homeless people live in less visible locations such as cars or abandon buildings. Occurrences of doubling-up are necessary for many homeless students or homeless families, indicating major short comings in national data. That said, the U.S. Department of Education estimates that in the 2015-2016 school year, 1.3 million public school students in the U.S. experienced homelessness, a doubling of the number of homeless students over the past decade. Similar to HUD reporting, this data also neglects to include students who may be couch surfing or living in multiple places over the course of a year pointing to their status as “at-risk” of homelessness rather than what would be considered a typical unaccompanied homeless youth (Evangelist & Shaefer, 2020). As educators and policy stakeholders grow more concerned about students as a distinct kind of homeless population, more studies emerge from universities analyzing if their own students experience homelessness and/or housing insecurity. A study conducted by the California State University (CSU) system in 2018 revealed that 10.9% of CSU students reported experiencing homelessness in the last 12 months. Students who experienced homelessness also reported higher levels of physical and mental health consequences that had negative impacts on academic performance. The study noted that African American and first-generation students had 18% higher rates of homelessness than their peers (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018). As one of the largest public college systems in the country, CSU provides a critical perspective on how college students may be impacted by homelessness. Though often left out of government issued homelessness statistics, student homelessness is a sub-
group clearly vulnerable to experiencing determinants of at-risk homelessness and instances of doubling up when their lack of visibility may exclude them from access to necessary services.

2.1.3: Homelessness, LGBTQ Discussion

Another sub-group requiring further discussion is LGBTQ+ homeless populations. Homelessness among LGBTQ+ populations is especially noticeable for LGBTQ+ youth. It is estimated that LGBTQ+ youth are 120% more likely to experience homelessness than heterosexual and cisgender persons. [Additionally, while only 7-10% of general homeless youth interact with service providers, 20-40% of youth experiencing homelessness are identify to service providers as LGBTQ+ (Price et al., 2019)]. LGBTQ+ homeless youth also tend to experience health and safety problems that non-LGBTQ+ homeless youth may not. A survey conducted by the Williams Institute at UCLA indicated that 68% of the LGBTQ+ youth they interacted with had experienced family rejection, 65% had a history of mental health problems, and 54% had a history of familial abuse (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2017). One study conducted by the Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership in 2010 examined problems faced by LGBTQ+ homeless youth in Los Angeles. It found that LGBTQ+ youth were disproportionately more likely to be robbed, physically assaulted, be a victim of a hate crime due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, and be harassed by the police than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts (Rabinovitz et al., 2010). Despite the overrepresentation of this vulnerable population, gaps exist in the ability for homeless service organization to provide adequate support to LGBTQ+ homeless people (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). This is especially true for transgender homeless populations.
It is estimated that 19% of all transgender or gender non-conforming persons will experience homelessness at some point in their lives. Additionally, transgender youth tend to experience longer episodes of homelessness than other LGBQ+ sub-groups. For transgender adults, many problems exist in their ability to access services and resources allocated to homeless persons. Only recently in 2016, HUD required federally funded shelter programs to provide equal access for transgender people. But, since not all shelters are federally funded, homeless transgender adults still experience significant barriers to obtaining resources. Furthermore, of those transgender adults who do seek shelter accommodations, 55% are harassed by shelter staff or other people in the shelter, 22% are sexually assaulted and 29% are turned away (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2017). The disproportionate rates of LGBTQ+ homelessness in addition to the proven disparities relating to accessing key resources such as shelter, and physical safety indicate that greater attention around LGBTQ+ homeless is needed on a national level.

2.2: Homelessness, Physical-Health Discussion

Academic and policy-focused discussions regarding homelessness often focus on housing as the main obstacle facing homeless persons. Though lack of housing and homelessness are intrinsically linked, there is also a strong connection between health and homelessness. The National Healthcare for Homeless Council reports poor health is one major cause of homelessness. A major injury or illness may begin as solely a health concern but can also result in time spent away from work. If individuals return to work too quickly and re-injure themselves they may worsen in health creating a cycle that can ultimately lead to unemployment, poverty or homelessness. Though an injury or illness in itself does
not guarantee homelessness, once a person with an illness or injury becomes homeless on average they will die 12 years sooner than the general U.S. population. The fact that most homeless persons live without consistent shelter is dangerous for their physical well-being. Living in crowded, stressful situations in shelters or on the streets exposes homeless populations to easily communicable diseases including Tuberculosis, respiratory illness, the flu, hepatitis in addition to violence, malnutrition, and weather exposure. Furthermore, diminished access to consistent or clean medication mechanisms can cause conditions like high blood pressure or diabetes to worsen over time. Similarly, a minor cut or even the common cold can turn into a more serious medical problems like pneumonia or an infection because of exposure to unclean environments (National Healthcare for the Homeless Council, 2018). Below, Figure 2 from the Health Center Patient Survey conducted by the National Healthcare for the Homeless Council in 2009 shows that chronic diseases and disorders regularly double in percent affected for homeless individuals compared to the overall population. Notably, HIV, Hepatitis C and depression are all more than 20% higher in homeless populations than the overall population.

In addition to physical health concerns, homeless persons consistently rank above average in their use of alcohol and drugs compared to the general population. Drug overdose is believed to be the leading cause of death among people experiencing homelessness and many other forms of death for homeless persons can be attributed to substance use in some way such as use of unclean needles (Doran et al., 2018). One study examining the substance use rates of homeless people who sought emergency department treatment found that while cannabis was the most commonly used substance, homeless
patients also reported frequent use of cocaine or crack and heroine (Doran et al., 2018). The study also found that homeless patients had significantly higher rates of lifetime opioid use and that homeless patients commonly reported seeking emergency care for issues related to substance use (Doran et al., 2018). Clearly health determinants are not only a characteristic of populations who may be at risk of homelessness but also a potential cause for more chronic experiences of populations already experiencing homelessness (Betterham, 2017). Concerns around this issue have become more urgent in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research conducted by UCLA in the early days of COVID-19 found that in California, high rates of unsheltered homeless individuals could exacerbate the virus due to insufficient hygiene and the susceptibility of homeless populations to pulmonary diseases (Culhane et al., 2020). Additionally, since by definition homeless populations lack consistent access to housing, COVID-19 shelter in place orders starkly illuminate the need to treat housing as a social determinant of health as well as a human right for homeless persons. In response to concern for homeless populations around COVID-19, multiple cities implemented emergency shelter spaces and isolation units, but long-term solutions in many cities remain unaddressed (Perri et al., 2020). Though physical health concerns for homeless populations are severe, they are also intrinsically linked to mental health concerns and treatment.
2.3: Homelessness, Mental-Health Discussion

Links between mental health issues and homelessness have existed in academic and government discourse regarding homelessness since at least the 1980s. In the 1970s and 1980s, the widespread deinstitutionalization of persons considered to be mentally ill corresponded with increases of visible homelessness, especially on the West Coast. However, where a lot of contemporary homelessness academic literature views deinstitutionalization in the 1970s and 1980s as a major cause of homelessness, that may not necessarily reveal the entire scope of the problem. Those periods of time also saw rapid growth in income inequality indicating that while homeless persons do disproportionately experience mental illness problems, that may only be one reason why a person becomes homeless (Quigley et al., 2001b). Recent analyses of overall homeless health determinants indicate that health conditions both physical and mental are a result of a mix of mental health, substance use, physical health, and social problem concerns. While individuals who
experience homeless may become homeless as a result of one or many extenuating factors, once a person with a mental illness becomes homeless their symptoms can be exacerbated by high stress circumstances, poor physical health, dangerous environments, and infrequent access to food. Any combination of these factors can result in frequent visits to hospitals. Additionally, once a homeless person with a mental illness receives care in a hospital, whether for substance use or not, being discharged from a hospital can result in negative impacts on mental health since a person may have to return to the street or infrequent housing when they leave the hospital (National Healthcare for the Homeless Council, 2018). Behavioral health concerns have also become a concern for researchers examining homeless populations in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. One study conducted by researchers in California and Massachusetts examined how the behavioral health and service use has changed homeless adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. Conducted between April and July of 2020, the study found that mental health symptoms were experienced by 38-48% of participants, participants who had used substances before the pandemic reported a 16-28% increase in use of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana, and 32-44% of participants experienced difficulty accessing behavioral health services. The study cautions against widespread acceptance of the numbers as universal given that it was taken from a small set of individuals already participating in a different clinical trial, but that the results indicate many homeless individuals appear to have more difficulty finding access to basic needs like food and shelter compared to before COVID-19 (Tucker et al., 2020). The relationship between physical and mental health in addition to substance use issues
reveals health factors as a major determinant and ongoing concern for homelessness policy and academic discourse especially as it relates to adequate shelter and safety.

2.4: The Criminalization of Homelessness

Despite the obvious connection between homelessness, a critical need for housing, and access to social and health services, criminalization of behavior associated with homelessness continues to rise in the United States. A report by the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty found increases in all types of laws that criminalize homelessness since 2016. The report examines criminalization laws in 187 cities across the United States. Of the cities studied, 74% of cities have at least one law that restricts camping in public, 51% have at least one law restricting sleeping in public, 55% have at least one law prohibiting sitting or lying down in public, 83% of cities restrict begging in public, 50% restrict living in vehicles, and 76% prohibit scavenging or dumpster diving (Bauman, 2019). Increases of national criminalization of homelessness also come among rises nationally of homeless encampments, especially on the West Coast. Following the 2008 financial crisis, the emergence of tent cities or homeless encampments across the West Coast were thought to be primarily tied to the housing crisis. However, recent research shows that the kinds of policing described above have more to do with the ways homeless persons have been pushed together in certain geographical locations. Though in some respects homeless encampments are considered a special order and policing problem, some cities have legalized encampments as an attempt to find cost-effective policy solutions (Herring & Lutz, 2015). In fact, some homeless communities view encampments as more of a safe space than actual shelters because individuals are able to enjoy more
personal freedoms (Herring, 2014). However, by no means are homeless encampments free from criminal behavior. Homeless encampments are widely associated with potential crime perpetrators and crime victims. Additionally, homeless individuals have significantly higher rates of crime victimization than housed individuals. For example, one study finds that in the area of Los Angeles known as “Skid Row” which houses a majority of the Los Angeles County homeless population also contains crime that goes beyond public nuisance issues like loitering, public urination, and aggressive panhandling. Skid Row is specifically home to vandalism, prostitution, open-air drug markets and robbery gangs (Berk & Macdonald, 2010). That being said, it is unclear how often homeless people specifically engage in serious or violent crimes. One study conducted in Oklahoma City reveals that while there is definitely a relationship between homelessness and criminalization, 76% of study participants had been arrested and 57% had been to jail more than 3 times, violent arrests were the least prevalent type of arrest. More often, people were arrested on drug or alcohol related offenses (Gonzalez et al., 2017). Though this is only one small sample, it is clear that the criminalization of behavior associated with homeless appears to be a far greater concern for homeless populations than being a victim of a violent crime.

2.5: Public Policy Addressing Homelessness

Despite its continued prevalence as an important sociopolitical problem, homelessness has received fairly little attention from Congress in federal legislation. The only major federal legislation on homelessness, the McKinney-Vento Act, of 1987 was renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in 2000. The Act provides funding for many homeless programs and services including emergency and transitional
shelters, permanent housing, healthcare, and job training. The original Act also defined homelessness for all federal funding purposes, but limited the definition to include only individuals. In 2010, the HEARTH (Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing) Act expanded the federal definition of homelessness to include more “at-risk” groups including people who are homeless but do not live on the street or in shelters. This might include people who are doubled up, people in danger of eviction, people who live in motels or do not have consistent housing, and women fleeing domestic violence. By expanding the definition of homelessness the HEARTH Act also expanded what kinds of populations are eligible for federal services. Since the HEARTH Act, most federal, state, and local approaches to public policy have centered around two models for how to approach homelessness from a governmental perspective: The Housing First Model (HFM) and the “Linear” model (Williams, 2017).

2.5.1: The Linear Model

The linear model is the primary way governments addressed homelessness in the 1980s and 1990s. Though never established through any specific acts of congress, the linear model was widely adopted as the standard for best practices around homelessness policy on a local and national level. The linear model calls for policy relating to homelessness to primarily fund emergency shelters that provide services to homeless populations. However, the linear model also requires that homeless people meet certain milestones or criteria to move through steps from emergency shelter or transitional housing to eventually reach permanent housing funded by the shelter. Many shelters that use a linear model still exist in many cities around the U.S. and are sometimes the only option for homeless people in
large cities. Shelters that were required to use a linear model also place limits on the amount of time a homeless person can stay, usually up to 90 days, which in theory will provide enough immediate or short-term shelter relief for homeless populations. The linear model is also at times referred to as the “mainstream model”, “staircase model”, “continuum of care model”, “residential treatment first” or “treatment first model”. However, regardless of what name the linear model is referred under, all programs with these types of requirements are based on the theory that an individual must reform in some way in order to gain and maintain permanent housing. In the linear model, permanent housing is seen as a resource that should not be given to those who are not ready for conquering certain requirements. These requirements can range from mental health stabilization to abstinence from drugs or alcohol, improving financial status through obtaining a job or even behavior regulation. Shelters who implement a linear model range across a broad spectrum. Some are private some are public, they serve multiple kinds of homeless populations, often there is implemented caseworker supervision, which makes it difficult for many to lead private lives. Homeless people often chose not to use shelters for these reasons. However, given the scarcity of shelters even though many do not use their services, they still have to turn people away (Williams, 2017).

Those who support the linear model argue that it is generally practical and cost-effective. In fact, some studies do show that in some cases linear programs can create better health outcomes in the long run especially in cases where individuals struggle with addiction disorders (Tsai & Rosenheck, 2010). However, at its core, criticism of the linear model references the reliance on emergency shelters as a first step, but for many an ultimate
barrier for many to successfully attain permanent housing. Though shelters are often near capacity, there is thought to be not enough beds among all shelters to make them a viable method for permanent or even immediate assistance. Additionally, shelters often turn people away based on gender, age, sexual orientation, language barriers or alcohol and substance use. Further criticism of the linear model finds the emphasis on social assistance to be invasive or leaning towards social control as a key aspect of their programs. Programs and rules in shelters can include curfews, drug tests, parenting or budgeting classes, substance abuse counseling or sobriety requirements. Though these seem helpful, the fact that passing or moving through the requirement of an individual shelter which could be private or publicly funded, can prevent a homeless person from receiving housing is potentially problematic as a solution to homelessness. Regardless of criticism, linear methods to homelessness from private and public policy spheres is unlikely to disappear. However, it is unclear if linear model approaches have done anything to mitigate increases in homelessness on a state or national level. For example, federal government Continuum of Care programs have been funded for over twenty years and yet homelessness is worse now that it was twenty years ago (Williams, 2017). As a response to the failures of the linear model, the Housing First Model grew in popularity in the early 2000s and is now considered to be the primary response to homelessness at a national level.

2.5.2: The Housing-First Model

In contrast to the linear model, the goal of the Housing First Model “HFM” is to provide homeless populations with immediate permanent housing and follow with social services including addiction support or financial training only after housing has been
secured. The HFM was initially theorized in the early 1990s by a non-profit organization called Pathways to Housing in New York City seeking to provide chronic homeless populations with long term services. According to a report conducted by HUD in 2007, the HFM or “supported housing approach” treats housing as a paramount supportive structure for particularly vulnerable homeless populations and should be treated as independent from treatment needs. Centered on populations with mental illness, the study reveals that HFM approaches do have more promising improvements for homeless persons experiencing mental illness (Pearson et al., 2007). The proven success of the HFM for homeless populations with mental illness led to an expansion of HUD’s Veterans Administration Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. The program has distributed more than 97,500 vouchers to veterans experiencing homelessness since 2008. Though originally adopted for use by more chronically homeless populations including veterans and individuals with substance use or mental health problems, the concept of the HFM has been applied to a broader range of homeless populations. For example, increases in rapid re-housing programs, which offer immediate temporary subsides for market housing have largely replaced traditional linear programs for chronic homeless populations, and are a relative staple in state and national approaches to homelessness policy (Evans, 2019). Additionally, the HFM has been assessed to offer homeless populations more independence and privacy that options in the linear model. Theoretically implementing the HFM is done through outreach to homeless populations who are eligible for housing to apply to a program which will help them locate and rent housing. Actual lodgings can vary tremendously. For example often supportive housing can include single room occupancy
buildings (SROs) in addition to mixed use affordable housing projects (Williams, 2017). That said, HFM approaches have been proven to lead to higher housing-retention rates, treatment utilization, and independence for participants (Williams, 2017). However, HFM does have a plethora of problems as well.

The reliance of HFM on affordable housing represents an ongoing concern for the adoption of this particular method. As access to low-income housing continues to diminish, HFM programs are unable to place homeless persons in affordable housing, negating essentially the entire approach (Williams, 2017). Additionally, though the emphasis of HFM approaches on chronically homeless populations means only a relatively small number of homeless persons are actually accepted to HFM programs (Watson et al., 2017). Studies indicate that since Housing First approaches target chronically homeless individuals, homeless families and other populations are not eligible for Housing First programs. This also correlates to data and discourse around homeless populations. For example, there is less data on families who exit homelessness than for chronically homeless individuals. The lack of a holistic discourse around homelessness ultimately leaves out populations who may not live in the street, but double up or move frequently (Williams, 2017). Furthermore, the lack of emphasis on treatment in the basic tenets of the HFM model mean that in actual implementation, harm reduction tactics are often overlooked. Though this has more to do with inadequate explanation and the politicized nature of addressing substance abuse issues on a national level, in the same HUD report from 2007 mentioned above, authors refused to use the term “harm reduction” due to its contentious nature. The political choices made by HUD during the Bush administration may have caused a less
active approach by social service providers attempting to implement the HFM in the mid-2000s (Watson et al., 2017). However, one study comparing Housing First with linear model outcomes for homeless persons with substance abuse disorders found that while problems do still exist for people when they live independently, transitional or linear treatment may not benefit outcomes any more than a Housing First approach (Tsai & Rosenheck, 2010). Other problems with implementation include contextual barriers such as funding and continued presence of linear approaches and the complex nature coordination required in HFM approaches (Watson et al., 2014). Despite these concerns, the steady increase of HFM approaches on a national level in addition to the housing focus of its approach indicates that it may still be a better option than more traditional linear approaches, but undoubtably more research is needed.

2.5.3: The Housing-First & Linear Model in California

In 2016, the California State Legislature passed Senate Bill 1380 (SB 1380), which required all housing programs serving homeless populations to implement a Housing First approach. Under SB 1380 the type of housing considered Housing First includes supportive housing or apartments made affordable through rental assistance and paired with intensive services to promote long term stability and rapid re-housing which connects individuals or families to an affordable apartment through short term rental assistance along with moderate services. The logic of SB 1380 was that general evidential testing on a local and national level saw Housing First as a concrete way to ensure tenants stayed in housing longer and with more stable results than more traditional linear model approaches (California Department of Housing and Community Development). However, for many
advocates and researchers examining homelessness in relation to state-wide policy mandates to implement Housing First approaches find that state officials have not done enough to support the infrastructure that a Housing First model requires. For example, in a report analyzing national trends relating to Housing First programs, California is specifically mentioned as a potential location where a Housing First philosophy has failed. Recent policy language changes by the Trump Administration have harkened back to a linear approach and in part reference places like San Francisco and Los Angeles where homeless populations have increased rather than decreased under a general acceptance of Housing First methodology across the state. Figure 3 taken from Stephen Eide’s report *Housing First and Homelessness: The Rhetoric and the Reality* reveals that while California has added more than 25,000 permanent supportive housing (PSH) units, a characteristic type of housing associated with Housing First, California’s unsheltered homeless numbers have increased by half over the same amount of time (Eide, 2020). Some homeless advocates believe that a Housing First approach is still ultimately the right route for California, but legislative gridlock and a failure by elected officials to fully commit to a Housing First approach for multiple homeless demographic populations could be the main problem.

In 2019, newly elected Governor Gavin Newsome created a Statewide Homelessness Advisory Task Force. In a letter addressed to the Task Force, the California American Civil Liberties Union expressed their concern that while acknowledging the problems that exist in California for combatting homelessness, the Task Force does little to propel Housing First policies forward. The letter specifically references the Task Force’s
chosen focus of “shelter-first strategy” and “doubling down on criminalization for people experiencing homelessness” as policies that are directly opposite to what a Housing First approach urges (Baker et al., 2019). Ultimately, the letter calls for California to embrace “permanent, affordable housing coupled with appropriate services as an immediate response to homelessness and the resources needed to realize this commitment” (Garrow, 2019). Moreover, Housing First approaches have been proven highly effective in California for homeless populations that are not necessarily chronic or unsheltered. For example, one study examining the effects of Housing First methodology for survivors of domestic violence, considered an “at-risk” group, saw 100% of participants exiting the program with stable housing, 93% having learned more about ways to plan for safety in the future, and 96% feeling more hopeful about their future (Sullivan et al., 2017). Though only eight agencies were tested, the study indicates that Housing First approaches when implemented correctly can be highly effective. Though Housing First still is law of the land in California, further explanation of the landscape of homelessness is required for a better understanding of what more can be done to mitigate California’s homelessness crisis.
2.6: Homelessness in California

Though homelessness around the U.S. remains a problem, California’s particular case is without doubt one of the worst in the nation. As of March 2020, California contained nearly one-third of the nation’s homeless, or approximately 130,000 homeless individuals (Mejia, 2020). Over the past decade, homelessness has increased by 22% in California. In addition to overall higher numbers of homeless people, California has the highest number of unsheltered homeless persons in the nation. Approximately 72% of California’s homeless population are considered unsheltered, and thus more at risk to health challenges, violence, and trauma than homeless individuals living in shelters. California’s homelessness crisis is due to a collective failure by state and social structures to address growing risk factors that span decades. However, in recent years many attribute current failings to a widespread lack of affordable housing (Gabriel & Ciudad-Real, 2020).
Indicating a call for action by California’s citizens in response to dramatic increases of homelessness, in the 2020 edition of a yearly survey conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) entitled “Californians & Their Government” responses indicate that homelessness is the number one most important issue that Californians in both political parties want state leaders to address. Additional data from the survey reveal that homelessness as an issue area has gained dramatic importance for citizens even in the past year. In 2019, 7% of likely voters named it as a top issue whereas in 2020, 23% of voters name homelessness as a top issue (Baldassare et al., 2020). Similar to national trends, homelessness demographics in California indicate influences of structural racism. Overrepresented groups include American Indian and Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian and other Asian Pacific Islander groups as well as Black and Latinx populations. Specifically, Latinx people in California are increasingly experiencing higher rates of new homelessness or being homeless for the first time and for less than a year when compared to other ethnic and race groups (Gabriel & Ciudad-Real, 2020). Furthermore, Black homeless populations are a particular concern. As of 2019, approximately 5.8% of Californians identified as Black when according to U.S census data they account for around 30% of California’s homeless population (Baker et al., 2019). Though California’s homelessness crisis is the by-product of a multitude of social and policy factors, three main issue areas emerge as the primary issue concerns for California’s struggles to mitigate homelessness: housing, criminalization, and health.
2.6.1: California Homelessness: Housing

Often cited as the primary reason for the longevity of California’s homelessness crisis, housing is seen by many as the principal obstacle for ending homelessness in California. Part of the problems associated with California’s inability to provide regular affordable housing exist because of economic fluctuations in California’s housing market without legislative regulation relating to housing. Most of California’s most comprehensive housing policy was passed in the 1970s and 80s and did not account for the increasing population growth and capacity problems California now faces. Laws including the Fair Employment and Housing Act of 1980 and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 were developed in attempts to protect civil rights against racist zoning put in place by local governments to restrict access to housing in certain neighborhoods. Since the 1980s, virtually no statewide laws were enacted leaving regulatory control and power to local governments (Radkowski, 2006). Changes in rhetoric surrounding housing and homelessness began to occur in the late 1990s and early 2000s. At that time, many of the causal explanations for homelessness blamed social factors including the deinstitutionalization of mental institutions. However, more recent literature acknowledges that circumstantial changes in housing markets make it nearly impossible for individuals in lower economic brackets to buy or even rent housing (Quigley et al., 2001a). When the cost of living is taken into account, California has one of the highest poverty rates in the nation. 2019 data from the National Low-Income Housing Coalition indicates that 1.3 million extremely low-income renter households are in California, 76% of which are paying more than half their income on rent.
Clearly, California needs more affordable housing. However, as of 2019 only 22 units of affordable housing existed per 100 extremely low-income renters (Baker et al., 2019). Because of this, in the past several decades low-income groups, often associated with at-risk of homelessness, have had to spread into neighborhoods surrounding urban centers in order to afford housing. Initially these instances of urban sprawl have been widely correlated with issues relating to redlining and archaic and racist zoning laws put in place in multiple cities as a means of maintaining the “environment” of different neighborhoods (Rothstein, 2018). Today this phenomenon still exists as an instance of racial exclusion, but can also be tied to environmental justice concerns for housing and homelessness. As groups that qualify as at-risk of homelessness are forced to commute, more fossil fuels are continually emitted causing many to advocate for reforms of CEQA to address a need for development of dense housing located in urban areas (Hernandez et al., 2015). Thus, some of the first housing policy solutions in the past five years in California have focused on the opportunity to allow cities to increase affordable housing in dense urban areas. Beginning in 2016, California passed several bills to try and bring creative solutions to offset California’s homelessness crisis through addressing affordable housing. Two focus areas target specific populations associated with homelessness. In 2016, multiple bills focused on easing zoning restrictions for Accessory Dwelling Units, ADUs, or “granny flats”. Since a legal ADU can access municipal infrastructure essentially creating a tiny home on the same property as a home zoned for single family use only, restrictions on these structures included highly complex ordinances and were subject to many barriers to development (Peterson, 2018). One such barrier is a social movement
slowing virtually all housing development in California. The NIMBY or “not in my backyard” group contains individuals who aim to maintain neighborhood environments in single family zoned areas or are simply anti-development. Members of the NIMBY movement are often white, wealthy homeowners who come into stark contrast with the YIMBY or “yes in my backyard” movement now advocating for more comprehensive housing and homelessness solutions (Maiman, 2019). In 2019, bills were proposed related to rent control, additional deregulation around zoning as well as CEQA reform as it relates to projects around homelessness (Maclean et al., 2019). While the bill requiring statewide rent control bill was passed, the bill in question only requires vacancy decontrol or limiting of the year-to-year increases in rents a landlord can charge a tenant but allows the rent to increase to market price between tenancies. Though this was definitely an important policy, it does little to fix problems relating to urban density housing construction. In the same legislative cycle, local governments continuously blocked attempts by the state to mandate affordable housing projects. For example, in 2019 a proposed bill would have prevented local governments from blocking high density housing development near transit hubs (Evans et al., 2019). The bill ultimately failed. In Governor Gavin Newsom’s 2020-21 Budget section relating to the State’s plan for homelessness, Governor Newsom states that the severe affordable housing crisis is in part directly responsible for putting more Californians at risk to housing instability and potential homelessness (Petek, 2020). While it is clear access to affordable housing is an ongoing concern for mitigation of homelessness, additional concerns relating to criminalization also continue to be problematic.
2.6.2: California Homelessness: Criminalization

Criminalization of homeless persons and behavior associated with homelessness is still considered a necessary part of homeless mitigation strategy in California. Given that approximately 72% of California’s homeless population is unsheltered and that unsheltered homeless populations are more likely to engage more frequently with police and law enforcement officials, criminalization and the relationship between homelessness and the California justice system is worthy of examination (Gabriel & Ciudad-Real, 2020). In part due to a lack of state legislation around mitigation strategies such as increasing access for affordable housing, responding to increases in homelessness in California in the early 2000s, fell to local governments. Multiple cities in California have ordinances aimed directly at homeless people or behavior associated with homelessness. Broadly speaking these so called “Quality of Life” ordinances range from restricting a homeless person’s ability to be in or use public space (loitering), while others specifically restrict things like solicitation of money or other services. Additionally some municipalities will engage in even more severe measures such as police “sweeps” of certain geographic regions only continuing a hostile environment for homeless persons and without sustained measures to prevent future instances of homelessness (Ali, 2014). Though in California citizens recognize homelessness as a major concern, public perception of the behavior of homeless persons is still widely regarded as deviant or undesirable. This bias and stigmatization only continues trends of abuse towards homeless people via the criminal justice system. The three main areas of law that tend to target homeless populations include the CA Penal Code, the California Business and Professions Code and multiple Municipal Codes. The CA
Penal Code makes lodging in any building, structure, vehicle or place, public or private, without permission illegal, the California Business and Professions code targets removal of shopping carts from retailers, and municipal codes tend to target behavioral trends associated with homelessness including possession of drugs or alcohol, sleeping in public spaces or loitering (Marks, 2013). One specific example of the egregious effects that certain municipal codes can have on homeless populations occur around Business Improvement Districts or BIDs. BIDs are private entities funded by local property assessments. BIDs continue to grow in size across California with approximately 200 in existence as of 2018. Typically located in downtown areas, which are also areas with a high concentration of unsheltered homeless people, BIDs are able to promote their own interests in the areas of public policy, policing and social services without regard to the needs of the greater public. A study conducted by the University of California Berkeley School of Law found that BIDs have used the hundreds of millions of dollars they collect annually as a method to influence strengthening state and local laws that target homeless people. The study shows that the specific behavior targeted is in fact “life-sustaining” activities in which homeless people have no choice but to engage in, such as sitting, resting, sleeping and food sharing (Selbin et al., 2018).

Another area of concern in California are municipal laws that restrict sleeping in vehicles. In Los Angeles specifically, there are approximately 16,528 people experiencing homelessness and sleeping in a vehicle which can include a car, van, RV or camper (Gabriel & Ciudad-Real, 2020). In Los Angeles, the city specifically prohibits residing in a vehicle during the hours of 9pm to 6pm. While homeless persons living in a vehicle are
more prone to health risks and break-ins that might endanger personal safety or the safety of the community, for many having to live in their vehicle is their only choice when compared to living on the street (University of Southern California, 2018). One of the main outcomes from municipal laws that prohibit vehicle-dwelling are the financial implications that can perpetuate cycles of poverty and push potential at-risk homeless people into chronic or unsheltered homelessness. Though criminal charges are not often used to regulate sleeping in vehicles, fines and fees are common that can prevent someone from paying for other necessary items like food, medication, transportation or can result in civil or court consequences which could bar them from being accepted into housing programs (Bauman, 2019). In 2016, the City of Los Angeles started a project known as the Safe Parking Pilot Program or SPPP. The program was started as an attempt to support homeless populations living in vehicles. The goal of Safe Parking Programs, now in place in multiple California cities, is to provide a legal and safe location for people who live in their vehicles to park at night while connecting them to housing and other social services. Though trials for the SPPP’s which took place in multiple cities across the West Coast including San Diego and Monterey were highly successful, number of people living in vehicles verses the number of safe parking spaces proved to be a problem in Los Angeles (University of Southern California, 2018). Currently, only 354 Safe Parking spaces exist meaning that potentially tens of thousands of homeless people who live in their vehicle are at risk of being targeted by anti-homeless laws (Gabriel & Ciudad-Real, 2020). Criminalization still plays a large role in continuing the cycle of poverty for California’s homeless.
2.6.3: California Homelessness: Healthcare

Health concerns for homeless people in California most often focus on unsheltered populations. Since the vast majority of homeless people in California are unsheltered, California’s homeless populations are generally more exposed to health challenges than the general public both nationally and in California (Gabriel & Ciudad-Real, 2020). One study examining specific health challenges for homeless people in California found that in addition to premature death, chronic and unsheltered homeless people also endure greater exposure to many diseases. The study examined the prevalence of such diseases including HIV, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis C, and Tuberculosis and found that homeless people are especially vulnerable due to weakened immunity and limited access to healthcare and services to mitigate the severity of communicable diseases (Liu et al., 2020). The outbreak of COVID-19 around the world increased scrutiny of public health systems as they relate to homeless people in California. In addition to the communicable diseases discussed above, high rates of chronic conditions including diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), substance abuse disorders, and disabilities among homeless persons qualify them as particularly at-risk for becoming severely ill should they contract COVID-19 (California Health Care Foundation, 2020). Furthermore, public health regulations such as isolation and social distancing required to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 are virtually impossible for homeless people. For example, in March of 2020 the largest homeless shelter in San Francisco reported a public health response to a COVID-19 outbreak in which 67% of residents and 17% of staff tested positive for COVID-19 (Imbert et al., 2020). To try and mitigate instances like this, in early April, California Governor Gavin
Newsom launched Project Roomkey which uses Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funding to provide homeless people in California with temporary housing through the securing of rooms in hotels and motels throughout the state. As of June 2020, the state had leased 15,837 rooms and filled 10,644 hotel rooms. The goal for the public health outcomes of Project Roomkey are to offer self-isolation for high-risk individuals experiencing homelessness including people over 65 and people with underlying health conditions, to provide quarantine capacity for anyone exposed to COVID-19, and to provide quarantine space for those who have tested positive but do not require hospitalization (California Health Care Foundation, 2020). The project experienced initial obstacles getting off the ground, but the more successful programs incorporated local service agencies in addition to creative methods to encourage adherence with public health protocols for homeless people who would rather remain in an encampment. Proponents of the project believe that while Project Roomkey is filling a desperate need as an immediate isolation and housing solution, it could become a long-term housing solution in California (California Health Care Foundation, 2020). That said, the project is currently utilizing hotels and motels that currently have no business due to the pandemic and any viability as a permanent solution requires significant financial commitment from state and local governments as well as continuing to coordinate between health care officials and community partners (California Health Care Foundation, 2020). Underlying health concerns exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic underscore the significant health risks correlated with being homeless in California.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1: Research Question 1 – What kinds of alternative housing solutions have been effective in decreasing homelessness in California broadly, and cities specifically?

State-wide efforts in California have largely failed to provide traditional affordable housing that is accessible for people either at-risk of homelessness or already experiencing homelessness. Thus, examining alternative methods of housing and what housing might look like in the future in California is necessary to understand how public policy should change going forward. Examples such as Safe Parking Programs, Tiny Homes, and Project Roomkey represent tangible policy initiatives catalyzed by state and local government to provide alternative solutions that benefit homeless populations and individuals living in extreme poverty.

Safe Parking Programs have existed in California since the early 2000s and will serve as the primary focus of discussion going forward. Because Tiny Homes and Project Roomkey are newer initiatives, there is not yet enough information to judge their long-term effectiveness as concrete solutions. However, a cursory discussion of Tiny Homes and Project Roomkey will provide information regarding the potential for future innovation in the area of alternative housing in California. Furthermore, the literature around homelessness also reveals a strong correlation between criminalization policies and its impact on the ability for individuals experiencing homelessness to find stable housing. One criminalization policy widespread in California and the U.S. is policy prohibiting and restricting people to live in a vehicle. Safe Parking Programs claim to provide a safe space for individuals who rely on a vehicle for shelter to park without fear of citation or criminal
targeting. However, these programs do not eliminate ordinances which prohibit vehicle dwelling, and their existence appears to subvert local ordinances which seek to prohibit this particular behavior. An additional discussion of the ordinances which prohibit vehicle dwelling will provide a broader context for the relationship between Safe Parking Programs and the cities in which they operate. By analyzing the language which criminalizes the behavior associated with homelessness it may illuminate changes that local or state policy should make going forward as a means to support homeless individuals rather than punish last-resort options like vehicle dwelling.

A successful examination of alternative housing solutions and Safe Parking Programs specifically requires an investigation into how certain community programs have either succeeded or failed over time regarding the type of homelessness targeted by the program. Going forward, Safe Parking Programs will serve as a case study to inform recommendations for policy changes that could occur following a thorough examination of the impacts of Safe Parking Programs. Beginning in 2004, several municipalities in California started Safe Parking Programs to target chronically homeless or at-risk homeless people living in cars, vans or RVs. Specific programs in Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Diego are of note due to their size and length of existence. Santa Barbara’s New Beginnings’ Safe Parking Shelter and Rapid Rehousing Program began in 2004 and currently manages 154 spaces in 26 parking lots throughout the cities of Santa Barbara, Goleta and unincorporated areas neighboring each county (Safe Parking Shelter and Rapid Rehousing Program, 2020). Founded in 2009, the San Diego non-profit organization Dreams for Change is the second oldest California Safe Parking Program. Over the past 10
years, the organization has assisted 2,681 vehicles, 4,722 people and placed 1,073 vehicles into housing (Dreams for Change, 2019). Modeled after New Beginnings in Santa Barbara, Safe Parking LA was founded later in 2016 and coordinates with participating organizations to provide safe parking locations for a total of around 450 vehicles (About Safe Parking LA, 2018). In 2019, other municipalities in California including Sacramento (Safe Parking Program, 2019) and San Francisco (Thadani, 2019), began their own pilot programs. However, due to their lack of longevity and a lack of available data there is not enough data to evaluate their impact.

Several important measures are vital to understand the impacts of Safe Parking Programs as a potential alternative housing policy solution. First, data must be separated between the Safe Parking Programs in Santa Barbara, Los Angeles and San Diego versus point in time data coming from surveys from each individual City. Important measurements from each Safe Parking Program will include tracking of the number of spaces each program has (#), the number of clients each program serves (#), and how many clients each program is able to place into housing (#). Following the collection of this data, I will make table to reflect each program’s respective data. Second, data will be collected from each City to examine the population of homeless people dwelling in vehicles who could benefit from participation in a Safe Parking Program. These measurements will include: the number of persons living in cars since 2016 (#), the number of persons in living vans since 2016 (#), and the number of persons in living RVs since 2016 (#). This data will be synthesized into a bar chart. The above statistics will be drawn together from several sources and listed in Appendix A (“Data Sources for RQ1”). Information regarding the
Safe Parking Programs is sourced from annual reports published by the individual programs. Point in time data for each City comes from publicly available data found on each City’s homeless services website.

3.2: Research Question 2 – What political and policy changes are necessary to increase affordable housing in California?

When examining the relationship between housing, criminalization and health it is important to recognize innovation, redefining, and reform approaches to affordable housing are the most impactful way to move forward. California non-profits and homelessness activists are innovating and manipulating existing systems to circumvent longstanding stringent and criminalizing policies, ineffective government solutions and lack of desire to build affordable housing. Statewide policy is only starting to adopt changes brought forth by alternative solutions. Determining potential policy recommendations for how existing programs hope to expand or change in the future requires input from experts in the field.

To explore the future of SPPs as a solution to addressing the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness, two interviews will be conducted with experts from the SPPs in Santa Barbara and San Diego. To measure the range of possible responses, the same questions will be asked to each expert and then summarized. The interview questions are as follows:

1. “What is your full name, position title and organization name?”
2. “Why are you passionate about mitigating homelessness in California?”
3. “How do you measure success for your program?”
4. “How do you think the political environment in California has failed homeless individuals and contributed to the housing crises?”

5. “What are one or two obstacles to substantial state-wide policy changes relating to homelessness?”

6. “Given the vulnerability of homeless individuals to suffer negative health outcomes, what is the best way policy can address the intersection between health and homelessness?”

7. “Have you noticed any trends based on race, gender, sexuality and citizenship in the individuals your organization works with?”

8. “Do you think emergency protocols put in place in reaction to COVID-19 (Project Roomkey, etc.) are likely to remain or inform policy relating to homelessness in the future?”

9. “How does the criminalization of behaviors associated with homelessness (loitering, living in a vehicle etc.) impact your organization’s work?”

10. “Do you see the emergence of more Housing First approaches such as Project Roomkey and Tiny Homes making an impact on the ability for individuals experiencing homelessness to obtain housing?”

11. “Tell me one thing that would surprise people about your organization?”

12. “Can you give me an example of a person you or your organization has worked with whose story is especially meaningful to you? No privileged, confidential, or private information necessary, speaking very broadly is ok.”
The interviewees will be found by contacting the individuals listed below. Once contact has been made, a zoom interview will be conducted using the questions above and recorded for record keeping purposes. The experts I interviewed are:

1. Cassie Roach: Program Manager, Senior Case Manager-Safe Parking Program, New Beginnings (Santa Barbara, CA)

2. Teresa Smith: CEO, Dreams for Change (San Diego, CA)

In contacting potential experts for this endeavor, I reached out multiple times to the media contact for the LAHSA, but never received return correspondence. The inability to get in touch with the LAHSA could be due to multiple factors which might include being inundated with media requests, their status as a government agency rather than non-profit, or an inability to give interviews for the purpose of research.

Before the interview occurred, in my confirmation email to the interviewee, I let the interviewee know that the information gained from this interview is only being used for an honors thesis course at Tulane University for college credit; and none of the information gained from this interview will be publicized nor published. Further, I repeated this language verbally at the beginning of my interviews with Teresa Smith of Dreams for Change on March 5 and Cassie Roach of New Beginnings on March 8, 2021. The next chapters contain the results of my research and interviews.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS RESEARCH QUESTION 1

4.1: Discussion of Historical Context for Safe Parking Programs

The concept of Safe Parking Programs (SPPs) originated in Santa Barbara, California at homeless coalition meetings attended by local advocates and members of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors. Eventually, the idea for a Safe Parking Program was drafted into a city ordinance in Santa Barbara and the City of Goleta, in which property owners were permitted to utilize parking infrastructure to host individuals living in vehicles overnight as an alternate source of transitional housing (Ivey et al., 2018). After passing the ordinance, the City of Santa Barbara wanted an experienced non-profit to assume the role of management for the new Safe Parking sites. New Beginnings Counseling Center assumed management in 2004 in cooperation with local churches, city government, non-profit agencies, and local business (Safe Parking Shelter and Rapid Rehousing Program, 2020).

Following the successful launch of New Beginnings’ SPP in 2004, the second most prominent SPP in operation today, Dreams for Change, located in San Diego California launched in 2009 (Dreams for Change, 2019). Around the time of the Great Recession in 2008, the leaders at Dreams noted an increase in vehicular dwelling made up largely of individuals who were unfamiliar with ways to access social services and assistance programs. Dreams created their SPP hoping to address the unique concerns of individuals who may not know what to do once they fall into extreme poverty. The program initially launched in one area of a church parking facility. Since then, several other lots have been
utilized, but opposition from local government has deterred further expansion (Ivey et al., 2018).

Since the beginnings of SPPs in Santa Barbara and San Diego, their model has spread to other areas of California and the West Coast including Seattle, Washington; Portland, Oregon; and Monterey, California (Safe Parking Programs, 2018). However, not all programs have the same rules and structure. For example, zoning restrictions in Oregon only allow SPPs to be implemented on land owned by religious institutions (Information for Religious Institutions, 2018). However, the variety among SPP’s allows cities to adapt the program based on the needs of their individual populations.

A large SPP program exists in Los Angeles. In 2016, Los Angeles launched its own version of a SPP as part of a $2-billion homelessness plan. The program was modeled primarily through examination of New Beginnings in Santa Barbara with the goal to provide individuals living in vehicles with a safe and legal place to park at night (Holland, 2016). Currently, the program is an approved strategy under the City of Los Angeles Comprehensive Homeless Strategy to combat homelessness and includes 20 different locations managed by multiple organizations in and around the greater LA area (LAHSA, 2019).

SPPs are increasingly becoming a common best practice for cities to use as an alternative strategy for homeless mitigation. However, New Beginnings in Santa Barbara, Dreams for Change in San Diego and Safe Parking Sites in Los Angeles administered by the LA Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) will provide case studies for how different SPPs function. These three programs are the largest SPPs in California with the easily
available public data and therefore can provide the greatest evidence for how cities might benefit from using SPPs as an initial or alternative step for a Housing First approach to homelessness.

4.2: Comparing and Contrasting Safe Parking Programs in California

Understanding the similarities and differences between the Safe Parking Programs in Santa Barbara, San Diego, and Los Angeles will prove critical to determining the extent to which the programs successful. In regard to structure, the SPPs in Santa Barbara and San Diego are similar. Both are run through a greater non-profit where the goal of the organization goes beyond the Safe Parking Program itself. For example, Santa Barbara’s New Beginnings also operates a counseling center, support services for veterans and their families, and a life skills program in addition to their SPP (Safe Parking Shelter and Rapid Rehousing Program, 2020). Similarly, Dreams for Change in San Diego works to provide paths to stability for individuals and families through case management, employment assistance, financial management programs in addition to their SPP (Dreams for Change, 2019).

In contrast, Safe Parking Programs in the greater Los Angeles area all fall under the oversight of the LAHSA, a public entity. The different SPPs under the LAHSA umbrella have different amenities at each site which may include some combination of onsite security and restrooms, access to a Coordinated Entry System (CES) assessment, referrals for community resources, and access to case management, financial and benefit assistance. However, none of these benefits are guaranteed and vary according to site location.
Additionally, the Los Angeles SPPs differ from the Santa Barbara and San Diego programs in styles of management. Some are run by religious organizations, others by non-profits. However, all programs are overseen by the LAHSA (LAHSA, 2019). Another important distinction between the programs in Santa Barbara, San Diego, and Los Angeles is the housing market characteristics and population sizes of the cities in which each program operates. Figure 8 provides the population size, median gross rent (2015-2019), and percent of persons living in poverty for each city and California as a whole according to 2019 Census data. This data will provide basic context for the cities in which each program operates.
New Beginnings is a privately run non-profit and was established in 2004. It’s Safe Parking Program currently manages 154 spaces in 26 parking lots throughout the cities of Santa Barbara, Goleta, and the neighboring unincorporated areas of the county. Each of these lots has entered in a written agreement with New Beginnings, who has indemnified them against any liability. Since the program’s inception in 2004, there have been no major incidents or damage to any of the participating lots or neighborhoods.

**Figure 4**
SAFE PARKING SANTA BARBARA: New Beginnings Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># spaces added (car)</th>
<th># spaces added (RV)</th>
<th># clients served / year</th>
<th># clients placed into housing or prevented from eviction / year</th>
<th>Services?</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-14</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>No reports available online until fiscal year 2015-2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>Supportive services for veteran families, life skills program</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>39</td>
<td><strong>see above</strong></td>
<td>Report includes that 81% of Safe Parking clients are considered to be experiencing chronic homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>166</td>
<td><strong>see above</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>167</td>
<td><strong>see above</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority
Safe Parking Sites

Established in 2016, the LAHSA-Administered Safe Parking sites assists homeless families and individuals living in vehicles by providing them with a safe space to park at night and by offering a variety of services depending on the individual site.

Key: Service Planning Areas (1 = Antelope Valley, 2 = San Fernando Valley, 3 n/a, 4 = Metro Los Angeles, 5 = West Los Angeles, 6 = South Los Angeles, 7 = Southeast Los Angeles), Restrooms = RR, Adults = A, Youth = YT, Families = FM, Los Angeles = LA, Veterans = V, Food Pantry = FP, Showers = S, Breakfast = B, Monday = M, Tuesday = T, Wednesday = W, Friday = F, On-Site Restrooms = OSRR, Portable Restrooms = PRR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th># Spaces</th>
<th>RVs</th>
<th>Amenities</th>
<th>Groups Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hope of the Valley (Palmdale)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>OSRR</td>
<td>A, FM, YT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers of America LA (Lancaster)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>OSRR</td>
<td>A, YT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Valley Caring Services (North Hills)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>S and B (M, W &amp; F), FP (T, W, &amp; F)</td>
<td>A, FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Parking LA (Reseda)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A, FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers of America LA (Van Nuys)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Homelessness CA/Shower of Hope (Glassell Park)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>PRR, 3 meals/week</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Homelessness CA/Shower of Hope (Westlake)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>PRR, 3 meals/week</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Parking LA (East Hollywood)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Parking LA (Echo Park)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A, FM, YT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Parking LA (Downtown Los Angeles)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A, FM, YT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers of America LA (Downtown LA)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A, FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Parking LA (Sawtelle)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A, FM, YT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Parking LA (Westchester)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A, FM, YT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Parking LA (West LA)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>V, A, FM, YT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Parking LA (Culver City)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A, FM, YT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSG/HOPICS (Compton)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>A, FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSG/HOPICS (South LA)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A, FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watts Labor Community Action Committee</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>OSRR</td>
<td>A, YT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers of America (East LA)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A, FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers of America Los Angeles (Whittier)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>PRR</td>
<td>A, FM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dreams for Change is a privately run non-profit and was established in 2009. Dreams for Change’s Safe Parking Program provides safe places to park for individuals and families living in their vehicle. They also offer case management and supportive services to the populations they serve.

Figure 6
SAFE PARKING SAN DIEGO: Site Breakdowns as of 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># spaces added (car)</th>
<th># spaces added (RV)</th>
<th># clients served / year</th>
<th># cars placed into housing or prevented from eviction / year</th>
<th># RVs placed into housing or prevented from eviction / year</th>
<th># people</th>
<th>Site Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>28th Street Safe Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2019 Imperial Ave Safe Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7
SAFE PARKING SAN DIEGO: 5-Year, 2019- & 10-Year Totals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># car spaces added</th>
<th># RV spaces added</th>
<th># vehicles served per year</th>
<th># people served per year</th>
<th># cars placed into housing</th>
<th># RVs placed into housing</th>
<th># vehicles placed into housing</th>
<th># people placed into housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009-2014</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1446</td>
<td>2567</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only 2019</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2019</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2681</td>
<td>4722</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1073 (avg. placement is 30%)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: 2019 Census Data & Demographics for Santa Barbara, San Diego, and Los Angeles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City / State</th>
<th>Population Size</th>
<th>Median Gross Rent ($)</th>
<th>Percent (%) of Persons Living in Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santa Barbara</td>
<td>446,499</td>
<td>1,643</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>3,338,330</td>
<td>1,658</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>3,979,576</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>39,512,223</td>
<td>1,503</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8

2019 Census Data & Demographics for Santa Barbara, San Diego, and Los Angeles

Figure 9

% of Unsheltered Homeless Living in a vehicle in Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Diego from 2016-2020

***Not all data is available for every year

Figure 10

% of Unsheltered Homeless Living in a vehicle in Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Diego from 2016-2020

***Not all data is available for every year
4.4: Discussion of Results

The data presented in 4.4 provide complex implications for determining whether if and how Safe Parking Programs are effective in mitigating homelessness. One important point going forward is an acknowledgement that much of the data presented has gaps and is not perfectly comparable between programs. For example, the LAHSA does not provide the number of spaces available at each of the programs it manages, whereas Dreams for Change and New Beginnings report those numbers as standard practice. And problems exist in the data from New Beginnings and Dreams for Change too. Most notably, they do not consistently report yearly outcomes and often provide different categorizations for data in each reporting. This is possibly because creating the infrastructure to track this type of data requires time and resources. For small non-profits or even government agencies like the LAHSA, the priority is not to report consistent data. Regardless of these flaws, there are notable results from this data that merit discussion.

Beginning with Figure 4, “SAFE PARKING SANTA BARBARA: New Beginnings Overview,” the main outlier can be seen in the “# clients placed into housing or prevented from eviction” category from 2017. In 2017, only 39 clients from New Beginnings were placed into housing. This stands in stark contrast with other data entries from alternate years all of which were over 150 clients. Another point of interest in the data from New Beginnings can be seen in the “# clients served / year” category. After 2016, the number of clients served per year drops from 763 in 2016 to 694 in 2017. Another drop occurs in 2018, from 694 to 529 clients, and then rises back to 694 clients in 2019. The first drop from 2016 to 2017 coincides with the drop of clients placed into housing which
also dramatically drops in 2017 as discussed above. It is also noteworthy that the data from New Beginnings is exclusively reported by number of clients rather than percentages. This will become an issue below when examining the relationship between the SPPs and the cities they reside in.

Next, Figure 5, “SAFE PARKING LOS ANGELES: Overview of Participating Programs,” proves the LAHSA reporting on the SPPs they manage. This table helps provide a better idea of how different SPPs prioritize different services to their clients. The most frequent service offered by all LAHSA administered SPPs is portable restrooms. Out of the 21 programs listed, 15 have portable rest rooms as their main service offered. In contrast, only three of the programs listed meal options as a part of their amenities. Notably, the LAHSA neglects to report much of the data that might give scholars an insight into the impact of these programs. In fact, the most important take away from this data may be an examination into what is not reported while acknowledging what is reported. For example, they do not list the number of spaces or clients each program works with and does not provide information into what kinds of support services (if any) are offered by the participating partners. While the partners themselves may report this kind of data, it appears odd that the managing authority does not deem this information relevant enough to include in its overview.

Conversely, Figure 8 reveals that in contrast to the cities of Santa Barbara and San Diego, Los Angeles has the largest population overall (3,979,576) and the greatest percentage of its citizens living in poverty (18%). Additionally, Figures 9 and 10 highlight the steady rate at which homeless individuals in the City of Los Angeles reside in vehicles
(between 35 and 45% from 2016-2020). The enormity of the problem present in attempting to house individuals experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles when compared to Santa Barbara and San Diego may indicate why Los Angeles’ data is reported so differently. In this case, there may not be capacity to address the concerns that are able to be addressed in greater detail in the reporting done by New Beginnings and Dreams for Change. Furthermore, as non-profit organizations, Dreams for Change and New Beginnings may have more resources to publish and distribute reports than the LAHSA does as a municipal agency.

Next, Figure 7, “SAFE PARKING SAN DIEGO: 5-Year, 2019- & 10-Year Totals,” presents several different points of interest in terms of Dreams for Change as an organization and in relation to the point in time city data for San Diego. At first glance, one of the more impressive points for Dreams for Change’s data is their average percentage in the “# vehicles placed into housing” column for their 10-year total or total since 2009. They report that they have placed 1073 vehicles into permanent housing which represents a 30% placement rate over the course of 10 years. Dreams for Change is the only SPP examined which provides this type of data as a percentage. As mentioned above, the program data for New Beginnings is provided by number of people and the data provided by the LAHSA is not provided on this topic. Given that Dreams for Change provides this percentage, it is then possible to examine the percentages given in the San Diego Point in Time data in relation to this aspect of data. While not completely congruent, Figures 9 and 10 show that San Diego’s rates of percent of unsheltered homeless living in a vehicle are consistently lower than those of Los Angeles and Santa Barbara from 2016-2020. Furthermore, Figure
8 reveals that the percent of individuals living in poverty in San Diego is also the lowest among the three cities at 10.3%. For these reasons, the 30% placement rate Dreams for Change is able to achieve over a 10-year period may in part be due to the smaller size of the overall population they are trying to help and serve.

While the data provided above does not show a complete picture of the effectiveness of Safe Parking Programs, it does provide a starting point for examining what data is available and how these programs might improve their structure and reporting to better support individuals interested in alternative approaches to mitigating homelessness. For example, while the structures and services across all three programs differ, it may be in the best interest of New Beginnings to increase the amount of data they report such as the number of spaces added for cars and RVs each year. Additionally, for Los Angeles, it would be beneficial for the LAHSA to begin to provide more data on the number of clients they serve and if they are able to or even attempt to place those clients into some form of permanent housing. Finally, for Dreams for Change, it may be beneficial for them to increase the rate at which they report their data, for example they might consider providing annual reports rather than reports every five years. These recommendations represent a start for how these very different programs might consider improving their transparency and relationship with the clients they serve. However, given that they are still relatively new and the concept of SPPs is still up and coming, it may be that their reporting tactics may improve with time. In an effort to provide a more comprehensive picture of the current context in which SPPs operate beyond the data, a discussion of the criminalization of behavior associated with homelessness and future alternatives follows.
4.5: Discussion of Criminalization of Homelessness

The literature regarding homelessness policy recognizes how city policies and ordinances that criminalize behavior associated with experiencing homelessness can act as a catalyst for individuals becoming chronically homeless. The most pertinent type of ordinance we will discuss are bans or restrictions on vehicle dwelling for both cars and RVs. Around the U.S., individuals often rely on sleeping or living in vehicles as an alternative to sleeping in tents or in the street. For many, though vehicles lack sanitation, it allows people who are still working but have no ability to pay rent to retain some semblance of home (Simon, 2019). However, despite the potential benefits for people who are forced to live in their vehicle of having basic shelter, cities consistently experience pressure from residents to deal with vehicles that are parked on residential streets overnight. Because of this, laws restricting vehicle dwelling are often packaged in the form of parking regulations that place restrictions on when or where a person can park a car. According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty there has been a 213% increase in laws restricting living in vehicles around the U.S. since 2006. Furthermore, since between 2016 and 2019, 22 more laws were enacted representing a 31% increase. Overall, 60.4% of cities surveyed by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty have at least one law that restricts the ability to live in a vehicle (Bauman, 2019).

Vital to understanding why these laws exist requires an interrogation of the kinds of misunderstanding that create homelessness myths. For example, requiring individuals living in a vehicle to pay a fine because of parking in the wrong area is not as simple as it may seem. Criminalizing policies can be highly ineffective, increase costs for cities and
may even be illegal. These ordinances do not address the root causes of why someone may be experiencing homelessness and simply place an undue burden on the person experiencing homelessness. The potential outcomes of criminalizing ordinances, monetary or jail time, have a greater potential to exacerbate the cycle of homelessness because it increases obstacles for someone to obtain housing, employment or other kinds of services which could worsen or extend a person’s experiencing of homelessness (Bauman, 2019).

In California, the problems associated with ordnances restricting the ability for those living in their vehicles to find safe and legal places to park has been an ongoing issue. In an interview with the New York Times, Neil Donovan, the President and CEO of the National Coalition for the Homeless described the trend of ordnances banning RV’s specifically as having originated in suburbs and spread into metropolitan areas primarily throughout the early and mid 2000s (Lovett, 2010). However, while increased visibility of vehicle dwelling in cities may have risen at that time, people have relied on cars as an alternative form of housing for a long time. On the West Coast specifically, mild weather has always made West Coast cities a hub for people who might be consistently housing insecure. For example, living in California means that spending a night living in a vehicle in between housing does not result in an automatic death sentence due to cold temperatures. However, understanding and being able to count those who dwell in vehicles continues to be an arduous process given the ability of this particular subsect of the homeless population to move (Ho, 2019). Furthermore, much of the fuel for creating ordinances such as oversized vehicle bans comes from complaints from neighbors and residents (Ho, 2019). To show how these kinds of bans impact Safe Parking Programs and those who benefit
from Safe Parking programs, the following will examine the specific ordinances in Santa Barbara, Los Angeles and San Diego.

Santa Barbara’s most recent ordinance which negatively impacts individuals living in vehicles was passed in 2016. The “Oversized Vehicle Parking Ordinance” or “SBMC 10.44.220” prohibits oversized vehicles from parking on-street within the city of Santa Barbara unless the vehicle has been issued a permit or passes certain exemptions. Passed on November 15, 2016, the City cites public safety concerns, limits in visibility, and traffic flow as its primary reasons for adoption (Oversized, 2018). While the ordinance does not mention RVs specifically, at the City Council meeting in which the Council unanimously passed the ordinance, City police cited multiple “quality of life” complaints from neighbors regarding the presence of RVs. Furthermore, recounts of the meeting describe heated debate between homeless service advocates and the council members. Some of the advocates present note the classification by Safe Parking Program New Beginnings of RVs and cars as a kind of home for many clients who otherwise would be forced onto the street due to vehicle impoundment from ordinances such as SBMC 10.44.220. Still in effect, this ordinance is especially complicated for individuals who are able to utilize services like New Beginnings at night, but have nowhere to park during the day (Welsh, 2016). Cassie Roach, whose interview is summarized in Chapter 5 will provide more details as to how this policy impacts the individuals who work with New Beginnings.

In contrast to Santa Barbara, Los Angeles has a far more complex history regarding restrictive ordinances related to dwelling in a vehicle. Prior to 2014 it was completely illegal to live in a vehicle in the city of Los Angeles. However, in 2014 this policy was
struck down in federal court (Reyes, 2019). The court cited the policy as inviting
discrimination against individuals experiencing poverty. In response to the strike down, the
city of Los Angeles imposed new regulations. The regulations were intended as an
intermediary measure to continue to provide some kind of enforcement while the LAHSA
developed its SPP infrastructure. The new restrictions appeased those living in
neighborhoods who were concerned about parking, trash and other potential problems
associated with RVs parked on residential streets. In the time since the new restrictions
were put in place, restrictions have spread while the development of SPPs has continued to
be relatively slow (Reyes, 2019). In July of 2019, the ordinance expired requiring the LA
City Council to vote either renew or do away with the rules put in place in 2014. In a
unanimous 13-0 vote, the City Council voted to extend the restrictions by six months.
Financially, tickets for rule violation start at $25 and increase to $50 for the second
violation and are $75 for every following violation. Specifically, the ordinance also
prohibits sleeping overnight in vehicles in residential areas as well as living in a vehicle
within a block of a school, park or day care (Scott, 2019). Despite reports by the Los
Angeles Police Department that only 10 citations are issued a month in between February
6, 2017 and June 30, 2018, and determining specific violations can be hard to prove, the
restrictions create widespread confusion and fear among vehicle dwellers who cannot
afford a citation. Figure 11 taken from the Los Angeles Department of City Planning shows
in green the areas in which it is legal to sleep in a vehicle (Tinoco, 2019).
Similarly to the arguments which occurred at the City Council meeting regarding the oversized vehicle ordinance in Santa Barbara, advocates for individuals experiencing homelessness actively argued against extending the restrictions in Los Angeles. At the LA City Council meeting, argued that the renewal of the rules constituted blatant harassment and criminalization of individuals living in their cars with no other options. Tensions rose so high that police detained a person in handcuffs and cleared other activists from the room (Reyes, 2019). After attempting to discover if the law was extended again following the six-month extension which was approved by the City Council at this meeting in 2019, no information is available indicating that the law was not renewed and is no longer in effect.

Similarly to Los Angeles, San Diego’s most recent ordinance targeting homelessness was approved following a ruling in federal court. In August of 2018, a federal
judge ruled that the ban within the city of San Diego which prohibited people living in cars was too vague to be enforceable. In February of 2018, the City Council ruled to repeal the 35-year-old law, but at the time it was unclear whether or not a revised version would replace the old law. At the time, homeless advocates felt that repealing the law was a critical first step towards ending the criminalization of homelessness in San Diego. The lawsuit in question was filed on behalf of a disabled homeless individual who struggles to receive services in traditional shelter environments due to his specific needs. Lawyers from Disability Rights California aided the individual in the case and argued that striking down the “habitation ordinance” does not mean the end of policies criminalizing individuals experiencing homelessness (Garrick, 2019). Their prediction proved correct. In May of 2019, the San Diego City Council approved a new law with a 6-3 vote following three hours of public testimony and debate. The new ordinance makes it illegal for people to sleep in their vehicle between the hours of 9 PM and 6 PM in residential areas, or at any time within 500 feet of a school or residence with the exception of colleges and Universities. The ordinance provides the hours above with the assumption that individuals who sleep in their car would be able to find other sleeping accommodations at a Safe Parking location or in a shelter (Shanahan, 2019). However, in an interview with the San Diego Union-Tribune, CEO of Dreams for Change Teresa Smith, also interviewed in Chapter 5, argued that Safe Parking Programs would not be prepared for the demand the new restrictions would place on their programs. While this point was countered by the Assistant Police Chief Paul Connelly, who relayed that the ordinance would be enforced as a last resort and that compassion would be a priority in handling potential violations,
advocates still argued that the precedent of the ordinance could still be implemented to criminalize individuals experiencing homelessness. This is especially pertinent for individuals living in RVs who are subjected under San Diego law to even more restrictions relating to parking. Regardless of how the ordinance will or will not be implemented, many individuals present at the City Council meeting in May of 2019 cited fear and anxiety as important concerns. The added restrictions arguably place undue burden on people experiencing homelessness who have few other options.

While different local governments across the U.S. and state of California make their own decisions regarding restrictions for vehicle dwelling and parking, they all have the potential to cause costly and potentially drastic implications for individuals experiencing or on the verge of homelessness. Ordinances regarding vehicle habitation specifically continue to be challenged and questioned in municipalities across California. For example, currently the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California is pursuing a lawsuit against the city of Pacifica regarding its ban against RV parking within city limits. Similar to the cases of Santa Barbara, Los Angeles and San Diego, the Pacifica case involves neighbors concerned about things like traffic and parking while residents living in their vehicles face life altering consequences. Currently Pacifica has the right to cite violators, impound their vehicle after five unpaid citations and even place vehicle owners in jail for up to six months (Rubenstein 2021). While it is encouraging to see civil rights advocates like the ACLU recognize the burden these kinds of local ordinances places on individuals experiencing homelessness, it is also important to acknowledge that there are other options for cities to take. For example, cities can expand or adopt a Safe Parking Program. The
data presented in Section 4.3 and 4.4, SPPs are proven alternatives to pursuing criminalization policies. In Chapter Five, interviewees Cassie Roach and Teresa Smith will elaborate on the different ways criminalization ordinances impact their organization and the homeless communities in their cities. Additionally, literature on homelessness advocates for a Housing First approach, which criminalization ordinances completely ignore. In 4.6, future alternatives for how Housing First approaches may change or provide an alternative to SPPs and criminalization ordinances in California will be explored.

4.6: Future Alternatives – Tiny Homes & Project Roomkey

Though Safe Parking Programs provide a critical service in the alternative housing space, recent trends and innovations in housing suggest a shift towards implementing even stronger Housing First approaches as a means for mitigating homelessness. A cursory examination of Tiny Homes and Project Roomkey will provide a look at future alternatives for homeless mitigation through alternative housing.

In California, there is no universally agreed upon statutory or regulatory definition for tiny houses. The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) allows multiple different structures to be defined as a tiny home so long as they fall between 80 and 400 square feet in size (Coleman, 2018). The lack of a universally agreed upon definition for tiny homes means that anything from an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) to a Recreational Vehicle (RV) could be classified as a tiny home. Though there are some statewide regulations in place for tiny homes, for example structures built on a chassis with wheels are not considered to be tiny homes under HCD’s jurisdiction much of the decision making as to permitting and zoning regulations is still controlled at the local
government level (Coleman, 2018). Local control over tiny home construction and regulation can become highly problematic if the municipality insists that the structure be subjected to the same kinds of zoning, permitting, and building code requirements as conventional housing. Though some tiny home builders attempt to subvert these requirements by, for example adding wheels so that the structure does not fall under the State’s definition of a tiny home, the roadblocks for constructing tiny homes are still very much a challenge to the viability of tiny homes as an option for widespread affordable housing (Coleman, 2018).

However, recent state-wide regulatory changes since 2016 attempt to get around the jurisdiction of local control over building standards to spur tiny home development as a form of emergency homeless housing. In September of 2016, the city of San Jose was granted permission through California Assembly Bill No. 2176 to “bypass compliance with state and local building, housing, health, habitability, or safety standards” in order to construct emergency bridge housing for the homeless. Generally speaking, “bridge” housing refers to emergency housing as a means of providing shelter prior to locating a permanent solution. The definition of emergency bridge housing was left broad in the bill, but allowed the City of San Jose to adopt through ordinance its own local standards for emergency bridge housing (Coleman, 2018). About a year later in October 2017, a similar bill was passed, California Assembly Bill No. 932, which authorized the cities of Berkeley, Emeryville, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Diego, the County of Santa Clara and the City and County of San Francisco to bypass the same regulations as in the bill from the year prior. The bill came in response to all cities listed declaring a “shelter crisis” meaning that the
amount of people who required shelter exceeded the amount of bed space available (Coleman, 2018).

By allowing these municipalities to bypass their own building, zoning and permitting innovation around tiny homes as a solution to homelessness has grown. One example of an innovative small housing approach to homeless mitigation is currently underway in Los Angeles through the construction of the Vignes complex. Once constructed, the complex will serve as a hybrid form of housing and shelter for homeless people with both permanent and temporary options. The 132 units of permanent housing are constructed out of used shipping containers to create modular housing units. By recycling the shipping containers and opting for a small housing solution, designers of the Vignes complex were able to keep construction costs down and speed up production on the project which is scheduled to be completed in a total of under five months (Smith, 2021).

The Vignes complex by no means the only one of its kind currently underway in California. In July of 2020, the Zoning Adjustments Board (ZAB) in Berkeley approved a project to construct a 39-unit complex made from modular constructing specifically for formerly homeless individuals. Overseen by the non-profit Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS), the project is scheduled to open within a year. By opting for a modular approach, the project is set to cost 30-40% less than a traditional construction project. Once operational, the project will operate similarly to the Vignes complex by offering residents access to social services including employment training, housing navigation and nutrition training. The project marks the first of its kind for Panoramic Interests, the development
company building the project, who hopes to create a replicable finance model for other potential projects around the Bay Area (Raguso, 2020).

The spread of COVID-19 has tested the viability of small housing as a solution both for individuals at-risk of homelessness and those already experiencing homelessness. As the projects in both Los Angeles and Berkeley show, small housing can be used as a solution to chronic homelessness. However, citizens in California are also finding that tiny homes can be a means to support family members who might be considered at-risk of homelessness due to adverse effects of the pandemic. It is estimated that since the laws relating to ADUs changed in California in 2017, there were more than 7,000 new units approved marking an almost 50% increase between 2017 and 2018. In 2020 alone, a San Jose ADU construction firm estimates that 10,000 ADUs will be permitted in California. ADU manufacturers throughout California report that individuals looking to construct ADUs are doing so as a means to house aging family members and young college students who are either more at-risk to the effects of COVID-19 or have been displaced as a result of emergency restrictions (Dineen, 2020). Thus, small housing is not only a solution for chronic homelessness but allows citizens to protect their family who otherwise would have no affordable housing options. It is also vital to acknowledge the potential of small housing to serve as a solution for populations like people of color, victims of domestic abuse, and LGBTQ+ people. By providing an affordable solution, individuals and groups who are more likely to become homeless have an improved chance of being able to lift themselves out of poverty. The implication of increased small housing options means that more people
will be provided with the opportunity to be housed if small housing becomes a readily available option in California.

Images of the Vignes Complex:

Image 4.6.1

Image 4.6.2
Example Images of Tiny Home Exteriors:

Image 4.6.3

Image 4.6.4
Renderings for BOSS Project in Berkeley, CA:

Image 4.6.5

Image 4.6.6

Emergency protocols in California have necessitated other innovative Housing First approaches to addressing the vulnerability of unhoused homelessness populations to contracting coronavirus. In March, Governor Newsom declared a state of emergency as it
relates to COVID-19 and specifically allocated $800 Million of the $1 billion in emergency funding to address the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness through the establishment of Project Roomkey (The 2020-2021 Spending Plan, 2020). Created in the Spring of 2020, Project Roomkey was meant to establish short term shelter for homeless people with a high likelihood of contracting to COVID-19 including those over the age of 65 and chronically homeless individuals forced to find shelter in group settings like mass tent encampments. When the project was initiated, Governor Newsom relayed that its status as an emergency protocol was only a starting point for connecting at-risk individuals with permanent housing (Baldassari, 2020)

Though little data is available due to the short term and ongoing nature of Project Roomkey, early results indicate that the concept of Project Roomkey is not enough to drastically change the landscape of homelessness in California. As of November 2020, Project Roomkey has included over 16,000 hotel and motel rooms across 55 counties and three tribal nation areas since April 2020 (Governor Newsom, 2020). However, a study conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California notes that Project Roomkey has provided rooms to only 8% of the overall homeless population and around 10% of unsheltered homeless people in California. It is also estimated that around 30% of chronically homeless people obtained shelter through the program. The study also notes that data reporting for Project Roomkey is likely overestimated due to its reliance on counts that occurred prior to the onset of the pandemic. Given that homelessness is thought to have increased in recent months due to factors such as economic displacement brought on by COVID-19, it is likely the data is undercounted (McConville, 2020). In the same report,
the PPIC notes that many of the problems with the implementation of Project Roomkey are only revealed when analyzed on a county level. For example, Figure 12 taken from the PPIC report reveals that virtually all of the major counties charged with implementing Project Roomkey, only San Francisco County managed to provide rooms to over 20% of its unsheltered homeless population (McConville, 2020).

Despite the ongoing and everchanging nature of COVID-19, counties are already reporting that they plan to stop participation in Project Roomkey and are looking to house continuing participants in permanent housing. In attempts to incentivize continued participation, the $800 million allocated for Project Roomkey in the Governor’s budget is meant to be used to convert some of the hotels and buildings being used into permanent and transitional housing. It is estimated that it will create over 6,000 new units of permanent and transitional housing. However, considering that 22,300 people were origionally placed into Project Roomkey, the 6,000 new units make a miniscule impact on addressing the need for affordable housing (Baldassari, 2020). Furthermore, once the pandemic subsides, funding for the program could become a major concern. Right now, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) pays for approximately 75% hotel use as a response strategy to COVID-19 (Baldassari, 2020). Though it is undeniable that Project Roomkey has made a difference for the shelter provided to over 22,300 Californians participating in the program, it is difficult to discern what the long-term legacy of the project will be. The speed with which Project Roomkey was implemented across the state shows that state-wide housing initiatives to address the needs of homeless populations are not only possible, but actually make a difference, albeit small, in the lives of those impacted by homelessness.
While Project Roomkey itself might not be considered entirely successful, it sets the precedent that state-wide attention and coordination on the issue of homelessness is not only possible but necessary going forward.

**Figure 12**

![Graph](image)

**4.7: Wrap Up**

The policy alternatives presented including SPPs, Tiny Homes and Project Roomkey all highlight the way in which California appears to be moving away from a criminalization and linear trend towards a Housing First approach to mitigating homelessness. While these signs are encouraging, the influence of local control over these programs in addition to other problems discussed such as lack of or incomplete reporting and the continued prevalence of criminalization policies mean that the further pressure is required to ensure that proven methods of homeless mitigation are implemented into policy
over problematic methods that ignore the root causes of homelessness. As program types and styles of management continue to change and expand it is essential to recognize how good initial concepts have failed or fallen short of their desired outcome. For example, as SPPs have expanded and grown across the state, more municipalities are seeing the benefit of providing safe places for individuals experiencing homelessness to connect to services. San Francisco recently piloted a “safe sleeping village” in which homeless persons who are vulnerable to COVID-19 can sleep at night and gain access to services and food. However, the program comes at a huge cost to the city at $61,000 per tent causing the SF City Council to choose between funding the safe sleeping program versus an SPP equivalent for RVs. Additionally, it is unclear if the safe sleeping pilot makes an effort to connect users to some form of permanent housing (Thadani, 2021). Thus, while innovation in the space of emergency homeless housing continues, the principals of Housing First policy continue to be overlooked. Nevertheless, change may be on the horizon. In 2021, California policymakers introduced the Social Housing Act of 2021. While not specifically targeting homelessness, the law would institute California’s first Housing Authority whose goal would be to develop residential buildings for poor and middle-income households where rent would help subsidize costs for neighbors with lesser economic status. The proposal acknowledges the special circumstances of California’s housing situation and has garnered widespread support (Dineen & Ravani 2021). This potential step in the area of housing could mean even more changes and new innovations coming for anyone experiencing housing insecurity including those at-risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness.
As improvement in the space of Housing First occurs, reporting will become even more essential to keep organizations accountable of their mission. In a report published by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) in July of 2020, the GAO authors found that despite being the foremost authority on collecting homelessness statistics from around the country, HUD’s Point in Time data counts were either inaccurate or could be improved in the areas of count methodology, accounting for sampling error and bias, and the assistance it provides to states for data collection (H.R. 2020). If HUD’s data collection is lacking, it is no surprise that smaller municipalities and organizations struggle with their own reporting. The acknowledgement of challenges relating to reporting is promising, but requires a commitment on the part of all parties to recognizing the importance of data collection to understanding the scale of homelessness in California and the U.S. a whole. To address California law makers specifically, a call to action is required in the areas of prioritizing Housing First approaches to mitigating homelessness and providing resources so that municipalities and smaller organizations and projects have the ability to support improving and tracking their reports on current experiences of homelessness around the state. Chapter 5 will provide a more personalized perspective on how policy can evolve in the area of homeless mitigation through interviews Teresa Smith of Dreams for Change and Cassie Roach of New Beginnings.
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS RESEARCH QUESTION 2

5.1: Introduction

The following is a summary of the interviews conducted on March 5, 2021, with Teresa Smith of Dreams for Change, and March 8, 2021, with Cassie Roach of New Beginnings. Before each interview, the following statement was read: "As we get started today, I want to make sure you know that the information gained from this interview is being used only for an honors thesis course at Tulane University for college credit; and none of the information gained from this interview will be publicized nor published."

5.2: Interview Summary

“What is your full name, position title and organization name?”

Cassie Roach is the Program Manager for the New Beginnings Counseling Center’s Safe Parking Program.

Teresa Smith the CEO and founder of Dreams for Change.

“Why are you passionate about mitigating homelessness in California?”

Cassie relayed that for her, housing is a human right, and that no individual should be left experiencing homelessness regardless of the circumstances which may have led to their lack of housing. She also emphasized that education is an important tool in helping people to understand the variety of experiences that can lead to homelessness. These days, someone doesn’t even have to go through a disaster, it could just be a change in circumstances to flip a switch and experience homelessness.

Teresa Smith described her passion for mitigating homelessness as arising from her belief that as a basic right, everyone deserves a place to live. Though she herself never had
the experience of being homeless, she has seen individuals who don’t have the basic commodity of a house and their experiences continue to drive her passion for the subject.

“How do you measure success for your program?”

According to Cassie, New Beginnings’ most important measurement for success is looking at the number of people they are able to successfully transition into permanent housing. Additional categories they consider important are increases in income and employment as well as other increases in income and benefits which might include social security, Cal Fresh or food benefits, and health insurance.

Similarly, Teresa relayed that the ultimate measurement of success for every individual working with Dreams for Change is the ability to obtain and maintain housing. Dreams for Change works with individuals experiencing homelessness across multiple spheres including their safe parking and workforce training programs. However, regardless of what a person’s situation may be, the ability to stay in housing is the truest measurement for success. As a person works towards the goal of being housed, Dreams for Change also provides supplemental support for steps that will help them achieve that goal including getting a job to increase their income to afford housing.

“How do you think the political environment in California has failed homeless individuals and contributed to the housing crises?”

Cassie specifically cited affordable housing regulations as one way that California has failed individuals experiencing homelessness. While Cassie conceded that housing regulations in California can be beneficial in that they prevent people being taken advantage of, they also create barriers to affordable housing. One other potential barrier
Cassie mentioned was NIMBYism or the not in my backyard movement in which increases in community input, while necessary, can also be prohibitive in preventing actual change from occurring. Nevertheless, Cassie sees potential changes in California as a definite possibility. She cited the dramatic increase in housing units available to homeless individuals through Project Roomkey in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. What she says would have taken California years to enact happened in a matter of months and while this signals progress, lots of regulations continue to exist which bog down the process of accessing affordable housing.

In contrast, Teresa framed the issue of politics and its failure to address homelessness as a class divide between the “haves and have nots.” Teresa rightly described the diverse physical landscape of California from coastal areas to inland deserts as contributing to the diverse communities which politicians in California represent. Often, the political issues and alliances between politicians boil to class and what people in an area represented by a politician have certain resources while others do not. Teresa argued that most of the time, those that are pushed aside, especially in local politics, are the homeless because there is a lack of willingness by politicians to take responsibility for these individuals and even when they do it is not necessarily to address the whole issue. This struggle between the haves and have not often plays itself out in the housing space. Teresa described the way in which interests of the “haves” often determine where municipalities build, how much is built and what capacity housing has to support the interests of both sides of the economic spectrum. For example, even if a politician wants to build low-income housing, people will often not want it to be built in their neighborhood.
When the vast majority of areas don’t want affordable housing built, it forces politicians to tow the same lines as the majority of constituents even if they are not the ones who would be directly impacted by a decision to build affordable housing. Teresa concluded by stating that this struggle of resources leads to how the issue of homelessness is dealt with as a whole.

“What are one or two obstacles to substantial state-wide policy changes relating to homelessness?”

Cassie reiterated that in her opinion the unwillingness to change the availability of affordable housing due to things like the cost of acquiring permits continues to be the most substantial obstacle to change relating to homelessness. However, Cassie also added that certain changes on the state-wide level have improved the ability for low-income individuals or individuals experiencing homelessness to gain access to affordable housing. For example, Cassie cited a decision by Governor Newsom allowing individuals receiving Section 8 vouchers or government subsidies as a source of income cannot be discriminated against because of their source of income when attempting to rent property. In other words, if an individual meets the criteria for low-income housing but receives Section 8 vouchers, they cannot be turned away. Cassie described being encouraged by this kind of progress, but repeated her view this is not enough.

Teresa provided two primary obstacles to substantial state-wide policy change: allocation of resources and a rural v. urban divide. According to Teresa, the allocation of resources primarily translates to policies around finance which hinder a lot of potential change. She described how scientific study now shows that a Housing First Model
approach to solving homelessness is far superior to any other method. However, in her experience, California doesn’t put the resources that would be necessary to make changes to alter current systems. Funds are then allocated in a combination where old methods continue to receive funding so in some ways the State is trying to use both old methods and a Housing First approach which hinders progress and makes it impossible to solve the issue on a state-wide level. The second obstacle Teresa raised, a rural v. urban divide relates to the allocation of resources in terms of which communities receive financial support and how local leadership distributes state funds. In her work, Teresa finds that even when policies are made on a state-level that have great potential, the ways that implementation trickles down often push those in need aside. For example, even if a certain amount is allocated to a service on a state-level, counties are in charge of implementation and distribution. Teresa recalls the challenges of this approach in that often times the county of San Diego in which her organization operates does not necessarily listen to or use funds how they were intended when dispersed by the state. The lack of follow-through by counties despite the good intentions by the state create a confusing environment in terms of communication which means often times it is really difficult to get anything done.

“Given the vulnerability of homeless individuals to suffer negative health outcomes, what is the best way policy can address the intersection between health and homelessness?”

In our discussion, Cassie described case management as a key component to getting people connected to health resources that already exist. Cassie relayed that many times people experiencing homelessness do not have access to resources like adequate
transportation to get to medical appointments. While services like Medical often have contracts with transportation for its users, people have to call multiple weeks in advance which might not be an option for everyone. According to Cassie one potential policy change would be to divert more resources towards transportation so that individuals experiencing homelessness could actually attend medical appointments. A second potential policy change Cassie raised was increasing funding for mental health programs to make them more accessible. Cassie said that while certain packages and bills have attempted to address mental health, it can be incredibly difficult to find and hire staff for those services. Additionally, to receive county services in the county of Santa Barbara, a person must be deemed either moderate or severely in need of care which often leaves out individuals who are still struggling. While people might have access to a third party, the inability to access adequate mental health services is still an issue that needs resolving across the state.

For Teresa, the intersection between health and homelessness goes back to the issues around access to housing. She argued that if people are put in housing, a lot of the medical issues, be it physical or mental, are easier to stabilize than they would be if someone is living on the streets. Teresa also emphasized the disconnect between are health systems and service systems. She provided the example of a homeless individual in San Diego who was experiencing “patient dumping” or going in and out of hospitals in the San Diego area without actually receiving treatment for underlying issues. While Teresa sees some improvements with these kinds of in that physicians are using things like the social determinants of health to direct patient care, there is still a large disconnect that could potentially be aided by placing people into housing. Another reason why Teresa sees the
housing component as so integral to the relationship between health and homelessness is because of the costs of certain services that result from a lack of housing. Teresa provided another example of a homeless youth her organization worked with who used an ambulance as a means of transportation to get to certain neighborhoods. Over the course of about three and a half weeks, this single individual used an ambulance around 10 times. The cost for health systems for ambulance use, emergency room use etc. is very high. Teresa argues that these costs would decrease if people were housed on a larger scale. For Teresa, until people are put in homes, health issues and the costs they incur cannot be addressed resulting in a continued lack of change.

“Have you noticed any trends based on race, gender, sexuality and citizenship in the individuals your organization works with?”

In regard to any demographic trends, Cassie relayed that New Beginnings predominantly sees single white male individuals seeking their services. The breakdown by gender is about 60% male and 40% female. There are some couples and families that their organization works with, but Cassie finds that it is not as many as people would assume. In the last several years, Cassie has noticed more individuals who identify as transgender seeking services. In regard to citizenship status, Cassie finds that by and large they do not have people seeking services who do not have permanent residency in the U.S. She believes this may be because there is still a lot of stigma and fear in immigrant communities about seeking help and that to use New Beginnings’ SPP services, people have to have a current driver’s license, registration and insurance due to the ordonnance of Santa Barbara municipal code which allows the program to operate. It can be difficult for
people who are not citizens to obtain these forms of identification which may be another reason why they don’t see non-citizens seeking their assistance. The main reason Cassie believes they see the types of demographics they do is in large part due to the fact that Santa Barbara is a predominantly white area of California.

Teresa was able to point to some recent trends that Dreams for Change is observing in the area of demographics. Dreams for Change has found that black and Latino or Hispanic populations are disproportionately experiencing homelessness in comparison to the general population. These trends have become very apparent in recent years especially since Dreams for Change opened up a new Safe Parking location in one of San Diego’s predominantly low-income and minority communities. This particular location is located on the edge of town and a couple of miles away from major highways. Other SPP locations for Dreams for Change are located closer to a highway and often draws users from a broader geographic area. In contrast, the new SPP cite sees that users are mostly from the surrounding community and are of black and brown descent. While Teresa said that this trend was initially surprising, it may point to the impact that more SPP locations can have in providing services to specific communities who need them. Another area where Teresa has noted increases is in senior populations. Teresa has worked in this field for about 10 years and the number of homeless seniors she sees continues to grow. According to Teresa this may be due to the elderly being pushed out of housing due to cost or loss of a sustainable income. In terms of gender and sexuality Teresa didn’t note any specific trends, but conveyed that the access to services based on gender can be disproportionate in a way where women have more direct services than men. Pre-COVID, Teresa found that there
was an extreme uptick in family homelessness due mostly to dramatic increase in housing and rental costs. However, eviction moratoriums put in place by the State in response to COVID has helped lessen the number of families experiencing homelessness. Given the proximity of San Diego to Mexico, Teresa believes that her organization does not see a lot of non-citizens primarily because families who have come from Mexico take family members who come to the U.S. in as a cultural value. In these instances there may be more “doubling up,” but that is not a demographic Dreams for Change sees regularly.

“Do you think emergency protocols put in place in reaction to COVID-19 (Project Roomkey, etc.) are likely to remain or inform policy relating to homelessness in the future?”

Cassie believes and hopes that emergency protocols like Project Roomkey will continue to exist and inform future decisions relating to policy around homelessness. When Project Roomkey began, Cassie said that New Beginnings actually expanded to help staff two positions at Project Roomkey full time. Currently, a full-time housing navigator and housing specialist from New Beginnings are working on site at Project Roomkey locations to help people in the Project Roomkey location transition into and retain housing. Cassie found that the continued extension of Projection Roomkey, which was orignionally meant to shut down at the end of 2020, signals recognition of the program’s success. The benefits of having people experiencing homelessness in one location versus out in encampments or other sites makes working with people a lot easier. She has also found that for individuals who may be more service resistant, Project Roomkey allows services to be brought directly too these individuals which makes them more accepting of services. Cassie hopes that
continued funding for Project Roomkey will remain since it appears to be a successful and potentially sustainable model. The amount of people that have been housed through Project Roomkey is highly unusual, but hopefully shows that programs like this can be necessary and useful going forward.

Teresa feels that on some level, there is a continued willingness to continue to fund protocols like Project Roomkey from the State. However, while she is encouraged that funds are being freed-up to continue these projects, which are obviously less expensive than building completely new housing units, there is still a lot of learning that needs to take place to perfect existing programs. Teresa conveyed that on a local level from individuals working on these programs in San Diego, the primary issue she hears about is that there is a very large gap between the amount of people being placed into the programs and the capacity for staff to manage and provide services in a meaningful way. Thus, while people are getting housed, they are struggling because there isn’t enough staff as would be needed. Herein lies the main lesson Teresa believes ought to be integrated into programs like Project Roomkey: while the housing is a good step, there needs to be a kind of dual capacity which includes both housing and the staffing infrastructure to support people in the housing and help them succeed past the program. That said, Teresa did say that she is starting to see a difference in chronically homeless persons who are directly benefiting from increased funds available for homelessness projects. Her main concern going forward is that the financial backing currently coming from the state will stop. Given that programs like Project Roomkey are being supplemented by federal funds, Teresa finds that the only real
solution is a national response to the issue of homelessness given the amount of money it will take to solve homelessness.

“How does the criminalization of behaviors associated with homelessness (loitering, living in a vehicle etc.) impact your organization’s work?”

Cassie described several aspects of how criminalization policies impact New Beginnings. Primarily, she said that these kinds of laws and their enforcement is a very grey area. While it is not technically illegal to sleep in a vehicle, traditionally law enforcement would tell people to move a long and point them to New Beginnings as a resource even if that meant waking someone up by tapping on their car window at 3:00 am. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, she says that they have seen a decrease overall in people seeking their services. She’s not sure if this has anything to do with the fact that law enforcement may be being more lenient with people experiencing homelessness, but this is definitely a possibility. Cassie also discussed the way in which city ordinances have required New Beginnings to change some of its program structure. For example, the new ordinance banning RVs from parking on city streets necessitated the opening of a daytime lot for people who live in their RV. Cassie says that the city of Santa Barbara was supportive in this endeavor. Now, New Beginnings has a daytime parking lot for RVs so that they are not at risk of being ticketed during the day, and at night they can utilize a different parking lot also run by New Beginnings. Cassie also relayed that she feels national attitudes to homelessness are slowly changing. As laws are struck down around the country that criminalize homelessness she has experienced that law enforcement in other places will become more aware of the underlying issues and be less likely to ticket.
Teresa spoke to the burden that criminalization policies can place on individuals experiencing homelessness. She described ordinances that criminalize behavior associated with homelessness as heart breaking for her personally given the severe trauma and mental health consequences it can have for her clients. For example, several days before we spoke, one of the individuals Dreams for Change works with was shot by the police for no apparent reason. While this does not pertain to a criminalization policy, it does speak to relationship between individuals experiencing homelessness and law enforcement. Teresa says that policies which criminalize homelessness are a major hinderance and keep people in a cycle of homelessness. For example, she has seen cases where someone is living in their vehicle and uses it to get to their job. The person’s car gets impounded, and the person has to live on the streets and loses their job because they have no way of getting to it. Even if someone is making progress, if they receive a fine or ticket it can cost them time, money, or even give them a criminal record which would make it much more difficult to obtain or maintain a job in the future. Essentially, criminalizing homelessness is a way of locking individuals out of systems that would help improve their lives. In addition to costing her clients’ money, criminalization policies also impact Dreams for Change because they often help people to pay off fines so that the client is able to move forward. According to Teresa, while this is a necessary service to provide, it detracts from what the main focus should be: housing. Teresa said quite clearly that these kinds of policies need to stop so that resources can be better spent helping rather than hurting individuals who are already in a bad situation.
“Do you see the emergence of more Housing First approaches such as Project Roomkey, Tiny Homes or ADUs making an impact on the ability for individuals experiencing homelessness to obtain housing?”

These kinds of Housing First approaches to homelessness Cassie says are very needed. She described her experiences working with clients who have been out of traditional housing for so long that the kinds of social norms attached to living in a home can be jarring and difficult for clients to adapt to. For example, some clients she has worked with have lived on the streets for so long that it will take several weeks if not months for them to be comfortable being and sleeping in a housing unit rather than say outside on their balcony. She sees these kinds of approaches as a good stepping or transitional solution to these kinds of issues. And, in some cases, she thinks they may be viable as a permanent fix. For example, she discussed Tiny Homes specifically as an option that might work for individuals who experienced homelessness because it allows someone who is used to living with few belongings to still feel comfortable in a house. She acknowledges that the housing crisis in California is not going away and so whatever methods allow people to be housed ought to implemented and followed as fast as possible.

While Teresa feels that all these options have great benefits and a Housing First is definitely the right route, the primary problem that exists is that no existing housing stock for low income or homeless individuals. The prohibitive costs in California of obtaining housing mean that to create a solution, California must first and foremost increase its housing stock. Another potential problem that exists is the physical land space many of these kinds of projects require. In urban cities where there is very little building space, most
building will end up being for apartments rather than something like Tiny Homes. Teresa thinks an important component will prove to be finding the right projects for the right landscape rather than pushing for housing where it isn’t right in the given situation. Nevertheless, regardless of the type of housing, more is needed. She mentioned ADUs and Project Roomkey as ways the state is creating more housing stock. While something like an ADU would not necessarily go to a homeless individual, it is still a way to create more housing. She added that Project Roomkey is essentially a way that California is bringing back the idea of a single room occupancy (SRO) hotel. This kind of bridge housing will help. The more housing that exists, the more people her organization can put into housing.

“Tell me one thing that would surprise people about your organization?”

Cassie said that one thing which often surprises people about New Beginnings is its history working with low-income populations of Santa Barbara. New Beginnings was started over 50 years ago as a night counseling clinic. After getting established in the Santa Barbara community working with low-income populations, they were able to expand their organization to include homeless services programs like their SPP. Cassie describes their proven track record and documented ability to help low-income populations as a way that they were able to build trust with the community. This trust has been integral to the success of their SPP and other programs. Cassie also relayed that the history of their organization as prioritizing mental health has played a role in their continued success. For example, Cassie’s boss is a licensed counselor and Cassie has seen the way that having licensed clinicians on staff and having a history of assisting people with mental health has allowed
New Beginnings to help with the mental health consequences often present with individuals who are experiencing homelessness.

While people are often surprised by the work Dreams for Change does in general given their help in establishing best practices for Safe Parking Programs, Teresa says that their style of programs is often what surprises people most. The programs for Dreams for Change are integrated so that the main focus is ensuring that people get housed. All clients go through financial education and meet with a financial coach regardless of where they came from in seeking services (Safe Parking, workforce training etc.). The point of prioritizing population over individual program is to attempt to best support people in stabilizing their housing and financial situations. One specific aspect of this that sets Dreams for Change apart is the work they do around taxes. Teresa describes Dreams for change as the “tax gurus” of San Diego County because of the work they do to help people with their income taxes and provide education and outreach in the community. Studies done by Dreams for Change show that earned income tax credits at the state and local level are one of the main reason people are able to stay housed by paying for their bills and rent with the cash they receive from these tax credits. Dreams for Change will actually be participating in a formal study based on this work. Teresa knows that people are often surprised by their attention to taxes specifically, but knows that it is a primary foundation in the ability for people to maintain housing.

“Can you give me an example of a person you or your organization has worked with whose story is especially meaningful to you? No privileged, confidential, or private information necessary, speaking very broadly is ok.”
The story Cassie provided is about a client who has worked with New Beginnings for seven years. This client, a disabled senior man, started out living in his RV when he came to New Beginnings. He was estranged from his one known family member who lives on the East Coast and was trying to survive with very little income and mostly relied on social security payments. Cassie describes him as a very creative individual who makes glass jewelry. During COVID-19, the man fell and broke a rib. The subsequent treatment led to his being diagnosed with cancer. Over the past several months, Cassie has worked with him to get him connected to different doctors and providers and set up his cancer team. Her next step was advocating on his behalf to try and get him housed as quickly as possible through subsidized senior housing. Eventually, housing came through and New Beginnings was able to help him get housed, acquire furniture, pots and pans and even a kitten named for his favorite beverage, Kombucha. Cassie describes the crazy experience of seeing his transition from living in his RV, working with him during low and high points and eventually getting to see him housed. She said that even the most difficult individuals who appear rude and angry can change when they are housed. Getting to see this for herself made her understand even more the difference having housing can make for a person.

The story that Teresa told is of a young woman who has worked with Dreams for Change for about three years. When she first came to Dreams for Change, she had just finished an approximately yearlong jail sentence. As a child, she was in and out of the foster system and experienced periods of homelessness. While she is still connected to some family, the relationships are not necessarily good ones. When she came into Dreams for Change’s workforce training program at the age of 22, she came with the hope of getting
her life back on track. Through that program she began to work and gain skills which showed her what having a job and being employed meant. While it was difficult for her to adjust, Teresa described that eventually she began to understand what is expected in a formal work setting. Only a couple of years later when the woman was 24, her sister passed away from cancer. Her sister had five children and the woman had two children of her own. However, despite these challenges, the woman took in the five children and is now a single mom of seven. Since her sister died, the woman has continued to seek services with Dreams for Change, but has continued to work and help the children she cares for deal with their grief over losing a mother. Currently, she works two jobs and Teresa says she has really stepped up to the plate to ensure the children in her care have everything they need. Teresa says that watching this woman grow as an individual given her journey from getting out of prison to being in and out of homelessness and now trying to set an example for the kids she is raising has made a big impact on her. She is glad the woman feels that she can reach out to Dreams for Change in times of need and that she knows she has a greater support system.

5.3: Discussion of Interview Results and Answer to Research Question 2

As a reminder, Research Question 2 states: What political and policy changes are necessary to increase affordable housing in California? After speaking with Cassie Roach of New Beginnings and Teresa Smith from Dreams for Change, the context for how Safe Parking Programs operate and interact with the realities of their cities is much clearer. The most important take away from speaking with these two experts is that housing ought to be the primary priority for any policy which hopes to address and impact the underlying
causes of homelessness in California. Both Roach and Smith confirmed their support for a Housing First approach as indeed the only tested method for solving homelessness. While they also spoke to different support systems, housing continued to be one thing of supreme importance to both individuals. Indeed, both Roach and Smith said that the number of individuals they house is the primary way that success is measured for their programs.

However, both Roach and Smith also offered other nuanced perspectives for how policy can change in California that have not as of yet been addressed by this paper. One specific suggestion that stood out from Roach was in her answer to Question 6: “Given the vulnerability of homeless individuals to suffer negative health outcomes, what is the best way policy can address the intersection between health and homelessness?” Roach provided that transportation to health providers is a substantial issue for the individuals experiencing homelessness that she works with. Roach suggested that one way for policy to address the intersection between health outcomes and homelessness would be to divert funding towards affordable public transportation and making health access more available and affordable. While these recommendations seem like common sense, Teresa outlines the way in which what may appear to be a simple task for someone with housing can seem extremely daunting for someone experiencing homelessness. Conversely, in several of her answers, Smith spoke to a rural v. urban divide in California which often dictates both the response of politicians to the needs of their constituents, how the State allocates funds, and how housing is able or unable to be constructed based on the landscape of certain areas. I found this perspective to be extremely helpful in understanding both the political environment of homelessness policy in California and the frustration that exists for
individuals like Smith who cannot necessarily change these realities and are bound to the will of their County for resource allocation.

Both Roach and Smith were able to provide a humanizing perspective to the topic of homelessness. It is easy to think of homelessness as just another area of political science or public policy. And, while the solutions to this issue may lie in law making and reform, it is important to be reminded of the individual human beings who California’s political system has failed. Their stories in answer to Question 12: “Can you give me an example of a person you or your organization has worked with whose story is especially meaningful to you? No privileged, confidential, or private information necessary, speaking very broadly is ok” are only a small picture into the greater landscape of this issue.

Thus, my primary recommendations are as follows. As both Roach and Smith say, any kind of housing is vitally important to creating change for individuals experiencing homelessness in California. So, SPPs, Project Roomkey, Tiny Homes and other efforts that allow for the construction of housing in urban areas like ADUs or the Vignes Complex should continue to be funded as a priority for California going forward. Additionally, increasing aid, federal or state, ought to be provided to ensure that programs like Project Roomkey are not only a short-term fix, but that they have adequate staffing and support to provide the individuals in their care with the resources they need. Additionally, efforts mentioned by Roach and Smith such as earned income tax benefits, access to mental health services, and potentially free public transportation should be included in conversations around how to support individuals experiencing homelessness. Lastly, ordinances which criminalize behaviors related to experiencing homelessness ought to be abolished access
the California and the U.S as a violation of human rights. All of the suggestions listed above would not only benefit individuals experiencing homelessness, but also the greater systems of municipalities, cities, California as a whole and the U.S. which continue to treat individuals experiencing homelessness as second-class citizens and unworthy of attention. Cassie Roach and Teresa Smith provided valuable perspectives and expertise in the area of homelessness work and greatly contributed to the focus of this project on ways that public policy can address solving homelessness in California.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this undergraduate honors thesis, I examined different ways California is attempting to mitigate its ongoing homelessness crisis by implementing alternative policy solutions using a Housing First approach in lieu of statewide policy changes. I conducted a thorough analysis of three Safe Parking Programs in California as well as other Housing First alternatives in addition to interviewing experts on the subject to answer my research questions.

The broadest answer to Research Question 1 is that the most effective alternative housing solutions for decreasing homelessness include a combination of Housing First methods and the kinds of health and life skills services necessary for individuals in these programs to succeed in maintaining their housing be it transitional or permanent. In analyzing the Safe Parking Programs at New Beginnings the LAHSA and Dreams for Change, it became clear while living in a car or RV may not seem an ideal alternative housing solution, many individuals who live in their vehicle would be living in more dire conditions but for the shelter a vehicle provides. Additionally, the persistence of municipal ordinances which criminalize vehicle dwelling, in some ways necessitating Safe Parking Programs. Following the analysis that was conducted of each the three Safe Parking Program models, it is clear that there is still much more to learn about the effectiveness of these kinds of programs. While it was difficult in some cases to gain a full picture of the true success of each program due to a lack of data reporting, the most impactful model appears to be those that actively combine other kinds of services like financial training with their Safe Parking Program. This can be seen by New Beginnings and Dreams for Change.
In contrast, as a government entity the LAHSA has a far broader model and may therefore be unable to regulate what is provided by the different programs it manages. While it is difficult to definitively say which model is most successful given the inefficient reporting models these organizations use, the fact that the LAHSA does not report any data regarding their success of finding clients permanent housing indicates that the other models ought to be championed as a potential step to finding people experiencing homelessness a permanent residence. Nevertheless, while Safe Parking Programs provide a viable bridge housing option, Project Roomkey and Tiny Homes show an even more forceful attempt to implement a Housing First strategy to homelessness mitigation in California. Since 2016, several municipalities in California have altered their zoning laws as a means to more easily construct tiny homes for use by homeless individuals. Alternatively, as an emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Gavin Newsom implemented Project Roomkey as a way to house homeless individuals. Though Project Roomkey has allowed some members of the homeless population to receive housing, it has not been as impactful as lawmakers hoped, and its funding sources may render it obsolete in the near future. However, the persistence and creativity with which California local programs and policy continue to devise alternative Housing First approaches to homelessness show that these efforts must continue to grow if a solution to homelessness is to be found.

The broadest answer to research question two is that politically, California policy makers must fully commit to a Housing First approach to mitigating homelessness which requires increasing any and all affordable housing options across the state. The perspectives of Cassie Roach of New Beginnings and Teresa Smith of Dreams for Change highlighted
the importance of housing not only as a policy solution but as a human right. Individuals who have lacked housing for an extended period of time like those experiencing homelessness are no less deserving of housing than anyone else. And yet, both experts described the way in which policy be it regarding health, criminalization, or housing continuously leaves people experiencing homelessness out of the conversation. Roach and Smith provided unique perspectives, but both also promoted the importance of combining the availability of services with the housing as of central importance. While this is not necessarily a prescription for increasing affordable housing, it is a necessary component to ensuring that once someone is moved into permanent housing, they are able to maintain it and not end up homeless again. The support systems provided by the New Beginnings and Dreams for Change and their success in housing their clients and helping those clients stay housed shows a tested method that newer projects like Project Roomkey ought to implement in a similar way. Interviewing Cassie Roach and Teresa Smith broadened the context for how Safe Parking Programs interact with the communities they serve as well as provided potential changes to policy that may be necessary to increase affordable housing for use by individuals experiencing homelessness in California.

If I were to move forward with this project in the future, I would like to look more closely at the history of criminalization ordinances related to individuals experiencing homelessness, how tax law can influence the cycles of homelessness and poverty, and broaden my scope of examination to other larger cities in California and the U.S. as a whole. While I was able to conduct a cursory examination of ordinances which criminalize homelessness in the cities of Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Diego, these cities are
by no means alone or even the most at fault in these kinds of local policy decisions. I would be very curious to see if the reasoning behind these kinds of policies is different in other areas of the U.S. and if so, analyze why that may be. In interviewing Teresa Smith, she raised the concept that earned income tax is one of the most important elements in keeping people housed and allowing people to pay their bills. This is an idea that was not raised in the literature on homelessness that I examined. I found this point incredibly interesting and would be very interested to look at it in the future given its potential to increase opportunities for low-income individuals. Finally, while this paper focuses on homelessness in California, homelessness is a growing issue nation-wide. Homelessness policy does not get the attention it requires in order for solutions to be theorized or implemented on a large scale. Further attention is needed to understand the political structures which have facilitated the nationwide rise of homelessness and what elements are blocking this issue from being solved.

Others, including myself, should continue to study the issue of homelessness policy because policy changes appear to be both the only way homelessness can be solved and simultaneously the biggest roadblock to solving homelessness. A Housing First approach to solving homelessness is widely the most accepted method for mitigating homelessness. Yet, California continues to either underfund or neglect Housing First approaches by continuing to use Linear approach methods. In analyzing alternative housing options and speaking with experts Cassie Roach and Teresa Smith, the lack of commitment to a Housing First method combined with roadblocks like criminalization ordinances mean that the landscape of homelessness policy is in a perpetual rut. It is my hope that scholars,
particularly in the area of political science, recognize this problem as a failure for local and state-level policy to address the concerns of individuals who valuable members of our communities but who have been failed by systems that give them little to no resources to change their status from homeless to housed. Homelessness is a policy issue among many other things and ought to be discussed that way on a national scale going forward.
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CHAPTER 8: APPENDIX A

Appendix A: Data Sources for Research Question 1

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CHAPTER 9: VITA

Miranda will graduate from Tulane University with Honors in Political Science on May 22, 2021. Following graduation, Miranda plans to return to her home state of California and work in the area of public policy to gain experience before applying to law school. Miranda hopes to pursue her passions for public policy and social justice in regardless of what her next endeavor may be.