



Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor, Second District



Keeping Vulnerable Homeless Seniors Housed Post-Pandemic



Project Roomkey provided people experiencing homelessness with a motel room to stay in during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo by Michael Owen Baker/Los Angeles County

Amid the pandemic, Los Angeles County is making an unprecedented effort to urgently bring 15,000 homeless people indoors to protect them from COVID-19 and slow the spread of infection. Acting on a [motion \[http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/145143.pdf\]](http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/145143.pdf) by Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Janice Hahn, the Board of Supervisors approved developing a

plan to keep particularly vulnerable homeless individuals housed even after the pandemic has subsided.

Currently, the LA County CEO Homeless Initiative is collaborating on Project Roomkey with the State of California, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, and other public and private partners to secure 15,000 hotel and motel rooms to serve as temporary homes for people experiencing homelessness who are particularly vulnerable to contracting the coronavirus, especially seniors and those with underlying health conditions. As of April 13, more than 1,946 beds at 23 sites have been procured, of which 515 beds are already in use.



Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas participating in the April 14, 2020 Board of Supervisors meeting. Photo by Aurelia Ventura/Board of Supervisors

“We can’t just think short-term,” Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. “We need to be thinking two steps ahead in order to mount a crisis response that is not only comprehensive but sustained.”

“Now is the time to be having these conversations – not when the disaster funding runs out,” Supervisor Ridley-Thomas added. “We may need to strategically prioritize existing resources, including housing vouchers

and supportive housing units that are coming online with Measure H and Proposition HHH funding, as well as Rapid Rehousing slots and resources for veterans.”

“We’re using unprecedented resources to bring people off the streets and indoors during this pandemic,” Supervisor Hahn said. “This is the level of urgency that the homeless crisis has demanded for years and when the day comes that this pandemic is behind us, we need to ensure that we can take advantage of the progress we have made and make sure that the people we have found shelter do not end up back on the streets.”

Bobby, a 65-year-old former software programmer lived in his car for 10 years until Project Roomkey helped him temporarily move into a hotel room. “It’s like I have to pinch myself all the time to believe this,” he said. “I would love it if they turn this into permanent housing because it would be kind of a bummer to have to go back to the car. To have permanent housing would be life changing — mentally, spiritually, every

kind of way.”

Arthur Ross, a 72-year old street outreach case manager for the homeless services provider HOPICS, also backed the effort to provide long-term housing, particularly for vulnerable homeless seniors. “A society’s greatness can be measured by how well it treats the young and the old,” he said. “With a sustainable plan, homeless seniors have an opportunity to rise like a phoenix out of the ashes of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The Los Angeles Business Council (LABC) also expressed “strong support” for the Supervisors’ motion, calling it “a major step toward a long-term strategy to provide a roof over the head of every Angeleno.” LABC President Mary Leslie said, “With nearly 9 percent of the LA County homeless population aged 65+, and growing, we must take every action to protect these at-risk individuals and families.”



A woman who benefited from Project Roomkey. Photo by Michael Owen Baker/Los Angeles County

Meanwhile, Willowbrook Senior Center Director and Empowerment Congress Senior Services Committee Director Sandi Hamilton said, “Older adults have had to dip into their retirement savings to address high housing costs, home and car maintenance, family matters and medical needs. This public health crisis will further send many senior citizens into poverty and homelessness. Plans to address homelessness must continue as, indeed, housing is a human right for all individuals. This motion supports outside-the-box solutions to ensure that we have NO unsheltered people over 65.”

This motion continued [action](https://ridley-thomas.lacounty.gov/index.php/lacounty-marshals-resources-for-comprehensive-crisis-response-to-homelessness/) [https://ridley-thomas.lacounty.gov/index.php/lacounty-marshals-resources-for-comprehensive-crisis-response-to-homelessness/]

that Supervisors Ridley-Thomas and Hahn initiated on January 21, 2020 when the Board directed County Departments to examine the Comprehensive Crisis Response Strategy [http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/143508.pdf] issued by Governor Gavin Newsom’s Council of Regional Homeless Advisors and develop the framework for establishing a legal obligation to provide housing.

In a report [http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/143508.pdf] back to the

Board dated March 24, 2020, a workgroup of County Departments proposed implementing or scaling up 16 of the Comprehensive Crisis Response strategies. It also proposed a pilot program that would focus on ensuring housing for homeless people aged 65 years or older.

“The County has been working aggressively to address the homelessness crisis. With assistance from the State, the County could do even more to help people move into housing,” County CEO Sachi Hamai said in the report.

The newest motion [<http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/145143.pdf>] called for the County to report back with an initial plan in 30 days and a longer-range implementation framework within 45 days to ensure options to all homeless older adults aged 65 and older who are willing to receive housing and services.



A couple who benefited from Project Roomkey. Photo by Michael Owen Baker/Los Angeles County

Share this entry

				
---	---	---	---	---

