

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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March 27, 2025

The Honorable Aisha Wahab
Chair, Senate Housing Committee
1021 O Street, Room 3330
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 16 (Blakespear), Homelessness facility operating costs – OPPOSE

Dear Senator Wahab,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to express our strong opposition to SB 16 (Blakespear), which imposes significant financial and administrative burdens on counties without providing adequate funding or flexibility to effectively address homelessness in our communities. While we recognize the importance of addressing homelessness through coordinated efforts, this bill creates unrealistic mandates that will strain county resources and disrupt ongoing local initiatives.

First, the requirement that counties contribute 50% of the expected costs of city-operated shelters, without guaranteed funding sources, places an undue financial burden on counties already struggling with limited budgets. Many counties, especially those with smaller populations or fewer financial resources, will find it infeasible to meet this requirement without sacrificing other essential services. Though the bill allows counties to declare financial infeasibility through a resolution, it ultimately gives the state the power to determine county contributions, undermining local fiscal autonomy.

Second, the bill's mandate for an expanded housing element assessment and integrated plan for behavioral health services increases administrative workloads without ensuring the necessary financial and technical support. Local governments are already required to collect and analyze extensive housing data, and this additional mandate will divert valuable resources away from direct services that could more immediately address homelessness.

Third, withholding 50% of Round 7 Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention (HHAP) program funds until state approval of an update to the regionally coordinated homeless action plan creates a bureaucratic bottleneck that could delay critical services. Counties and cities need reliable and timely funding to maintain continuity in homelessness programs, and this provision risks destabilizing ongoing efforts.

Additionally, the bill's provisions requiring counties to integrate Round 7 HHAP activities into their Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) plans place further administrative burdens on counties without providing corresponding funding or flexibility. The MHSA was designed to address long-term mental health needs and repurposing it to accommodate homelessness programs without additional resources may undermine essential mental health services that are already stretched thin.

Finally, while we support the goal of enhancing regional coordination, a rigid, state-mandated approach does not account for the unique challenges different counties face in addressing homelessness. Local governments must have the flexibility to develop and implement solutions tailored to their specific needs rather than be subject to one-size-fits-all mandates that may not be effective in all jurisdictions.

For these reasons, the Kern County Board of Supervisors strongly opposes SB 16 and urges you to reconsider its provisions to ensure counties are not unfairly burdened with unfunded mandates that compromise their ability to serve vulnerable populations effectively. We appreciate your attention to our concerns and welcome the opportunity to collaborate on meaningful, sustainable solutions to homelessness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Leticia Perez', with a stylized, cursive script.

Leticia Perez, Chair
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members, Senate Housing Committee
Honorable Members, Kern Legislative Delegation
Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange