



COALITION TO
ABOLISH SLAVERY
& TRAFFICKING

RE: Comments Regarding Continuing Funding Needed for Project Safe Haven

I am providing written comments on behalf of the survivors the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (Cast) serves who are receiving housing through project Safe Haven.

Cast is one of the largest service providers in the country directly serving victims of human trafficking. In 2005 we opened the first shelter in the country dedicated to serving sex and labor trafficking survivors, and in 2018 we opened a second shelter. It is Cast's on the ground experience in Los Angeles that shape our request that funding for Project Safe Haven be continued. Additionally the disturbing findings during the annual 2018, 2019, 2020 homeless count that between 12%-16% reported being victims of human trafficking, demonstrates that homeless services money should be used for these individuals. Specialized programs like Project Safe Haven for human trafficking victims are needed as this population is often not appropriately served in traditional homeless services programs. This need is even more imperative due to COVID-19 which exacerbates vulnerability to recruitment into human trafficking and makes current victims receiving services more vulnerable to re-exploitation.

Traffickers commonly exploit sex and labor trafficking victims by providing access to shelter and basic necessities, and making victims feel like they have nowhere to turn but the trafficker for support. Further traffickers prey on vulnerable populations such as the homeless, those fleeing abusive relationships, and immigrants through recruitment into what seems like legitimate employment, and ends up being sex or labor trafficking. Due to COVID-19, California's astronomical unemployment rates makes those seeking work even more vulnerable to trafficking.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the only additional support provided to human trafficking survivors in Los Angeles is through Project Safe Haven. Project Safe Haven doubled the shelter capacity for survivors of domestic violence and has helped nearly two thousand Angelinos live Safer At Home without fear of violence. It has tripled Cast's capacity to serve the emergency shelter needs of trafficking victims. Unfortunately, without additional funding, the New Year will force survivors that are not yet connected to permanent housing to face another choice: fall into homelessness or go back to a human trafficker.

At Cast the faces of these survivors who will be forced to find a new place to stay are:

32 Survivors of Sex and Labor trafficking

- 19 sex trafficking survivors and 10 children of survivors
- 3 labor trafficking survivors

Cast has been struggling to re-house the above survivors but has been unable to secure housing for any of these current clients receiving Project Safe Have support due to lack of income, credit, the pandemic-shut down, and the stringent time line. Additionally due to mental and physical health concerns for these clients, Cast assessment is that frankly these clients are not ready to be transitioned to other housing programs and that the intensive support they are receiving through Project Safe Haven is imperative as the pandemic grips Los Angeles and is only expected to worsen in the next 2-3 months.

H-HAP money from the state of California must be utilized to continue this vital program for survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence during the pandemic and in its aftermath.

Cast also asks that the Council act urgently to:

- Collect program data to allow us to better understand how many survivors will still require support come January 1, 2021;
- Identify potential funding sources or ways to extend the use of remaining CRF funding or other CARES Act funding like Emergency Solutions Grants;
- Explore possible policy and system prioritization solutions to support connecting all remaining Project Safe Haven clients to permanent solutions;
- Search for permanent funding sources (including potential public/private partnerships with philanthropy) to extend this vital resource to continuing supporting survivors and their families through the pandemic and beyond.

Thank you in advance for addressing this life-threatening issue for trafficking survivors in your care.

COALITION TO ABOLISH SLAVERY AND TRAFFICKING

Systemic change is at the core of CAST's mission. Taking a survivor-centered approach to ending modern slavery, CAST has a proven track record of working directly with survivors of human trafficking which builds an important bridge between practice and policy to inform effective policy initiatives. By developing broad-based partnerships, CAST effectively advocates for policies that work to end human trafficking and help survivors rebuild their lives.

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