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MEMO

To: Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council
From: Nathaniel VerGow, Acting Chief Programs Officer, LAHSA *NV*
Date: August 29, 2023
Re: Report on Winter Shelter Program (Council File 12-1690-S18)

The following memorandum is in response to [Council File No. 12-1690-S18](#), approved by the Los Angeles City Council's Housing and Homelessness Committee on January 18, 2023. The motion directs the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) to report on increasing bed capacity, expanding Seasonal Winter Shelter Program (SWSP) sites, and ensuring equitable access to the City's Augmented Winter Shelter Program (AWSP). The requested program information is detailed below.

Winter Shelter Program Overview

Components

LAHSA's Winter Shelter Program consists of two components: the Seasonal Winter Shelter Program (SWSP) and the Augmented Winter Shelter Program (AWSP).

The SWSP is a site-based, low-barrier congregate shelter that offers safe and supportive shelter paired with food and resources to people experiencing homelessness, typically operated between November 1st to March 31st annually. These sites provide overnight shelter services for at least twelve hours (upwards to twenty-four hours) seven days a week during the winter season.

The AWSP provides congregate and/or non-congregate low-barrier shelter to people experiencing homelessness during severe cold and wet weather conditions, otherwise known as inclement weather. The program aims to protect individuals from contracting hypothermia, pneumonia, and any medical or health-related conditions induced by extreme cold and/or wet weather. When conditions warrant activation of the AWSP, sites are mobilized and operate twenty-four hours a day during severe weather event(s). The sites are then demobilized after the inclement weather period ends. Within the City of Los Angeles (City), the decision to activate AWSP resources is a collaborative one between the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Unified Homeless Response Center, LA City Mayor's Office, and LAHSA. AWSP can operate out of City Recreation and Parks (RAP) facilities, existing congregate shelters, hotels/motels, or other locations suitable for short-term shelter.



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Accessing SWSP and AWSP

As noted above, the SWSP operates out of congregate facilities throughout the winter season. Information about these resources is distributed through multiple avenues, such as LAHSA's website, regular LAHSA mass emails distributed throughout the winter season, LAHSA's social media accounts, partner agency bulletins, and outreach teams engaging with unsheltered individuals throughout the City of Los Angeles.

During the 2022-2023 winter shelter season, LAHSA and the City utilized motel vouchers as the primary available resource during AWSP activations. When AWSP was activated, individuals could call 1-800-548-6047 (LAHSA's WSP hotline) or 2-1-1 to determine qualification for resource. If the individual qualified for services, and a motel room was available, 2-1-1 processed the reservation and arranged transportation. In FY 22-23, 31,140 calls were received by 2-1-1 from individuals requesting access to winter shelter resources. LAHSA outreach teams also facilitated access to hotel/motel vouchers as an additional entry point to the program to further expand opportunities for unsheltered individuals to connect with this resource. In addition, in response to an extreme storm in February of 2023, LAHSA and the City opened three site-based AWSP locations at RAP facilities. These locations were open for approximately two weeks to increase the available inventory of beds in regions impacted by the storm.

Bed Capacity in Fiscal Year 2022-2023

In Fiscal Year 2022-2023, the City of Los Angeles invested \$4,322,805 in the winter shelter program. The funding supported both SWSP and AWSP and included a mid-year increase adjustment made as the program exceeded its original allocation due to an increase in AWSP program needs resulting from winter storms. A summary of available programming through these resources is included below.

SWSP

In Fiscal Year 2022-23, three congregate SWSP sites with a total bed capacity of 156 were operated for the winter season. The table below summarizes the SWSP inventory.

Table 1. Seasonal Winter Shelter Programs							
Provider	Project Name	Operation Period	Days of Operation	SPA	CD	SD	Bed Count
Abundant Blessings	View Street	11/1/2023-3/31/2023	151	6	2	2	16
Home at Last	Western	11/1/2023-3/31/2023	151	6	8	2	60
Home at Last	Broadway	2/13/2023-3/31/2023	47	6	9	2	80



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AWSP

This past winter, weather patterns were colder and more severe than in recent years. As a result, at the direction of the City, AWSP in the City of Los Angeles was activated continuously between January 1, 2023 and the program's closing date of March 31, 2023. During the winter season and across all activations, 142 unduplicated households accessed motel vouchers through the AWSP. The table below outlines the site-based AWSP resources that were available to people seeking shelter during the extreme storm period.

Table 2. Augmented Winter Shelter Congregate Programs							
Provider	Project Name	Operation Period	Days of Operation	SPA	CD	SD	Bed Count
First to Serve	Glassell Park	2/23/2023-3/6/2023	13	4	1	1	80
First to Serve	Second AME Church	2/26/2023-3/6/2023	10	6	9	2	75
Urban Alchemy	Van Nuys/Sherman Oaks	2/25/2023-3/6/2023	11	2	4	3	56

Efforts to Expand Program Capacity and Equitable Access in Fiscal Year 2022-2023

Significant efforts are made each year to maximize the number of beds and sites available within the funding resources allocated for SWSP and AWSP efforts. The funding available for each winter shelter season is approved through the City's annual budgeting process and funding is typically confirmed sometime between March and June for that winter's efforts. Once resources are confirmed, LAHSA begins site identification efforts throughout summer and fall and engages service provider partners to secure operators for site locations. Site identification efforts are conducted in coordination with the City, as the utilization of RAP facilities or other City-owned properties requires City approval.

Efforts to secure sites have been impacted by a shortage in available inventory. For example, SWSP requires securing sites that are available 24/7 for a 5-month period. Typically, sites that have dedicated space for this extended period prefer instead to operate services for 12-months of the year as it is more sustainable from a fiscal standpoint. In addition, AWSP requires securing sites on short, sometimes same day, notice. In the instance of repurposed RAP sites, or other similar facilities used for AWSP, pausing and/or moving regular programming at these locations is required to operate a proposed shelter.



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There are also operational challenges for service providers to operate SWSP and AWSP, which can limit feasibility of securing enough operators for these programs. Feedback from service providers on the challenges of operating SWSP and/or AWSP include the following:

- Operational concerns caused by the need for rapid deployment of staff and resources with limited notice.
- Difficulty in hiring, training, and re-training staff for short-term or seasonal programs.
- Concerns that the current reimbursement rate is insufficient to cover operating costs, particularly for AWSP where there are often overtime costs incurred because provider staff members need to take on additional shifts given the limited notice to increase staffing.
- Stretched capacity of service provider partners to expand services at new sites, especially in recent years.

Based on these facility and service provider capacity challenges, the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 winter shelter program focused on the following strategies:

SWSP:

- Utilizing contractually unfunded beds at existing interim housing sites to maximize utilization of bed inventory and facilitate linkages to year-round interim housing.
- Securing congregate sites, and providers to operate those sites, in areas where unfunded beds could not be secured.
- Utilizing LAHSA's Bed Reservation System through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to manage vacancies and coordinate placements into available beds.

AWSP:

- Utilizing hotel/motel vouchers to bring people indoors during activation of the ASWP in instances where congregate sites and providers could not be secured.
- Expanding avenues of access to AWSP by leveraging resource coordination through outreach teams, in addition to 2-1-1, to ensure that unsheltered individuals have multiple pathways to shelter access during severe weather events.

But despite these improved strategies for securing beds at site-based programs for SWSP, the inventory of available SWSP beds decreased from the year prior due to the persistent challenges outlined above. However, this decrease in site-based beds was offset by the addition of motel vouchers for AWSP, which created a flexible resource that could be leveraged, as needed, and deployed across the City of Los Angeles. As a result, more people were served through AWSP in the City of Los Angeles than in prior years.



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This past winter not only was the weather significantly colder and wetter than in recent years, there was also a substantial increase in requests for services from people experiencing homelessness. As there were increased efforts to publicize the program and access pathways this year, it is not yet clear if the increase in calls was due to an increase in demand or due to more readily information about the program. Regardless, LAHSA took several steps this past winter to increase capacity mid-season in partnership with the City. These efforts included the following:

- Requesting and receiving an increase in funding allocation for AWSP from the City to support an increase in issuance of motel vouchers.
- Opening an additional SWSP site in February 2023 to increase SWSP bed availability.
- Opening three RAP facilities for two-week operations of AWSP in February 2023 in response to an extreme storm.
- Increasing referral pathways into the program via outreach services to reduce barriers to entry for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- Working alongside LAHSA's contracted referral call center service provider to increase the number of motel vendors partnering with the AWSP.

The efforts above endeavored to increase both the inventory of programs, to reduce barriers to entry into the programs, and to expand equitable access into the winter shelter programs in areas lacking a site-based winter shelter.

Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Winter Season Planning

Planning for the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 SWSP and AWSP is currently underway to maximize shelter inventory. LAHSA plans to continue to operationalize site-based SWSP with a hybrid model of AWSP that operates out of both site-based facilities and motels. This year's responses will rely more heavily on site-based operations for AWSP, as there is anticipation there will be a reduction in available motel inventory that can be utilized for AWSP this winter. To expand site-based inventory for these efforts, LAHSA has been engaging with City County Districts, Councils of Governments, faith-based communities, and other partners to explore potential City- or privately-owned facilities that could be utilized for SWSP or AWSP. In addition, LAHSA has been engaging service providers to explore their capacity to operate SWSP or AWSP and is reviewing funding models with the goal of working with the City to alleviate budgetary concerns of providers.

Signature: 
Date: 08/29/2023