



Monterey County

Item No.

Board Report

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

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It is recommended that the Homeless Services Committee receive an update on key activities related to the Monterey County safe parking program operations.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Homeless Services Committee receive an update on key activities related to the Monterey County safe parking program operations.

SUMMARY/DISCUSSION:

Program History:

In the County of Monterey, there are increasing numbers of homeless individuals living in their vehicles as a last resort form of housing and the 2022 homeless census revealed 1/5 of unsheltered homeless individuals are living in their vehicle. Vehicle dwelling by persons experiencing homelessness is scattered throughout the County, with some areas having greater density of occupied vehicles than others. Vehicles provide a sense of security for persons experiencing homelessness, as they help alleviate fears that are commonly associated with living on the streets or in a shelter. Throughout the County, several ordinances have been enacted that do not allow for overnight parking. Thus, homeless individuals living in their vehicles must move repeatedly, or risk citations and towing. This lack of stability further entrenches individuals into homelessness, and negatively impacts their path to self-sufficiency and housing.

In response to a 2017 referral from a member of the Board of Supervisors, as well as community and environmental issues from homeless vehicle dwellers on Lapis Road in unincorporated Monterey County, several meetings were convened to discuss Safe Parking needs in the County. These discussions resulted in the creation of the Monterey County Safe Parking Program.

Current Operations and Successful Outcomes:

The Monterey County Safe Parking Program at 2616 First Ave., Marina officially opened on December 15, 2017 with space to serve approximately 15 vehicles (inclusive of large RVs) and added a smaller location in Seaside, located at 390 Elm Street in November 2019 with space to serve up to 7 cars (no RVs or large vehicles). Orphan Productions, a 501c(3) community-based organization presently contracts with Department of Social Services to administer the Safe Parking program.

The program operates 7pm to 7am, 7 days a week including holidays and provides participants a safe parking space to sleep in their vehicle, individual case management services that include job search, housing search, and other support as uniquely identified. Portable hygiene facilities, security and garbage disposal bins are on-site to support the program's operation. During FY 21-22, the program served 53 unique individuals which included 4 children. Of these individuals, 20 were linked to housing and 11 individuals gained new employment. The program handles approximately 120 calls each month with inquiries regarding the program and the waitlist has approximately 10-15 individuals.

Program Best Practices and Future Funding Opportunities:

While there are several excellent examples of successful safe parking programs throughout the country, the overall model of safe parking is still relatively new making on-going funding for the service somewhat challenging to secure. Existing programs draw funding from a number of sources including local city and county dollars as well as private and faith-based organization funding and newly created state programs have begun to identify operations of safe parking programs may fall under eligibility categories of “street outreach” so long as other certain funding requirements such as HMIS utilization and Housing First practices are met. These accommodations have recently allowed the county’s Homeless, Housing Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) funds to be applied toward operational costs, yet budget deficits continue to exist due to costly aspects of the program that are sometimes difficult to predict such as security issues and environmental cleaning.

The Sol Price School of Public Policy at University of Southern California published “Smart Practices for Safe Parking” a nationwide review of safe parking programs in April 2021 and the One Starfish program operated by our local provider was included in the report. The report findings support the concept of safe parking as a “stabilizing force in parkers’ lives and benefit to the broader community” and promote five key smart practices in safe parking programs: 1) intentional design, 2) strategic location of parking lots, 3) building trust and community among program participants, 4) strong social service integration, and 5) engaging stakeholders. In addition to the benefits the participants received, many programs cited “improved community understanding as a significant benefit and measured program success on the change in perceptions from the surrounding community who were often apprehensive during program onset.

Overall, safe parking programs appear to be a beneficial form of homeless intervention with increasing need. Homelessness is an issue that has compounding effects on those experiencing it and the average life expectancy for individuals experiencing homelessness is 25 years less than those in stable housing. Safe parking programs provide safe and sanitary short-term solutions to homeless individuals who are living in their vehicles while they are paired with supportive services that will assist them in finding permanent housing. Services that support families in obtaining stable, permanent housing create a pathway to other systems that can ultimately lead to better health and quality of life.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The Monterey County Department of Social Services engaged with representatives from Orphan Productions, CAO-IGLA Homeless Services Director, the Coalition of Homeless Services Providers, and other local homeless service providers.

FINANCING:

There is no effect to the County General Fund resulting from the receipt of this report.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

This program correlates to the Health & Human Services Strategic Initiative adopted by the Board of Supervisors by working towards the goals of improving the health and quality of life outcomes for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

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