

# HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS: RESIDENTS AND LEADERS CALL OUT CITY FOR AGGRESSIVE HOMELESSNESS POLICY

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One week after Gov. Gavin Newsom ordered cities to start clearing out homelessness encampments in their jurisdiction, San Francisco leaders and community members have voiced their concerns over the aggressive approach from the state, echoed by Mayor London Breed. On June 25, Newsom signed an executive order directing state agencies to begin evicting people from encampments, particularly ones that “pose a threat to the life, health, and safety of the community.” Mayor Breed has been clear about her stance on the crisis, saying that the city would have a “very aggressive” approach to cracking down on homeless encampments. The post *Housing Not Handcuffs: Residents and Leaders Call Out City for Aggressive Homelessness Policy* first appeared on Post News Group.

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By Magaly Muñoz

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On June 25, Newsom signed an executive order directing state agencies to begin evicting people from encampments, particularly ones that “pose a threat to the life, health, and safety of the community.”

Mayor Breed has been clear about her stance on the crisis, saying that the city would have a “very aggressive” approach to cracking down on homeless encampments.

Supervisor Dean Preston said at a press conference Tuesday morning that he was “disappointed” in the mayor and his fellow elected officials in supporting a narrative that criminalizes unhoused people.

“Just because Trump’s Supreme Court says we, the city, has the power to start arresting people, citing people, criminally prosecuting people for being homeless without even offering them a place to stay, does not mean we have to take that invitation,” Preston said.

Advocates held their press conference in front of the vacant Hotel Whitcomb, which is located down the street from city hall. During the pandemic, the hotel was used as a temporary housing facility for Project Roomkey in order to isolate and house vulnerable people who were living on the street.

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The community wants to use the hotel’s 459 rooms and dozens of other vacant units across the city, for permanent supportive housing to get people out of the encampments.

There are over 8,000 unhoused individuals in San Francisco, according to 2024 Point In Time Count data.

Angela Chan, Assistant Chief Attorney for the SF Public Defender’s Office, said it’s “extremely hard” to find temporary housing in the city because people feel unsafe and unwelcomed in certain shelters.

“Our ask or encouragement to the city is, let’s think through real solutions to really address the needs of people who are poor and unhoused because throwing people in jail, it makes things a lot

worse, and it costs the city a lot more," Chan told the Post.

The problem that attorneys are seeing is that unhoused individuals end up in jail for sleeping on the streets, only to be released the next day, still unhoused and awaiting a court date and possible fines or more jail time. The issue seems to be recycled and a way to kick the can down the road.

Chan said police are not assisting with resources for housing so it's on the public defenders to find clients help.

With the sweeps not being anything new to the city, advocates are worried about what this "very aggressive" crackdown might mean for homeless residents.

"We have a situation where want to make it uncomfortable for them, take away their property, push them around from block to block... What we'll see in the population is an increased level of trauma, longer episodes of homelessness, probably increased substance use, loss of medications and survival gear. All of these things really, really make a horrendous situation that much worse," Jennifer Friedenbach, executive director of the Coalition on Homelessness, told the Post.

Friedenbach said policymakers are shifting blame to unhoused people for being homeless instead of faulting themselves for the lack of addressing the issue.

She said rising rents, inflation in the cost of living, and income disparities are all driving forces to homelessness. Cities and local municipalities should provide rental assistance, eviction defense and variety in housing on the public and private market, while also building and buying affordable homes to transform into new living complexes.

The city plans to increase their sweeps of encampments starting August 1.



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