OVERVIEW
The San Diego County (County) Board of Supervisors continues to address the regional homelessness and housing crisis with unprecedented commitment and resources. As we continue to make historic investments to address this matter at all levels of county government, there is a need for resource optimization to identify the most effective avenues for critical resource distribution.

The best way to tackle the homelessness crisis is to prevent individuals from being homeless in the first place. Every person who remains housed, is one less person living on the street, in a car, or in a shelter. The Homeless Prevention Program, as described in this board letter, would help accomplish just that.

Predictive analytics that leverages a comprehensive integrated data system would enable the County to address homelessness before it begins. Existing programs often rely on varying entities for referrals to individuals most in need of resources to avoid homelessness. But many individuals in need might never receive the resources before they slip through the cracks. While these programs are successful in assisting many, a predictive model would allow the County to be proactive to discover who is eligible for various support programs.

This new program may also proactively and strategically keep hard working individuals in their homes and out of homelessness. This approach builds on successful implementation of a similar research-backed predictive model implemented in Los Angeles County, which has found a way to predict who is at the highest risk of homelessness, often before an individual recognizes their own vulnerability.

The County of San Diego can follow suit and implement such a program. We anticipate that, based on initial research, we would need to determine which departments and data points should be
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included in the integrated system. As the predictive risk assessment is created, it might also identify external data points (i.e. Homelessness Management Information System, Health Information Exchange, etc.) that should be included in the integrated system as well. Once it is known which departments are necessary for the success of the program, the Chief Evaluation Officer, along with other pertinent staff members, could then work to centralize necessary data into one system. This central point of entry for program staff is where the risk assessment could be utilized, and a determination made, to identify who might be most at risk for homelessness. Program staff could then use the identified list of individuals to provide resources, such as a case management plan, connection to services, or providing funds. This program is not intended to replace any existing program or funding model, but rather to streamline and predict who might most be in need of support to prevent homelessness.

Today’s actions include directions to the Chief Administrative Officer to develop a strategy to integrate different county department data points into an integrated data system and develop the Homeless Prevention Program, including a risk assessment to determine who may be most at risk of homelessness. Finally, to best implement this preventative program a Homelessness Prevention Unit is proposed to be created within the Department of Homelessness Solutions and Equitable Communities.

RECOMMENDATION(S)
CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER
Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to:

1. Develop a comprehensive integrated data system that can link and centralize multiple data points, both internal and external, into one system in which individual-level data would be anonymized after being linked. This system should include necessary county program participant information from relevant departments. Relevant departments might include but are not limited to: Department of Environmental Health Quality; Sheriff’s Department; Probation; Aging & Independence Services; Behavioral Health Services; Child Welfare Services; Eligibility Operations; Homeless Solutions & Equitable Communities; and Housing & Community Development Services. Return back to the Board with an implementation strategy for creating this system within 180 days, including an assessment of potential legal, operational, and technological challenges, along with funding needs, any necessary departmental operational changes, and an assessment of potential system uses beyond the homelessness risk assessment, which is the subject of this board letter.

2. Research and develop an implementation strategy for the creation of the Homeless Prevention Program which is a homelessness risk assessment model, along with the specified department data points that would be necessary for the successful implementation and execution of this model.

3. Create a Homeless Prevention Unit within the Office of Homelessness Solutions to assist with internal communication and coordination needed among departments as
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well as conduct direct outreach to individuals determined by the model to be at risk of homelessness.

4. Assess the costs of establishing the integrated data system, along with ongoing costs associated with maintaining its integrity, and identify potential funding sources.

5. Identify current funding sources that could be used, or funding needed, to support the Homelessness Prevention Program.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT
According to the Regional Task Force on Homelessness, the 2022 Point-in-Time Count identified a minimum of 8,427 people who said they were unsheltered or in shelters throughout the county. Of those who were unsheltered, 58 percent reported having a disability and 25 percent were 55 years or older. People of color are disproportionately impacted among those experiencing homelessness, with 27 percent identifying as Black or African American—roughly five times the proportion of African Americans in the region, and 3 percent identified as American Indian or Alaska Native—which is nearly three times the proportion in the region. Through this Homeless Prevention Program, the County will work with people at-risk of or experiencing homelessness, impacted residents, community partners, and other key stakeholders to ensure racial and social equity is front and center of all aspects of homelessness prevention programming.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT
The proposed action to prevent homelessness by utilizing a predictive risk assessment through combined data from County departments contributes to many of the County Sustainability Goals, specifically, to provide just and equitable access as well as to protect health and well-being. This proposed action will impact the communities and socio-economic groups most at risk of homelessness who have been historically burdened by factors often outside of their control, which supports sustainability in equity, economy, and health or wellbeing.

FISCAL IMPACT
There is no fiscal impact associated with today’s action. There will be future fiscal impacts based on recommendations resulting from today’s action, for which staff will return to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) with recommendations for consideration and approval. Funding for future costs will need to be identified by the departments and will proceed once identified. The departments will monitor their budgets and return to the Board with mid-year action to adjust the budget as necessary and/or incorporate future budgets as funding becomes available. At this time, there will be no change in net General Fund and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT
The homelessness and housing affordability crises remain not only a threat to hard-working families living paycheck to paycheck, but also remains a threat to businesses. Healthier and more prosperous employees will yield greater success for our businesses and our economy. Suggested rewrite: Investing in initiatives that prevent homelessness will have multiple benefits for individuals and families, and for local communities and businesses, with clear benefits for our
economy as a whole. Keeping more working families in their homes stands to benefit them and our regional economy long term.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT
N/A

BACKGROUND
Housing affordability and lack of affordable housing continue to be of great concern.¹ The County of San Diego (County) continues to invest in programs and seek new resources to address the ever-growing crisis of homelessness and housing affordability.² While we wait for affordable units to come online, we must also invest in complementary measures to provide critical resources and keep individuals in their homes.

The Regional Task Force on Homelessness (RTFH) conducts an annual homeless count mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide an estimate of the number of homeless persons throughout San Diego County. The count includes persons living “on the street” or staying in homeless shelters. Overall, the 2022 Point-in-Time Count found no less than 8,427 individuals experiencing homelessness across San Diego County, a 10 percent increase from 2020.³

The RTFH also published the “Homelessness Crisis Response System” report in 2020 that found the number of first-time homeless people in the county increased from 2,326 in 2019 to 4,152 in 2020, a 79 percent increase. Additionally, among households, first-time homelessness increased from 1,910 to 3,450 last year, up 81 percent.⁴

The County centralizes critical expertise and operations, and uses equity and data, to better provide housing and supportive services that address the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of losing their home. In November 2021, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to adopt the “Framework for Ending Homelessness.” The framework is anchored in five strategic domains: root cause and upstream prevention strategies; diversion and mitigation services; treatment and outreach; emergency/interim housing and resources; and permanent housing and supportive services.⁵

In 2020, the County of Los Angeles (L.A. County) began to address the housing and homelessness crisis by centralizing data for analysis to prevent homelessness before it starts. L.A. County invested in a predictive tool⁶ developed by University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) researchers that pulls data from eight county agencies to assist outreach workers by focusing their

⁵ https://www.countynewscenter.com/county-board-adopts-new-framework-for-ending-homelessness/
attention and assistance on individuals and families believed to be at the greatest risk of losing their homes or on the verge of homelessness.\textsuperscript{7}

The predictive model in Los Angeles uses an algorithm, with over 500 features, within a confidential data source. A few examples of those features within the homelessness predictive model include those who have been in the emergency room, booked in jail, suffered a psychiatric crisis that led to hospitalization, received social service benefits, or have listed a county office as their “home address” for such programs, an indicator that has been shown to mean they were homeless at the time.

By identifying people at high risk of first-time homelessness or returning to homelessness, and understanding risk factors associated with future homelessness, L.A. County has been more effectively able to target its homelessness prevention efforts to ensure often extremely limited resources are going to those most likely to benefit from them, sometimes before the individuals or families at risk even knew they needed said resources.\textsuperscript{8}

The County has an opportunity to match the effort in L.A. County by utilizing the skills and knowledge of our newly formed Office of Evaluation, Performance, and Analytics (OEPA), local research universities, and the Office of Homelessness Solutions (OHS). The recommended actions align with the vision of OHS to invest in “collaborative efforts to reduce homelessness across the County, ensure enterprise-wide actions are coordinated, and reduce barriers to accessing services through evidence-based and data-driven.”\textsuperscript{9}

The homelessness risk assessment would be a tool, ideally designed from existing data, used to assess an individual's likelihood of becoming homeless based on identified patterns or existing factors. The County’s predictive risk assessment model may require additional research to determine which departments should be included in the central data system. For example, if it is determined that someone is deemed more likely to become homeless in San Diego after they have defaulted on paying their property taxes a certain number of times, and perhaps have also been incarcerated or arrested, the integrated data system could include data from each of those respective departments.

Once there is a central location of data established, the risk assessment could be programmed to calculate and identify individuals likely to experience homelessness. The goal of this program is not to duplicate case management but rather to work to identify individuals not on the radar but on a proven path of homelessness. Additionally, the centralized data system is not intended to replace any current system used by necessary county departments, but rather existing data would be linked anonymously to this integrated point of entry for program management.

While there are many funding opportunities to support individuals who are facing homelessness, or who are currently homeless, the goal of his model would again be not to interfere with existing

\textsuperscript{7} https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-06-12/homeless-prevention-unit
\textsuperscript{8} https://www.capolicylab.org/predicting-preventing-homelessness-la/
\textsuperscript{9} https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/hsec/OHS.html
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program funding or staffing models but rather to reinforce existing or future program opportunities, needs, and successes. For example, the Board of Supervisors recently funded a second round of the Flexible Housing Pool to help provide streamlined access to rental units and ensure ongoing housing stability. If the risk assessment were to identify someone at risk of eviction or in need of immediate housing, program staff may be able to connect the individual in need of housing stability resources to the Flexible Housing Pool after the outreach was conducted. The L.A. County program is successful as it is linked to flexible funds, ensuring immediate assistance is provided to a client when outreach workers make initial contact. The same example could be replicated for different outcomes based on the need for support services, programs, or funding opportunities after a risk assessment and initial outreach is completed.

The proposed creation of a Homelessness Prevention Unit within OHS will allow for dedicated staff time to work within the list identified by Homeless Prevention Program. This proposed unit will also assess current or future county program needs, such as housing subsidies for seniors or flex housing pool funding. Additionally, this unit will be able to assist in communication and coordination needed between departments once individuals are identified by the risk assessment should they be known to multiple county departments.

Combining data points, which might not be predictors on their own, would afford staff the opportunity to better understand and predict which individuals are in need of intervention. This information could also allow staff the opportunity to better predict annual budget needs as well as future utilization of services. The County continues to address the regional homelessness and housing crisis with unprecedented commitment and this action is another tool in the prevention toolbox.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN
This proposed action directly supports the Equity Initiative in Health and Economic Opportunity in the County of San Diego’s 2022-2027 Strategic Plan by focusing on systems that ensure equal opportunity for health and well-being through partnerships and innovation and advancing opportunities for economic growth and development.

Respectfully submitted,

[Signature]

CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER
Supervisor, Fourth District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A

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10 https://www.rthsd.org/about-coc/flex-housing-pool/