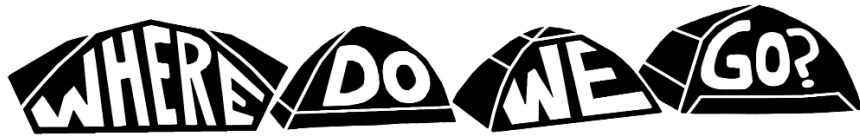


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Andrea M. Henson
Executive Director and Legal Counsel
Where Do We Go? (Also known as Where Do We Go Berkeley)
510-640-7390
ahenson@wdwg.org

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Advocacy Group Condemns Governor Newsom's Executive Order on Homeless Encampments

Berkeley, CA – On Wednesday, Osha Neumann, Board Member and Attorney at Where Do We Go ("WDWG") expressed outrage at Governor Newsom's executive order directing cities and state agencies across California to escalate the war on the homeless. "Why is Newsom adopting the Trump playbook demonizing the most vulnerable and helpless victims of society's heartlessness? Has he decided that the politics of cruelty is his ticket to higher office? We're on the ground. We see firsthand what happens when homeless encampments are swept and people have no place to go. Those encampments are their safety net. Scattered, separated from their support system, they can die. We've seen it. The government should be in the business of preventing harm not causing it. Newsom's order will cause a world of harm."

A right wing heartless Supreme Court gave government the green light to hammer the homeless when it reversed *Johnson v. Grants Pass*, thus overturning the court's reading of the Constitution that required government to offer shelter, before it criminalized those without. That's no excuse for Newsom to rush to drop the hammer.

Neumann commented: "Where are homeless people supposed to go? They can't float in the air. They can't tread water. They need what we all need. Sweeping encampments will not make them go away. Newsom is adopting the leaf blower approach to homelessness – find a pile of homeless, blow it down the road, wait till homeless people collect together again, and blow them away again. It's cruel and it's an exercise in futility."

Andrea Henson, Executive Director and Attorney at WDWG, who is in the streets daily and who has lived in encampments to protect the rights of her unhoused clients during encampment removals comments, "The Governor's executive order to remove homeless encampments across California

punishes the poor, is ill-informed and lacks connection to the true reality that these money hoarding service providers are simply not doing their jobs. The Governor and local leaders are holding on to the illusion that individuals experiencing homelessness are provided with all these services before a sweep."

Henson further states "If the Governor is truly concerned about getting people housed and out of encampments, then provide them with a grievance and appeal process by an independent entity who could hear their side of the story. That is due process. Call for an investigation of service providers and shelters to determine why individuals are refusing take services. That is oversight. Instead, the Governor's order offers no protection for the unhoused who will be displaced from encampments without services and/or outreach. It has no provision for much-needed performance reviews of resource providers that fail to conduct outreach or assist these vulnerable communities. It touts all the money California is spending. Does he realize how much money is wasted; how little of it reaches the people most in need? State agencies and local governments are dismissive, paying no attention to the lack of outreach prior to a sweep yet they keep paying providers millions of state and federal dollars in funding to provide these services. Newsom's order could ignite a new a new reign of terror. The poor and the homeless should get ready for more torment inflicted by the state."

Henson notes that the lack of fiscal accountability in the Governor's order could be disastrous. A state audit published in April 2024 detailed the lack of oversight over resource providers and spending on homelessness. The audit revealed that California has spent nearly \$24 billion on homelessness and housing since 2018, yet the state's homeless population has increased by 32% during that time.¹ Currently, there are no laws protecting homeless individuals that are similar to the tenant protection boards throughout the state. Henson insists that any new solutions must include provider accountability and due process protections for the poor.

Dr. Jeffrey Schonberg, a Medical Anthropologist in the Global Health Program at the University of California, San Diego and a Director with WDWG questions the Governor's statements in the Executive Order, refusing to follow the most recent, scientific evidence. The real harm is not in encampments that "pose threats to life, health and safety," but greater threats to life, health and safety are actually caused through the sweeps and their lingering effects. "The Governor's order does not only exacerbate the violence experienced everyday by the unhoused as a result of their extreme poverty, but entrenches it in forms of trauma that further confounds efforts to combat the crisis."

Bay Area cities are already failing to uphold the so-called protections for unhoused people in their current encampment management policies. Henson says this will only get worse under Newsom's order. The current executive order directs agencies and departments to contact service providers to request outreach services for persons experiencing homelessness, but it does nothing to ensure those individuals receive that assistance. On Wednesday, July 24, 2024, at a California Department of Transportation ("CalTrans") encampment clearing in Oakland, California at Hwy 880, 4th Street, under the structure at Laney College, Henson asked a Caltrans representative whether any outreach had occurred at the site. She was told that the City of Oakland's provider did not respond to their request for outreach. One resident, an elderly United States Marine Veteran, told Henson that no one had been to the site to talk to any of the residents. No resource provider had assessed his physical disabilities or helped him as he struggled to move his belongings from under the bridge. He has nowhere else to go.

¹ <https://information.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2023-102.1/index.html>

Governor Newsom's order lacks accountability to protect homeless individuals, families, and children who are being removed. Accountability is key to protecting California's most vulnerable and ensuring that those experiencing homelessness are housed and stay housed. Encampment removals without oversight waste taxpayer money and encourage state brutality while the number of individuals experiencing homelessness increases over time.

Where Do We Go provides legal aid, advocacy, and material support for those who are experiencing homelessness. We urge the inclusion of concrete measures to ensure that resource providers are held accountable, and that comprehensive outreach is conducted prior to any removal actions. We also demand the establishment of oversight mechanisms to protect the unhoused from potential abuse and neglect.

The current approach risks further marginalizing an already vulnerable population and exacerbating the homelessness crisis. "Where Do We Go" is the cry of the individuals in homeless encampments who have nowhere to go. Our organization will continue to advocate for policies that prioritize the dignity and well-being of all Californians, particularly those experiencing homelessness.

For more information, please contact Andrea M. Henson.



About Where Do We Go:

Founded in Berkeley, California by unhoused individuals living in the four largest homeless encampments along the I-80 corridor, Where Do We Go has grown into a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing legal aid, advocacy, and material support to the unhoused population.

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