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DOWNTOWN AND COMMUNITY LEADERS CALL FOR ACTION TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS CRISIS AMIDST SPIKE IN UNSHELTERED AND ENCAMPMENT COUNT

Safe Village Pilot Program Among Solutions Encouraged to Address Demonstrated Need

SAN DIEGO – Feb. 1, 2022 – In the January 2022 count of both individuals sleeping on the street and those estimated to be sheltering in cars and encampments, the Downtown San Diego Partnership recorded the highest number of unsheltered people in the Downtown area since 2016. This is only the latest in data highlighting the tremendous need for solutions and resources in Downtown that has fueled the organization’s advocacy efforts, including current calls for a “Safe Village” pilot program to provide an additional shelter alternative.

The January 2022 Downtown Partnership monthly homeless count found 1,406 individuals sleeping on the street and more than 422 tent encampments throughout the seven Downtown neighborhoods. This number nearly doubles those of January 2021 and represents the highest number of unsheltered individuals noted since December of 2016.

Since 2012, the Downtown Partnership has conducted a monthly census of the Downtown area to serve as a record for the need in San Diego’s urban center and to strategically deploy its in-house services through the Downtown Partnership Clean & Safe program.

The Downtown Partnership is issuing a call to action to implement immediate measures to allow individuals and families more short-term alternatives to living on the street or in encampments. Specifically, community leaders are calling for a Safe Village pilot program – a non-congregate village to access transitional resources.

“With COVID-19 continuing to spread, halting shelter intakes and straining availability of existing shelter options, there is a need to implement more short-term solutions,” said Betsy Brennan, President and CEO of the Downtown Partnership. “COVID-19 is not going away. With the threat of other communicable disease (like the current shigellosis and previous hepatitis A) and

encampment numbers on the rise, it is time to start building additional, non-congregate, transitional resources like Safe Villages.”

Examples of successful Safe Village programs with various resources exist in cities around the country. In those programs, “Safe Villages” can include structures for individuals and families (pallet homes, tiny homes, tents, etc.); living accommodations (bedding, bathrooms, showers); security; and municipal and social services (social security, health care, counseling).

“The goal is to build more homes – the ultimate solution to end homeless,” said Brennan. “However, until we get more homes and more permanent supportive housing on the market, we need to keep all options on the table. We need to hear support for solutions like Safe Villages if we’re going to see this crisis and the impact it’s having on the lives of people experiencing homelessness move in a different direction.”

“We support bringing all options to the table to bring more people off the street and into safe, affirming, spaces for basic human needs,” said John Brady, California homelessness advocate and Founder of Lived Experience Advisers, an organization focused on elevating voices of those who have previously experienced homelessness to be a part of the solution. “Safe Villages have demonstrated success up and down the state and it is time San Diego consider this option for families, the elderly, and those not interested in congregate living. While shelters have been unable to do intakes since mid-December, even every current shelter at full capacity would leave nearly 1,000 on our streets in Downtown alone. This is inhumane.”

“We know the current situation for people experiencing homelessness in Downtown is unacceptable.” said Tamera Kohler, CEO, Regional Task Force on Homelessness. “We believe that we have the correct leadership in place, at the City and the County, now we are ready to see more action and results.”

The Downtown San Diego Partnership has partnered with Lived Experience Advisers to draft a proposal on Safe Village site operations, and it looks forward to presenting this plan to regional leaders in the coming weeks.

This is one of several advocacy priorities maintained by the organization to support solutions for homelessness including:

- Expanding shelter capacity
- Adding safe non-congregate shelter options
- Increasing outreach with professionals trained to assist those with behavioral health or substance abuse needs
- Deploying resources in a coordinated, compassionate, and data-driven way

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*The **Downtown San Diego Partnership** is a nonprofit organization that serves as the principal voice and driving force behind the economic and cultural prosperity of Downtown San Diego through membership, advocacy, and public services. It also serves as the managing organization for several special districts including the Clean & Safe program that provide essential public services in the 275 blocks of Downtown. For more information, visit downtownsandiego.org.*