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CITY SECRETARY
DALLAS, TEXAS



CITY OF DALLAS

Memorandum

DATE November 4, 2024

TO Mayor Eric Johnson

SUBJECT **Recommendation for Disbanding the Dallas Area Partnership on Ending Homelessness**

I am writing to recommend the immediate disbandment of the Dallas Area Partnership on Ending Homelessness (DAPEH) based on insights gained during my year as Chairman, and the findings of the Dallas HOPE report published by the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness, Organizations, Policies, and Encampments (HOPE). This report, discussed in January 2024 at the City Council Housing and Homelessness Committee meeting, also recommended the dissolution of the DAPEH.

The City of Dallas and Dallas County continue to face significant challenges regarding homelessness. Recent data provided by the lead agency, Housing Forward, indicates a reduction in homelessness from their annual point in time count. However, this data contradicts the frequent feedback received by city councilmembers from residents and business leaders, as well as the visible encampments throughout the city. The annual survey of resident satisfaction continues to place homelessness as one of Dallas' most pressing issues, underscoring the urgent need for effective solutions.

Although the DAPEH had not made much progress in the years since it was created, I initially supported retaining the DAPEH, as its founding documents included elements I believed could address homelessness in a unique way. I would like to share what I have learned and experienced that has led me to reconsider my stance.

First, the DAPEH was intended to provide oversight and accountability within the Dallas homeless system. However, after serving for a year, it has become increasingly clear that the current structure—comprising only two elected officials accountable to Dallas residents and various appointed members accountable to different constituencies—hinders true accountability. The reality is that the most significant accountability for our homeless services will ultimately come from the largest funders of the homeless non-profit providers, including the city council and county commissioners, as well as homeless advocates and journalists.

Second, I viewed the DAPEH's ability to levy taxes as a unique mechanism for addressing the need for dedicated funding in the homeless system. In practice, this function is already fulfilled by both the City of Dallas and Dallas County, which could allocate tax dollars to support homeless initiatives. Using the DAPEH complicates matters, as both the city and county must agree on funding decisions, potentially diluting initiatives through necessary compromises and reducing their effectiveness. In reality, both entities can pursue the most meaningful and impactful projects and initiatives directly aligned with their constituencies' needs, minimizing bureaucratic hurdles.

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Lastly, the DAPEH operates without any staff, meaning that all necessary functions—such as administering programs, hiring personnel, seeking legal advice, collecting data, and ensuring compliance—would simply duplicate existing resources at both the city and county levels. The existence of a third governmental entity managing tax dollars for homelessness complicates operations, creates redundancy, and ultimately diminishes public accountability.

While I advocate for the continuation of collaborative efforts between the city and county to advance large-scale homeless projects, it is important to note that the DAPEH has not played a role in these initiatives. As such, DAPEH is no longer a necessary component of our strategy to address homelessness effectively.

I believe disbanding the DAPEH will streamline our efforts, and ultimately help focus our city council on effective solutions for homelessness across our city.

The HOPE report also provided a recommendation for disbanding the City of Dallas Citizen’s Homeless Commission (CHC). As you may recall, I served as the Vice Chair of the CHC prior to my election to the city council. Based on my experience with both the CHC and the city council, I recommend that the City of Dallas maintain the Citizen’s Homeless Commission, but with a refined focus. The CHC should concentrate on gathering input and suggestions from individuals experiencing homelessness, as well as from residents and businesses impacted by homelessness. This input should be used to direct staff in developing recommendations to address top concerns. All proposals from staff regarding homelessness should be vetted by the Commission, and their recommendations should then be forwarded to the City Council Housing and Homelessness Committee for consideration and recommendation to the full city council for funding, as appropriate.

The CHC should not be comprised of homeless non-profit staff or leaders, but rather be comprised of typical residents who can provide common-sense input on initiatives aimed at serving individuals experiencing homelessness and maintaining a high quality of life in our city.

My interest in addressing homelessness was a key reason I decided to run for city council. Having served as the Chairman of the Collin County Homeless Coalition, as a staff Director for a homeless shelter, on the leadership committee for Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance, on the Mayor’s Task Force on Ending Homelessness, and as Vice Chair for the CDC, I have worked in the field professionally and as a volunteer. It is vitally important to our city that we enact the policies and programs needed to serve this vulnerable population in a manner that provides safety and stabilization, and helps as many people as possible return to independence and self-sufficiency.

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Thank you for the opportunity to serve in this role and bring my recommendations to you. I look forward to discussing it further.

Sincerely,



Cara Mendelsohn
Chairman, Dallas Area Partnership on Ending Homelessness

c: Kimberly Bizzor Tolbert, City Manager (I)
Tammy Palomino, City Attorney
Mark Swann, City Auditor
Billerae Johnson, City Secretary
Preston Robinson, Administrative Judge
Dominique Artis, Chief of Public Safety (I)
Dev Rastogi, Assistant City Manager
M. Elizabeth (Liz) Cedillo-Pereira, Assistant City Manager

Alina Ciocan, Assistant City Manager
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Robin Bentley, Assistant City Manager (I)
Jack Ireland, Chief Financial Officer
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