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DESTINATIONHOMESV.ORG

July 8, 2024

Board of Directors
Santa Clara Valley Water District
5750 Almaden Expressway
San Jose, CA 95118

Re: Proposed Water Resources Protection Zones Ordinance (Item 3.5 on the 7/9 Board Meeting Agenda)

Honorable Directors,

On behalf of Destination: Home, a public-private partnership dedicated to ending homelessness in Santa Clara County, **I write to express our serious concerns about the proposed Water Resources Protection Zones Ordinance.**

Our homelessness crisis represents a true societal failure resulting from our own policy choices made over the past several decades. Furthermore, the greatest impacts of these collective failures are shouldered by our unhoused neighbors, and we should not make it harder for those who are suffering on our streets to simply survive.

So, while we appreciate the importance of protecting our waterways and addressing the impacts posed by encampments, we all have an obligation to figure out how to do so without exacerbating the challenges faced by our unhoused neighbors.

Unfortunately, the proposed ordinance fails to meet this critically-important standard. In particular, we are concerned that:

- **The proposed ordinance carries criminal penalties.** Violations of the proposed ordinance would be classified as a misdemeanor, with fines up to \$500 and imprisonment for up to 30 days in county jail. Such punitive measures are not only cruel, they are a poor use of scarce law enforcement resources and have proven ineffective in yielding the outcomes they intend to create. As a result, they often do nothing but further harm very vulnerable people and create additional barriers to securing stable housing.
- **The proposed ordinance covers all Water District land and easements.** Instead of crafting a narrowly-tailored ordinance to address the areas of greatest concern, this ordinance would cover all Water District land and easements in the county. This type of blanket prohibition is not only an outsized action relative to the stated goals of the ordinance, it places a huge burden for the thousands of unhoused residents who have been forced to find refuge outdoors.
- **The proposed ordinance offers such a restrictive and punitive approach when our community does not have enough shelter and housing options available.** Despite significant progress made over recent years, we still lack enough available shelter and housing to meet the need in our community. When alternatives are not available, it is inhumane to punish people who are simply seeking a safe place to sleep, and these types of measures only serve to push people to another part of our community (but no closer to a real solution).

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Instead of focusing solely on punitive measures, we should be working together to help more people living along our creeks access shelter and housing - especially since SCVWD-sponsored state legislation was approved last year to provide the district with explicit authority to support these types of strategies. Instituting a balanced, multi-faceted approach that includes expanded housing and shelter options will not only yield far better outcomes for our unhoused neighbors, it will prove a much more effective strategy for reducing impacts in and along our waterways.

We all want to protect our waterways and to reduce the impact of encampments along our creeks and throughout the broader community. However, this ordinance is not the answer.

Please reject the proposed ordinance and let's work together to develop real solutions that will yield the results we are all seeking.

Sincerely,

Ray Bramson
Chief Operating Officer