

STATEMENT OF REASONS OF THE PROPOSED MEASURE

Limitations on Navigation Centers

Navigation centers must first and foremost navigate! They are emergency, short-term shelters, not transitional or permanent housing.

Despite skyrocketing budgets for homeless services, street conditions in San Francisco have deteriorated. Between 2015 and 2019, the point-in-time count of unsheltered homeless rose 19%. 1/3rd are substance abusers. 1/3rd severely mental ill—up 140% in 4 years!

In 2015, San Francisco began an experiment: invite unsheltered homeless into emergency, short-term shelters with few preconditions, and rapidly "navigate" them to housing, healthcare and services.

At first, Supervisors and the Mayor sold these "navigation centers" as 40 to 100 resident facilities that would pop up in neighborhoods with unsheltered homeless, resolve local cases, then close within two years. Entry was "low barrier", residents could come and go 24/7, bring family and pets. But rules of conduct applied, service referrals were mandatory, stays limited to 90 days.

Now, navigation centers like Embarcadero are designed for 200+ residents. Capital costs are bloated, cronyism suspected. Stays are lengthening. The requirement that centers close after two years, repealed. Environmental, competitive bidding and nondiscrimination regulations, suspended. Rights of neighbors to challenge in court, eliminated by Sacramento.

Momentum is building for more centers, and to position them (and relocate the homeless) all over the city—for "fairness". Five Supervisors have proposed a center in every supervisory district, with 90-day minimum residence and no limit.

The "low barrier" philosophy is spilling over into operations, weakening protocols for mental illness, addiction and criminal conduct.

Public reception is mixed. Some think it's too soon to judge. Others, living nearby, report rising crime, loitering, encampments, drug dealing, and sidewalk needles and feces.

With this Measure, we take away from politicians the decision where to locate navigation centers: any new center must open where we count the most unsheltered homeless. We restore the requirement that centers close within two years. Navigation centers should be hyperlocal, reduce homelessness in a community swiftly, then shut down as originally promised. Not permanent fixtures in our neighborhoods.

We enforce the statutory 100 resident limit.

We establish a priority exit for the severely mentally ill (not prescription compliant) to mental health hospitalization, and for substance abusers to off-site residential rehab.

We limit residence to 60 days to encourage rapid navigation, renewable only after medical or mental health related hospitalization, off-site residential rehab, or 120 days out of a navigation center. (The severely mentally ill, if prescription-compliant, also qualify for renewal). 60 days should be enough to navigate cooperative residents without severe mental illness or addiction to at least transitional housing, or help reconnect them with family or friends ("Homeward Bound").

Finally, we terminate the residence of anyone who—on the premises of a navigation center—possesses alcohol, controlled substances, guns or knives, drinks, uses, or commits misdemeanors or felonies, including assault, drug dealing, larceny, pimping or pandering, prostitution, sexual battery or rape. Any center that turns a blind eye is required to close.

Richie Greenberg

Larry Marso

PROPOSERS