

Work as one state to fight homelessness – and NIMBYism

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Homelessness is not a one-city problem. If you're without a roof over your head — other than the one in that pop-up pup tent you are carrying around — it doesn't make much difference to you if you are in Santa Ana or Santa Clarita, Alhambra or Anaheim. (With winter approaching, it surely does make a difference that you are in temperate California and not in freezing North Dakota.)

But since the worst social problem affecting our state is everywhere, that's why it's a good thing that California's mayors are making an effort to work together on solutions.

At a conference in Sacramento earlier this month, the mayors of Los Angeles, San Diego, Oakland and Sacramento asked “for bold state action to help the more than 130,000 Californians who are homeless, urging Gov.-elect Gavin Newsom to revive a controversial funding source for affordable housing and make it easier for cities to build shelters,” reports Matt Levin of the CALMatters website.

“This is a fundamentally broken system that needs to be re-imagined from the get-go,” said Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf, after telling the story of a homeless Oakland woman who gave birth in a car two days ago. “I just hope that we don't keep on tweaking this cycle that we have become complacent with.”

The only Republican of the group, Kevin Faulconer of San Diego, said that even with the passage this month of two statewide initiatives that will combine \$6 billion in new affordable housing and homelessness-relief spending, more affordable housing dollars are still needed.

Besides money, the mayors also agreed that a key stumbling block in all of their cities is the pernicious problem of NIMBYism everywhere. Everyone in the state seems to agree that we need to grapple with the issue of men, women and children living on the sidewalks, but when permanent supportive housing is planned on some block near where they live, most everyone seems to scream bloody murder.

Even in supposedly compassionate Venice, residents are trying to block a shelter from being built in an empty bus yard. The mayors agreed that when it comes to land use, “Local control is highly overrated,” as Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg said. We need to work as one state to solve this common problem.