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FUNDING OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS COUNTYWIDE HOMELESSNESS

Santa Cruz County and the Homeless Action Partnership, working in cooperation with local cities and partner agencies, on Friday released a Request for Proposals (RFP) to help address the rising crisis of homelessness in Santa Cruz County.

With California homelessness soaring to 134,000 residents in 2018 – a quarter of the nation's estimated homeless population -- the state Legislature recently passed emergency funding for local communities to address the statewide homelessness crisis. In total, more than \$10 million will be distributed locally through an RFP process overseen by Homeless Action Partnership member jurisdictions and made available to local programs, services and facilities within Santa Cruz County. Grant funds must be spent within two years.

"Homelessness is the critical issue facing our community. These much-needed and long overdue state funds will be spent as quickly as possible to help those in need and reduce community impacts," Santa Cruz County Board Chair Ryan Coonerty said.

"This is an opportunity to implement programs and projects that will have a lasting impact on homelessness in our community," Santa Cruz Mayor Martine Watkins said.

"These funds will generate new opportunities to serve those in most need in our community. We are ready to work in partnership with service providers to generate some creative solutions to homelessness," Watsonville Mayor Francisco Estrada said.

According to the most recent point-in-time count, 2,249 Santa Cruz County residents were homeless, a crisis made highly visible due to 80 percent of the local homeless population being unsheltered. A new count is scheduled for January 31, 2019.

According to the 2017 point-in-time count, two-thirds of local homeless persons have been in living in Santa Cruz County for five years or more, and one-third are currently employed. Fifty-five percent have a disabling condition, and nearly 600 homeless individuals are either transition-age youth or unaccompanied minors.

California Emergency Solutions and Housing (CESH) is a state-funded block grant program to address the needs of homeless individuals and families and assist them in regaining stable housing. The state has awarded \$889,000 for CESH programs in Santa Cruz County.

The Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) is a state-funded block grant program to address immediate homelessness challenges, and is intended to allow communities which have declared a homelessness crisis the flexibility to apply the funding in a manner that directly benefits homeless persons and families. The state has awarded \$9,674,883 for HEAP programs in Santa Cruz County.

The joint HEAP and CESH RFP includes funding priorities identified through extensive input from local elected officials, nonprofits, services providers and interested parties, as well as "All In: Toward a Home for Every County Resident," a countywide plan to address homelessness adopted by every jurisdiction in Santa Cruz County. The identified priorities include: emergency shelters and navigation centers, homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing, support services, rental assistance and housing relocation, and immediate capital needs such as storage facilities, bathrooms, laundry services and more.

Grant applications are due Feb. 22, 2019, with an applicant orientation session to be held January 25, 2019 from 10 a.m.-noon at United Way of Santa Cruz County, 4450 Capitola Road, Suite 106, Capitola. Applications must be submitted to Rayne.Marr@santacruzcounty.us **and** tonygardnerconsulting@yahoo.com.

Proposals will be vetted by a Project Selection Committee comprised of non-conflicted members of the Homeless Action Partnership Board and Executive Committee, as well as other knowledgeable, non-conflicted community members recruited to assist with the review and scoring of projects. Project selection is anticipated to be concluded by the end of March, with the first contracts issued in April.

A copy of the RFP is attached and available online at www.santacruzcounty.us.