

1. SUMMARY OF HOMELESSNESS IN MERCED COUNTY

A. Merced City and County Continuum of Care HUD Longitudinal System Assessment from October 1, 2017 – September 30, 2018

Attached.

B. Data from COC Longitudinal System Assessment

1. Total number of households served in:
 - (1) Emergency Shelter, Safe Haven and Transitional Housing=368
 - (2) Rapid Rehousing=157
 - (3) Permanent Supportive Housing=31
2. Total number of disabled households served across all interventions=140
3. Total number of households experiencing chronic homelessness served across all interventions=232
4. Total number of 55+ households served across all interventions= 194
5. Total number of unaccompanied youth served across all interventions= 2
6. Total number of veteran households served across all interventions= 105
7. Number of individuals served across all interventions who were:
 - (1) Female= 188
 - (2) Male= 375
 - (3) Transgender= 3
 - (4) Gender Non-Conforming= 0
8. Total number individuals served across all interventions who were:
 - (1) White, Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino (only)= 259
 - (2) White, Hispanic/Latino (only)= 169
 - (3) Black or African American (only)= 95
 - (4) Asian (only)= 10
 - (5) American Indian or Alaska Native (only)= 13
 - (6) Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (only)= 3
 - (7) Multiple races= 16

2. DEMONSTRATION OF REGIONAL COORDINATION

A. Coordinated Entry System (CES) Information

1. *How Merced County Coordinates with CoC CES*

Merced County staff from at least three departments participate in the Merced City and County Continuum of Care CES working group, including the County Executive Office, Human Services Agency, and Behavioral Health and Recovery Services.

Merced County Human Services Agency is now the Collaborative Applicant for the Merced City and County Continuum of Care, and is the CES lead agency.

Other key CES participants are direct service provider organizations including:

- Turning Point, a non-profit organization which connects homeless individuals to housing and service providers;
- Sierra Saving Grace, a faith-based non-profit organization which connects homeless individuals to housing and service providers;
- Healthy House, a non-profit organization which connects homeless individuals to housing and service providers, with emphasis on overcoming challenges related to differences in language and culture;
- Department of Veterans Affairs, which connects individuals to housing and service providers, with emphasis on veterans, their dependents and survivors;
- Merced Police Department, which responds to complaints of homeless individuals appearing to sleep in public spaces not meant for human habitation, exhibiting signs of severe service needs, or otherwise coming into frequent contact with law enforcement;
- Merced County Community Action Agency, a non-profit corporation and the largest shelter provider in Merced County; and
- Merced Rescue Mission, a faith-based non-profit organization which provides several transitional shelter facilities.

2. Current Challenges Related to CES and Plans to Address these Challenges

- Service providers who do not receive Continuum of Care funding do not see the benefit of dealing with the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), so they do not enter their clients into the system.
- Not all stakeholders are comfortable with HMIS, requiring the lead HMIS agency to make entries on behalf of others.
- We have discovered that not all vouchers for permanent housing available from the Merced Housing Authority are being used, largely due to landlords unwilling to rent to the homeless.
- We understand that our December 2017 CEC Policies and Procedures are not in full compliance with recent HUD guidance and they are being updated.
- On a county wide level we are having difficulty housing the chronically homeless due to the amount of case management needed for them to maintain housing.
- Overall, we acknowledge a need to re-focus on measurable outcomes for our system of care as opposed to responding to the immediate needs before us.

Therefore we are in the process of addressing these challenges.

In August 2019 a consultant was contracted to assess the current state of homelessness in Merced County, identify gaps in addressing it, update our CEC Policies and Procedures, and recommend next steps to ensure that our systems are aligned and funding is being used effectively.

3. *How Merced County Promotes Utilization of CES*

What outreach do you conduct to ensure all individuals experiencing homelessness in Merced County, including those with multiple barriers, are aware of the CES assessment and referral process?

In 2017, Merced County created a task force to address substandard housing, encampments and areas unsuitable for human habitation. In October 2018 Merced County deepened its commitment to combat homelessness by opening an Outreach Center tasked with connecting homeless individuals and families to services.

Merced County staff are encouraged to work across program lines to create a seamless service plan for clients, and the County has trained its staff to utilize the COC HMIS.

Outreach is conducted by outreach teams and resources who specifically target people experiencing chronic homelessness, veterans, families with children, youth, LGBTQ youth, and survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking. Outreach is conducted at locations such as local shelters, at parks, under bridges, and other places where homeless persons congregate.

In this way, outreach teams verbally advise homeless persons that there is a process to match community resources to their unique situation.

Staff who work with homeless individuals are encouraged to operate under a “no wrong door” business model. No matter the entry point, homeless persons are assisted as they navigate the network of programs offered through the County and community partners.

Efforts to market housing and supportive services available through the CES include:

- a. **Advertising** in locations or media that are used and viewed or listened to by those last likely to enter services and housing;
- b. **Marketing** services and housing to specific groups frequented by those least likely to access these services;
- c. **Handout** that describes CES processes to be used by those in crisis to locate, identify, and access CES services;
- d. **Ensuring** that CES stakeholder agencies understand the purpose and objectives of CES as well as the Fair Housing Act.

B. Prioritization Criteria

1. Criteria used to prioritize assistance for people experiencing homelessness in Merced County

Service providers in Merced County use the Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) as the standard triage assessment tool.

This assessment is conducted at partner agencies including shelters, transitional housing programs, outreach programs, and anywhere that people who are homeless first encounter the local system of care.

The VI-SPDAT prioritizes severity of need by determining the following criteria:

- history of homelessness
- chronic health conditions
- substance use
- mental illness
- encounters with emergency room services
- encounters with law enforcement
- other factors

This assessment is integrated into the local HMIS. The COC maintains a list based on the length of time homeless and the assessment survey scores retrieved from intake records in HMIS.

2. *How CES is used for this process*

The CoC makes the Coordinated Entry System (CES) list available to the CES working group, which meets weekly. The CES list is extracted from HIS based upon the VI-SPDAT assessment data.

The CES working group also receives feedback from local law enforcement who identify individuals living in public spaces such as parks, and who are negatively impacting the general population.

The CES then prioritizes the order in which eligible persons are referred to permanent housing or permanent supportive housing, in the manner described below.

- First priority – chronically homeless individuals with the longest history of homelessness and most severe need

An individual or family identified as having severe service needs and who has experienced fewer than four episodes of homelessness or in an emergency shelter, but where the cumulative time of homelessness is at least 12 months

- Second priority – chronically homeless individuals with the longest history of homelessness

An individual or family who has severe service needs and is homeless or in an emergency shelter

- Third priority – chronically homeless with most severe needs

An individual or family not identified with severe service needs, but is homeless or in an emergency shelter

- Fourth priority – all other chronically homeless

An individual or family not identified with severe service needs, and is currently residing in transitional housing

C. Coordination of Regional Needs

1. *How Merced County has coordinated with CoC to identify share of regional need to address homelessness*

Assembly member Adam Gray has convened a subcommittee of Merced City and County CoC members to identify needs and a regional response to homelessness in Merced County. This task force consists of local elected officials, city managers and law enforcement agencies, and has been meeting regularly for over a year.

Data from Merced County's Homeless Management Information System and Point in Time counts were analyzed in recognition of the need for data-based, informed decisions.

These task force meetings have produced a regional response to Merced County's homelessness crisis, including:

- Agreement that Merced County will construct a "Navigation Center" shelter facility in Merced with supportive services on-site. The 75-bed Merced Navigation Center is planned to open in October 2020.
- Agreement that Merced County will create "mini-Navigation Centers" at other locations throughout Merced County. These are essentially transitional facilities offering shelter plus supportive services. These sites will all open during 2020 and be operated by Merced Rescue Mission.
- Agreement that the City of Merced will construct 119 units of affordable housing units, 30 of which will be units of permanent supportive housing.
- Request that CoC develop a housing inventory program to aid in expediting placements
- Request that CoC update the CES and HMIS to collect better data and enhance assessment tools

2. *Merced County's identified share of need and how requested funds help Merced County meet the need*

The requested HHAP funds will allow Merced County to meet operational needs of the 75-bed Merced Navigation Center opening October 2020.

The Merced Navigation Center will be a "low barrier" shelter – individuals with pets, possessions and partners will be accommodated. This definitely meets a regional need in addressing homelessness in the Merced County region.

D. Creating Sustainable, Long Term Housing Solutions

1. *How Merced County is involved in the efforts to create sustainable, long term housing solutions for people experiencing homelessness*

- In October 2019, Merced County replaced its zoning code, which had not been updated since 1977. The zoning code was updated to make it more user friendly and in alignment with State statutes relating to development of housing and emergency shelters.
- In April 2019 the County successfully applied for SB2 planning funds with which to update the Franklin-Beachwood Community Plan (Franklin-Beachwood is an unincorporated community in Merced County). SB2 intends to streamline housing production and increase affordable housing stock. The 1983 Franklin-Beachwood Community Specific Plan is the most outdated in the county. The revised Franklin-Beachwood Community Specific Plan will be adopted by June 2022.
- Since 2018 Merced County has worked with the City of Merced on its plans to construct a 119-unit affordable housing complex with 30 units of permanent supportive housing. In December 2019, Merced County declared a 5 acre parcel of land owned by the County and needed by the City as surplus property, and allowed sale of the property to the City for the project.
- In July 2019, Merced County contracted with a consultant for assistance in implementing its \$631,401 “No Place Like Home” grant award from the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). No Place Like Home is intended to develop permanent supportive housing for homeless persons who are also in need of mental health services. Merced County’s NPLH technical assistance grant intends to support implementation of the Coordinated Entry System, permanent supportive housing and the accompanying supportive services required.
- Merced County’s Department of Community and Economic Development collaborates with developers and outside organizations to encourage the development of affordable housing. Its code enforcement division investigates complaints of substandard housing conditions and works with property owners to bring housing up to code.

3. RESOURCES ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

A. Existing Programs and Resources

1. List of all funds Merced County uses to provide housing and homeless services for homeless populations (federal, state and local)

Project	Purpose	Amount	Fund Source
Pacheco Place <i>Merced County Behavioral Health</i>	8 beds perm supp hsg Operated by Merced County Community Action Agency	\$153,562	HUD CoC
Home Start <i>Merced County Behavioral Health</i>	4 beds perm supp hsg Operated by Merced County Community Action Agency	\$137,311	HUD CoC
CalWORKS Homeless Assistance <i>Merced County Human Services Agency</i>	Rental assistance for homeless CalWORKS families	\$1,195,485	CA Dept Social Svcs
CalWORKS Housing Support <i>Merced County Human Services Agency</i>	Rental assistance and support svcs for homeless CalWORKS families	\$2,813,523	CA Dept Social Svcs
Home Safe <i>Merced County Adult Protective Services</i>	Housing assistance	\$747,080	CA Dept Social Svcs
Housing and Disability Advocacy <i>Merced County Human Services Agency</i>	Supportive svcs for disabled persons who are homeless	\$261,788	CA Dept Social Svcs
Mental Health Services Act Housing Program <i>Merced County Behavioral Health</i>	10 units perm supportive hsg	\$1,131,713	CA Dept of Mental Health

Project	Purpose	Amount	Fund Source
Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) <i>Merced County Behavioral Health</i>	Community outreach, case management, mental health svcs	\$95,503	Dept of Health and Human Svcs
Outreach and Treatment Program <i>Merced County Behavioral Health</i>	Rental assistance for homeless w/ mental illness	\$210,000	CA Dept of Healthcare Svcs
D Street Shelter <i>Merced County</i>	60 bed temporary shelter Operated by Merced County Community Action Agency	\$546,928	CA Assembly Bill 97
Outreach and Engagement Center <i>Merced County</i>	Outreach, assessment & referrals for homeless individuals	\$1,609,526	CA Assembly Bill 97
Rescue Mission <i>Merced County</i>	Transitional shelter	\$60,000	CA Assembly Bill 97
Rescue Mission <i>Merced County</i>	50 beds transitional shelter w/ supportive svcs	\$986,354	CA Senate Bill 850
Juvenile Hall Demolition <i>Merced County</i>	Cleared site for construction of new Navigation Center, opening Oct 2020	\$474,694	CA Assembly Bill 97
Navigation Center <u>Construction</u> <i>Merced County</i>	75 bed shelter w/ supportive svcs; opening Oct 2020	\$1,749,441	CA Senate Bill 850
Navigation Center <u>Construction</u> <i>Merced County</i>	75 bed shelter w/ supportive svcs; opening Oct 2020	\$2,500,000	Central CA Alliance for Health
Navigation Center <u>Operations</u> <i>Merced County</i>	75 bed shelter w/ supportive svcs; opening Oct 2020	\$2,250,559 (3 yrs)	CA Senate Bill 850

Project	Purpose	Amount	Fund Source
Navigation Center <u>Operations</u> <i>Merced County</i>	75 bed shelter w/ supportive svcs; opening Oct 2020	\$984,852 (3 yrs)	CA Senate Bill 2
Health Care Navigator <i>Merced County Human Services Agency</i>	Outreach to homeless; assist w/ accessing Medi-Cal	\$1,173,963	CA Dept of Health Care Svcs

2. *How the above resources are integrated or coordinated with Merced CoC members*

Five of the above projects are delivered through partnerships with other CoC members, including:

- Merced County Community Action Agency is a non-profit corporation which operates 12 beds of permanent supportive housing and a 60 bed temporary shelter through contracts with Merced County.
- Merced Rescue Mission is a non-profit organization which will operate 50 beds of transitional shelter housing through contracts with Merced County.

Merced County also integrates its staffing resources in various ways to further the efforts of the CoC:

- Merced County employs several staff members to provide support services to the homeless population, including outreach staff, case managers, substance abuse counselors, housing navigator and health care navigator.
- Merced County lends staff support to assist with the annual Point in Time count.
- Merced County Human Services Agency is now the Collaborative Applicant for the Merced City and County Continuum of Care.

Merced County offers short term housing assistance, housing search assistance, credit repairs, crisis counseling, substance use disorder counseling, job training, transportation, and other services which support homeless individuals and families. These services are integrated into the overall system of care and utilized by other Merced CoC providers.

3. *Current gaps in housing and homeless services for homeless in Merced County*

Merced County's population is 282,928; more than a third are Medi-Cal members. Merced County is known for rates of poverty and unemployment approximately double the national average, and a shortage of housing which is affordable for residents. These factors have contributed to increasing rates of homelessness in Merced County.

In December 2019, the Merced County Homeless Management Information System documented that 1,503 unduplicated homeless adults had sought shelter services since December 2018.

The January 2019 Point in Time count discovered that 26% of those homeless persons contacted self-identified as current substance abusers, and 35% stated they had been admitted to the emergency department or hospital more than once during the previous year.

The target population usually have had frequent contact with law enforcement. They are likely to have a history of chaotic life functioning, leading to an erratic work history, financial instability, substance use disorder, and untreated medical conditions.

Therefore, the needs of the target population include:

- basic shelter, meals and showers;
- assistance in accessing permanent housing, transportation, mainstream benefits, and employment;
- medical assessment, treatment and referrals; and
- substance use disorder treatment.

It is clear that additional shelter beds and additional case management staffing are necessary to address homelessness and return individuals to productive functioning in the family, workplace, and community.

B. HHAP Funding Plans

1. *How jurisdiction plans to use HHAP and how it will complement existing funds to close identified gaps in housing and homeless services for homeless in Merced County*

The County is constructing a 75-bed shelter with support services on site, which will be known as the Merced Navigation Center. The Merced Navigation Center will open in October 2020 and will operate 24 hours per day. Construction will be accomplished via funding provided by Senate Bill 850 and (potentially) the Central California Alliance for Health.

The proposed HHAP funding – including the eight percent set aside for youth ages 18 to 24 - will be used to operate the Merced Navigation Center. HHAP funding will complement other sources including CA Senate Bill 850 funds, CA Senate Bill 2 (Permanent Local Housing Allocation) funds, and the in-kind value of County staff time.

Merced County understands that ending homelessness requires immediate access to a safe and decent shelter. The Merced Navigation Center will be a low-barrier, service-enriched shelter targeting homeless adults with high risk chronic conditions. Individuals will be allowed to bring partners, pets, and personal belongings, thereby reducing the primary barriers to seeking shelter and supports.

The facility will feature sleeping beds, meals, showers, space for storing personal possessions, a pet kennel area, and conference/ classroom space. The facility will have round-the-clock staffing and security present.

Residents will receive coordinated care on site, including: case management; medical assessment and referrals; substance use disorder treatment; assistance in accessing mainstream benefits; job training and employment assistance; and assistance in locating permanent housing.

2. *How Merced County will ensure that HHAP funded project will align and comply with core components of Housing First*

Homeless individuals will be referred to the Merced Navigation Center and be connected to permanent housing swiftly and with no treatment preconditions or other barriers. A housing navigator will be assigned to assess housing needs of each Merced Navigation Center resident and link the resident to available housing resources.

Homeless individuals will be referred by: first responders and outreach workers who visit homeless encampments, parks, under bridges, and other places where homeless congregate; hospitals; and providers who participate in the CES.

4. PARTNERS ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

A. Collaborating Partner Efforts

1. Collaborative partners who will work on identified HHAP project and how Merced County will work with them

Merced Police Department will refer homeless individuals to the Merced Navigation Center. Merced Police Department responds to complaints of homeless individuals appearing to sleep in public spaces not meant for human habitation, exhibiting signs of severe service needs, or otherwise coming into frequent contact with law enforcement.

County departments such as Merced County Human Services Agency and Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services will offer supportive services at the site for Merced Navigation Center residents.

All Merced Navigation Center residents will receive a needs assessment in order to make linkages to appropriate providers. A clinical assessment will be performed to determine psychosocial history, a mental status exam and an alcohol and drug assessment.

Residents will then be assigned a case manager to monitor progress based on the initial assessments. The case manager will assure that residents receive support with group counseling and accessing all programs as appropriate, including Medi-Cal, Supplemental Security Income, employment assistance and transportation assistance.

A housing navigator will work with residents and the supportive services providers to locate and secure the appropriate level of permanent housing for residents. The housing navigator will check with Merced Housing Authority for rental assistance. Through the Housing Choice Voucher program, Merced Housing Authority offers up to \$850 per month in rental assistance for 2,803 units, 150 of which are prioritized for homeless individuals or families.

Catholic Charities will come to the Merced Navigation Center and offer supportive services, including financial assistance for housing placement.

Merced County Community Action Agency, the lead HMIS agency, will provide support and assistance to Merced Navigation Center staff having difficulty using HMIS.

A contracted operator will oversee basic shelter and security.

2. *Barriers that Merced County experiences in partnering, and how these barriers will be addressed*

Examples – lack of key stakeholders or service providers, political bureaucracy, approval methods, lack of community input

Merced County's barriers are not unique to other County organizations.

- The size of the organization presents challenges in information-sharing
- The organization's institutional structure does not easily address homelessness. Departments which address specific aspects of homelessness are not staffed to take responsibility for a project which was initiated by another.
- Identifying clear goals for the Merced Navigation Center – both in form and function – has proven challenging. Discussions regarding the size and type of facility took place for more than a year.

Eventually agreement was reached when Merced County also allocated some of its CA Senate Bill 850 funds for small transitional shelters in areas of Merced County outside the City of Merced.

- Local stakeholders lack the appropriate resources to house and case manage chronically homeless individuals with untreated mental illness, severe substance abuse, and chronic health conditions.
- Some service providers are not funded by Continuum of Care, therefore, do not participate in the CoC or HMIS. We are still considering ways to partner with non-CoC service providers.
- Homeless individuals willing to accept shelter or housing must wait longer for other assistance such as food, services, etc. due to a cumbersome and time-intensive referral process.

We intend to address this barrier by designating specific days and times that service providers will be available to provide immediate connection to resources, rather than simply referrals.

- Merced County is known for a scarcity of housing which is affordable for its residents. At the same time, housing exists which is vacant due to substandard conditions.

Merced County intends to apply for Community Development Block Grant funding this year with which to augment its code enforcement division. Through a more robust code enforcement program and existing housing rehabilitation loan programs, the County intends to turn substandard properties into viable housing.

As described previously, a consultant has been contracted to assess the current state of homelessness in Merced County, identify gaps in addressing it, update our CEC Policies and Procedures, and recommend next steps to ensure that our systems are aligned and funding is being used effectively. These recommendations will include those for optimal utilization of the Merced Navigation Center.

3. *If no collaborative partners have been identified – process of how Merced County intends to include new and existing partners on HHAP project*

Collaborative partners have not been identified because Merced County only approved construction of the Merced Navigation Center approximately 30 days ago – on January 14, 2020.

One possibility under consideration is to move Merced County’s Outreach Center to the Merced Navigation Center facility. As described previously, the staff assigned to the Outreach Center are tasked with connecting homeless individuals and families to services.

The County is in the process of a Request for Proposals for a contracted management entity. The County expects to select a management entity by June 2020. The management entity will be expected to foster collaborative partnerships to enhance services to Merced Navigation Center residents.

5. SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

Measurable goals that HHAP will be expected to achieve in Merced County

The Merced Navigation Center is projected to serve at least 150 unduplicated individuals per year. We anticipate that:

1. By January 2022 and every year afterward, 100% of eligible Merced Navigation Center residents will be linked to Medi-Cal enrollment.
2. By January 2022 and every year afterward, 100% of formerly homeless Merced Navigation Center residents will receive case management services.
3. By January 2022 and every year afterward, 50% of Merced Navigation Center residents will exit into permanent housing or permanent supportive housing.
4. By January 2022 and every year afterward, 80% of Merced Navigation Center residents will be linked to resources which increase their income.
5. By January 2022 and every year afterward, 40% of Merced Navigation Center residents will complete employability-related skills training as appropriate.
6. By January 22 and every year afterward, 50% of Merced Navigation Center residents will have decided upon a primary care physician.

To accomplish these outcomes, a contracted management entity will be retained by June 1, 2020 to operate the Merced Navigation Center. By November 1, 2020, the Merced Navigation Center will have finished construction and offer shelter and services to the target population.



**HOMELESS HOUSING, ASSISTANCE AND PREVENTION PROGRAM (HHAP)
ANNUAL BUDGET TEMPLATE**

APPLICANT INFORMATION

CoC / Large City / County Name:	County of Merced	Receiving Redirected Funds? Y/N	No
Administrative Entity Name:	County of Merced	Total Redirected Funding	\$ -

HHAP FUNDING EXPENDITURE PLAN*

ELIGIBLE USE CATEGORY	FY20/21	FY21/22	FY22/23	FY23/24	FY24/25	TOTAL
Rental Assistance and Rapid Rehousing	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Operating Subsidies and Reserves	\$ 617,086.24	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 617,086.24
Landlord Incentives	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Outreach and Coordination (including employment)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Systems Support to Create Regional Partnerships	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Delivery of Permanent Housing	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Prevention and Shelter Diversion to Permanent Housing	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
New Navigation Centers and Emergency Shelters	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Strategic Homelessness Planning, Infrastructure Development, CES, and HMIS (up to 5%)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Administrative (up to 7%)	\$ 46,447.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 46,447.00
TOTAL FUNDING ALLOCATION						\$ 663,533.24
	FY20/21	FY21/22	FY22/23	FY23/24	FY24/25	TOTAL
Youth Set-Aside (at least 8%)	\$ 53,083.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 53,083.00

*Narrative should reflect details of HHAP funding plan

COMMENTS:

FINAL

**MERCED CITY AND COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE
COLLABORATIVE APPLICANT**

PO BOX 112
MERCED, CA 95341-0112

February 11, 2020

Amber Ostrander, HHAP Program Grant Manager
Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council
Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency
915 Capitol Mall, Suite 350A
Sacramento CA 95814

Dear Ms. Ostrander:

I am writing in support of Merced County's application for Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Program (HHAP) assistance, administered by the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council. It is my understanding that Merced County intends to use these funds for operating needs of the new Merced Navigation Center.

The Merced Navigation Center is projected to open by November 2020, and will provide shelter and support services to at least 150 homeless individuals per year. The Merced Navigation Center is planned as a "low barrier" shelter – individuals with pets, possessions and partners will be accommodated. This definitely meets a regional need in addressing homelessness in the Merced County region.

Merced City and County Continuum of Care members are highly interested in the new Merced Navigation Center, and we expect that coordination will be an ongoing conversation at both Continuum of Care Executive Board and Coordinated Entry System meetings. We would appreciate your favorable consideration of Merced County's application.

If there are any questions regarding this matter, please contact Tammy Arias at 209-385-3000 extension 15202.

Sincerely,



Leslie Abasta-Cummings
Board Chair
Merced City and County Continuum of Care