

From: [Katie Finch](#)
To: [BOS Public Comment](#)
Subject: Comment In Support of Ranch House Project
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Attachments: [Letter ISO Ranch House Project.pdf](#)

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To: Nevada County Board of Supervisors

In re: Public Comment in Support of Ranch House Project

Hi All,

I am writing in support of The Ranch House Project associated with the Nevada County Behavioral Health Department. I support this project in my professional role as a Deputy Public Defender as well as my private role as a citizen of Nevada County generally and Grass Valley specifically.

It is difficult to overstate the impact of secure housing in assisting someone who lives with mental health issues and other co-occurring complex needs. I see this firsthand in my work with community members as a deputy public defender. I work with clients who are facing criminal charges that often are the result of what is essentially the criminalization of unhoused community members living with mental health needs and substance use issues. It's a reality that someone who is unhoused and trying to survive in the community is likely to come into contact with law enforcement- often times over small "quality of life" infractions. Local law enforcement seems to feel that their best tool to deal with the community issues of those who are unhoused is to target the most vulnerable of our community members with arrest and incarceration. This is not a new tactic. It's the one that cities and counties have employed for years without success. Arrest and incarceration can be further destabilizing to an individual, on top of the fact that such measures serve only to disappear a person for a period of time as opposed to actually addressing the issue at hand. We, as a community, are wasting taxpayer dollars on law enforcement to arrest and incarcerate and then prosecute an issue where the very simple and humane answer is to provide supportive housing to community members in need.

There is a better, more humane, and more effective way to both assist unhoused community members and make better use of community resources: housing first methods, specifically supportive housing. I don't claim to be the expert on these models, and for that, I turn to people who are those experts: the professionals with the Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative at the University of California San Francisco. An article entitled "Housing First is Not Housing Only" authored by Ned Reskinoff in October of 2021 discusses the successes of a housing-first policy offered in Santa Clara County:

"...[W]hat about interventions targeted at the highest-need individuals? My own favorite study of the PSH model—the study I find myself returning to again and again—comes from here at BHHI. Margot, fellow BHHI faculty member Maria Raven, MD, and Matthew Niedzwiecki, PhD, conducted a randomized control trial of a PSH intervention offered in Santa Clara County on a Housing First basis. (For those who don't consume much social science research: Randomized control trials are just about the closest you can get to replicating ideal laboratory conditions when studying a policy intervention out in the field.) The target population for this intervention was people with extremely high needs; as the researchers noted [in their writeup of the study for Health Services Review](#), "Participants averaged five hospitalizations, 20 visits to the emergency department, five to psychiatric

emergency services, and three to jail in the two years prior to being enrolled.”

In other words, this Housing First-aligned treatment was specifically for the hardest-to-treat members of Santa Clara’s unhoused community. The results of the intervention were extraordinary: 86% of those who received the treatment were successfully housed and remained housed for the vast majority of the follow-up period (which averaged around three years). Similarly, there was a sharp drop in utilization of emergency psychiatric services among the treatment group, corresponding to a rise in scheduled mental health visits.

Not only does Housing First work, but the evidence shows that it can work for even the highest need population of people experiencing homelessness. The 86% success rate cited in the *Health Services Review* article, while impressive, actually understates the intervention’s effectiveness. When BHHI researchers revisited Santa Clara for additional data, they found that *more than 90%* of participants had been housed and remained housed over the long term.”

Link to the full article here: <https://homelessness.ucsf.edu/blog/housing-first-not-housing-only>

I would also point decision makers to a panoply of evidence-based studies that document the success of housing first models in leading to retained housing and a decrease in substance use, and better outcomes in relation to mental health issues. These studies are provided on a website hosted by National Alliance to End Homelessness: <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/data-visualization-the-evidence-on-housing-first/>

Lastly, I wanted to leave you all with my lived experience of working with community members experiencing homelessness/insecurity in their housing and complex mental health and substance use needs. I have seen clients whose lives are vastly changed with the stability and dignity of being provided a roof over their head. These are clients who were facing multiple low-level misdemeanor cases as a result of frequent arrests. One client in particular is navigating his challenges while remaining housed at a location that had previously denied him entry. He is now working with a case manager on housing applications, attending outpatient substance use treatment, and attending appointments with a professional at Nevada County Behavioral Health. He is engaged in his cases as we work together to find the best path forward. Just last week, I picked him up for a court hearing from where he is currently staying at Hospitality House. Not only was he early- waiting by the door with bells on- he was hopeful about his future, which is something that he hasn’t felt in quite some time. He was engaged. Arrest and incarceration lead to isolation. Supportive housing leads to community, engagement, and far better outcomes. This is what we should be working towards and supporting as a community.

I encourage you to pass any measures that will support The Ranch House Project in moving forward.

Sincerely,

Katie Finch

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