Housing, Mental Health Advocates Push for November Ballot Measure Would repeal, replace Measure H

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Yvonne Wheeler, president of the L.A. County Federation of Labor. Photo: Leroy Hamilton.

OUR WEEKLY LOS ANGELES — "Today, we stand at a critical crossroads in our county's history," Yvonne Wheeler, president of the L.A. County Federation of Labor, said in a statement. "We have one of two options. Either we go about business as usual, or we can do something about it. Together, we can enact solutions to tackle the crisis head on, starting with the Affordable Housing, Homelessness Solutions and Prevention Now measure."

A coalition of housing and mental health advocates, among others, submitted more than 410,000 signatures this week to the county in hopes of placing a homeless initiative on the November ballot.

The measure, known as the Affordable Housing, Homelessness Solutions and Prevention Now initiative, would repeal and replace Measure H, a quarter-cent sales tax approved by county voters in 2017 to create a dedicated stream of revenue to address homelessness. Measure H is expected to expire in 2027, unless renewed.

Backers say the new initiative, which would increase the sales tax to a half-cent, would be a game changer for the county and its approach to addressing the homelessness crisis. Proponents have said the measure would produce $1.2 billion annually.

The coalition–including more than 80 organizations such as the L.A. County Federation of Labor, California Community Foundation, United Way of Greater Los Angeles, Los Angeles/Orange Counties Building and Construction Trades Council, SEIU 721, among others–worked together to draft, qualify, and aim to pass a “bold and new” approach to housing affordability and homelessness, organizers said.

They aim to focus more funding generated by the half-cent sales tax to build more affordable housing, increase access to mental health and substance abuse treatment, and bolster accountability measures–including a legal requirement to deliver results.

The proposed ballot measure notes that 60% of the revenue would cover costs for homelessness services and 15% of that would be distributed to cities based on the annual point-in-time count. Another 35.75% would support the L.A. County Affordable Housing Solutions Agency, which was created last year by the state Legislature to oversee homeless solutions.

Earlier Tuesday, hundreds of supporters rallied outside of the offices of the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk’s office to submit the signatures. The county requires 238,922 valid signatures in order for the ballot measure to qualify.

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Pete White, a representative of the Angeleno Project and executive director of the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN), said rent is “too damn high.” He highlighted that the proposed measure would uplift accountability with regular reporting, annual audits and performance evaluations.

“This measure was written by experts,” Jessica Melendez, director of policy for T.R.U.S.T. South LA, a nonprofit, said in a statement. “Homelessness is the most extreme manifestation of poverty and community displacement. We won’t be able to address homelessness unless we do a much better job of helping keep those homes that folks already have.”

She added, “We believe this measure goes much further than any previous attempt to do exactly that–prevent homelessness before it happens.”

According to the coalition, the county is expected to verify signatures within 30 business days and decide whether the measure qualifies to be placed on the November ballot.