

LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

[Emergency Ordinance - Restroom and Hand Washing Facilities for Unsheltered People]

Emergency ordinance to limit the spread of COVID-19 by requiring the City, through service agreements with third parties, to provide, staff, and maintain restrooms equipped with toilets and hand washing facilities, at a ratio of one restroom per 50 unsheltered people, within three weeks of the effective date of this ordinance; waive the requirement under Charter, Section 9.118, that the Board of Supervisors approve the service agreements for restrooms equipped with toilets and hand washing facilities; and affirming the Planning Department’s determination under the California Environmental Quality Act.

Existing Law

This ordinance does not amend existing law.

Background Information

This emergency ordinance addresses the present high risk of COVID-19 spread through lack of adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities for unsheltered individuals. On March 22, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) issued Interim Guidance: “Responding to Coronavirus Disease 2019 COVID-19 among People Experiencing Unsheltered Homeless,” which specifically provides that one method of preventing the spread of COVID-19 among those who are unsheltered is to “[e]nsure nearby restroom facilities have functional water taps, are stocked with hand hygiene materials (soap, drying materials) and bath tissue, and remain open to people experiencing homelessness 24 hours per day. If toilets or handwashing facilities are not available nearby, provide access to portable latrines with handwashing facilities for encampments of more than 10 people.”

The CDC guidance recommending the provision of restrooms is clear. But thousands of unsheltered people are unable to maintain proper personal hygiene and to comply with the social distancing requirements to wash their hands frequently and thoroughly. The lack of restrooms equipped with a toilet and hand washing facility that enable unhoused people to maintain personal hygiene and to frequently and thoroughly wash their hands, poses a severe and imminent threat to the health, safety, and well-being of themselves and others.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Emergency Handbook establishes standards for the ratio of toilets to individuals at one toilet for 50 people in an emergency. This ratio corresponds to the standards set by Sphere, an international humanitarian organization that provides disaster relief response guidance. To meet the needs of San Francisco’s approximately 5,180 unsheltered individuals at a ratio one restroom for 50 unsheltered persons, the City needs approximately 65 additional restrooms.

The prevalence of underlying health conditions among people experiencing homelessness increases their vulnerability to COVID-19 infection, and therefore increases the

likelihood that COVID-19 will spread rapidly through the homeless community. This makes it especially important that unsheltered individuals have access to free, public restrooms with hand washing facilities.

Having a sufficient number of restrooms equipped with hand washing facilities will allow people experiencing homelessness to maintain proper personal hygiene and to frequently and thoroughly wash their hands, and will help slow community spread of COVID-19.

The Mayor is authorized to designate one or more City agencies to administer the ordinance.

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