



March 5, 2021

The Honorable David Chiu
California State Assembly
State Capitol, P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0017

RE: AB 328 (Chiu) – Reentry Housing Program – SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Chiu,

East Bay Housing Organizations (EBHO) is pleased to support AB 328, which addresses the racial disparities that connect mass incarceration to housing insecurity by allocating new revenues from prison closures to programs to provide stable housing for formerly incarcerated people.

EBHO is a non-profit, member-driven organization with over 300 organizational and individual members. For 35 years, we have worked to preserve, protect, and create affordable housing opportunities for low-income communities in the East Bay by educating, advocating, organizing, and building coalitions. We believe that solutions to California's severe housing crisis must be comprehensive. As such, we support a multi-pronged effort based on the three principles of production of new housing, preservation of existing housing that is affordable, and protection of residents from unaffordable rent increases, eviction, displacement, and homelessness.

Incarceration is severely destabilizing for individuals, families, and communities. Upon release, formerly incarcerated people face significant hurdles on the road to restabilize themselves and their loved ones—most especially widespread legal discrimination in employment in housing. The result is that many people leaving prison and jail experience housing insecurity and even homelessness. Indeed, formerly incarcerated people are 10 times more likely than the general population to experience homelessness in California. In Oakland, where EBHO's central office is located, a recent survey of residents living in encampments conducted by Just Cities found that over 70 percent were formerly incarcerated. Moreover, Black Americans experience severe disparities at every stage of the criminal justice system, including police stops, arrests, prosecution, and sentencing. This makes the burden of mass incarceration, and its downstream effects on housing insecurity and homelessness, one of the most pressing racial justice issues of our time.

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The Reentry Housing Program (AB 328) would address these historic and ongoing harms by reallocating money saved through prison closures toward programs to provide stable housing to formerly incarcerated people. After years of leading the nation in the harmful experiment of mass incarceration, California has begun to reverse course through realignment policies meant to reduce prison overcrowding. The money saved through resulting prison closures creates an ideal opportunity to address the consequences of mass incarceration through programs, such as rental assistance and operating subsidies for permanent supportive housing, that will give formerly incarcerated people a stable place to call home. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has accelerated the early release of low-level offenders, makes such programs all the more timely.

We thank you for introducing this bill and look forward to working to secure its passage. We also encourage you to consider ways to advance anti-discrimination measures in housing for formerly incarcerated people (also known as “ban the box”) as a necessary complement to creating new funding for housing stabilization services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey Levin".

Jeffrey Levin
Policy Director