



ECONOMIC ROUNDTABLE

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315 West Ninth Street, Suite 502
Los Angeles, CA 90015

January 25, 2019

Max Stevens, Ph.D.
Los Angeles County Chief Information Office
350 South Figueroa Street, Suite 188
Los Angeles, California 90071

Dear Dr. Stevens:

I am writing in response to your December 20, 2018 letter, requiring the Economic Roundtable to return and destroy data provided by the County, and to withhold from the public both the research report I sent you for comment and two new screening tools that identify individuals and groups most at risk of becoming persistently homeless.

These tools have immediate, practical importance for identifying over one-thousand County residents who become homeless each month and go on to remain persistently homeless. These are workers who have just lost their jobs and youth entering adulthood who will become persistently homeless within three years.

Helping people avoid long-term homelessness through early intervention is far less difficult and costly than dealing with the problems that come with persistent homelessness. Homelessness takes a heavy toll on those who experience it, especially on their health. The costs of persistent homelessness are also high for taxpayers. As periods of homelessness persist, problems become more serious and the cost of treating them more expensive.

The problem is that it is not easy to identify those people who are at high risk of becoming persistently homeless so that resources can be targeted toward early interventions that work for them.

The powerful benefit of these new screening tools is that they will enable high-risk County residents to avoid the misery and harm of persistent homelessness by identifying them when they first become homeless, or even before they are homeless, so that they can immediately get the help they need to escape homelessness. The current system of prioritization effectively forces many people to spend at least a year on the street, or to become so ill that they become extremely expensive for the County, before they can receive the help they need.

The letter we received set out the County's position regarding its prerogative to control and withhold data, but did not address the substance of the Economic Roundtable's research or the value of this work for combatting homelessness.

Our assessment is that the derivative, de-identified and anonymized database the Economic Roundtable has built out of records provided by the County can be shown to

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be public records. These records are an important, and possibly irreplaceable, research asset for understanding and combatting homelessness.

Our report and the screening tools it contains are important speech on an issue of extraordinary public importance, and we believe that suppression of that speech by the County would be highly inappropriate and improper. The usefulness and impact of the report and the screening tools would be substantially undermined by destruction or suppression of the data on which they are based because the replicability of a study's results is crucial to its perceived reliability. Thus, destruction or suppression of the data would be tantamount to suppression of the report and screening tools themselves.

Our mission as a public benefit, nonprofit research organization is to develop information useful for systemic change and the public good, and to provide immediate, free access to information we produce. This includes our recently completed report and the screening tools it provides for identifying high risk individuals and giving them immediate help to escape homelessness.

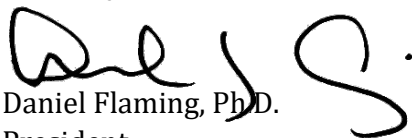
The data originally provided by the County required extensive cleaning to remove duplicates, correct data entry mistakes, and interpolate missing data. Then further work was needed to de-identify the information and roll the data up into categories that anonymize individuals while preserving important distinctions between groups. This data has been compiled over fifteen years and represents over seven-million individuals, of whom over one-million experienced homelessness. Over two person-years of our work has been contributed to building the dataset, at no cost to the County.

This is the largest, most multi-faceted and extended dataset of this kind that we know of in the United States. It is a powerful research tool for combatting homelessness in Los Angeles County and across the country. It would be a great loss to both homeless individuals and taxpayers for this dataset to be destroyed. We are prepared to donate the dataset to the County so that it can be made available to other researchers.

We want to resolve this issue amicably. We believe our research is beneficial for the County's efforts to combat homelessness. We are requesting a meeting with you and other appropriate County representatives within the next two weeks. We will defer action regarding the database and the report during that time.

Please let me know if you are available to meet, and if so, dates when you are available. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Flaming, Ph.D.', with a period at the end.

Daniel Flaming, Ph.D.
President

c: Phil Ansell
Fesia Davenport
William Kehoe