

Maricopa County's explosive growth brings with it some challenges, including a shortage of affordable housing that contributes to an increase in homelessness in our region. This is not just a downtown Phoenix issue; we see its presence and impact in communities in the East Valley as well. County government can't solve the homelessness challenge alone, but we do have many critical pieces of the puzzle. Thanks to the efforts of our Human Services Department, trusted community partners, and dedicated leaders across the region, we are providing strong support and new funding to proven approaches that can have a lasting impact.

In June, the Board of Supervisors approved \$2 million in federal and county dollars to fund several programs and initiatives with proven success reducing homelessness, unemployment, and recidivism. This is an 11% increase in funding from the previous year and includes:

- Investing in diversion strategies that help those experiencing a housing crisis find alternate housing that is safe and appropriate
- Partnering with non-profit housing providers to give individuals a "quick exit" from homelessness into more permanent housing tailored to individual needs
- Partnering with regional shelter partners to assist individuals with emergency shelter and essential services
- Leading the "Hand in Hand" project which connects those in the justice system who have experienced homelessness with supportive housing, physical/mental health, and navigation services while in jail, and community services upon release, all with the goal of reducing the chances they will return to jail and ending their homelessness

We've also made permanent a full-time Homelessness Program Manager to ensure these proven programs and initiatives are carried out thoughtfully, collaboratively, and successfully.

In addition, we've created a Workforce Development Coordinator position to assist recently-housed individuals in finding and obtaining a job so they don't become homeless again.

In July, the Board approved an East Valley resolution authorizing data sharing and collaboration on the issue of homelessness between Maricopa County; the cities of Apache Junction, Chandler, Mesa, Scottsdale, and Tempe; the Town of Gilbert; and the Maricopa Regional Continuum of Care Governing Board. I am grateful to Mayors, Town and City Council members, and other staff for their commitment to finding regional solutions.

Homelessness is a complicated issue, and resources are finite. That's why working together is so important. By partnering with cities and towns that are also making large investments in homelessness, we can make our dollars stretch further and increase our impact.

Getting people off the streets—providing them some stability, a roof over the heads, and a job that pays the bills—makes our communities safer, healthier, and more economically vibrant. Maricopa County is a regional leader and active partner on this issue. I hope you will support our efforts.

Jack Sellers is a Chandler resident and a member of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors