

It is challenging to keep up with the overabundance of information we are asked to sift through on a daily basis. Sometimes life feels like one big game of “whack a mole.” Just when you think you have mastered the intricacies of a crisis, another one pops up for you to address. The consequence of this non-stop barrage and the need to focus on multiple concerns at the same time is critical decisions, with long term, far reaching consequences, are made before our brains can even catch up. I fear this is the case with Prop 200.

Proposition 200 is an unfunded mandate to increase the number of safety officers and first responders in our community. As the CEO of a domestic abuse agency, I can tell you how deeply grateful we are to public safety officers and first responders. Few agencies understand more about the challenges facing our courageous police officers as they respond to the thousands of domestic abuse disputes each year. The health and well being of our community rests on the shoulders of our police officers and first responders, and are essential to our agency to achieve our mission of providing opportunities to create, sustain and celebrate lives free from abuse.

Here’s the quandary: in order to fulfill this mandate, which permanently changes our city charter, critical funding that goes toward domestic abuse, homelessness, hunger, and after school services would probably be eliminated. There is just not enough money to cover this unfunded mandate and continue to fund essential services that our community requires for the citizens less fortunate.

So, why is it that we continue to look at our community needs as either/or instead of recognizing the intrinsic interdependency of our community services?

All propositions are complicated, cumbersome and often loaded with benefits and consequences, and they are all packaged in a three digit number and a quick tag line designed to *say it all!* The tag line for Prop 200, “Public Safety First Initiative”, looks wise on the surface. Who wouldn’t like to see an increase in police and first responders? But this price may be too high. It is essential that we understand this is an unfunded mandate.

Each funding stream represents beds in Emerge! shelters and the individuals needed to answer our 20,000 crisis calls each year. Rarely in our community does a day go by where there isn’t a news story about domestic abuse, and far too often, a domestic abuse related fatality. The funding at risk represents lives.

What will the police do with the hundreds of people they direct to our shelters each year if the domestic violence funding is eliminated because of the unfunded Prop 200 mandate?

So, in the interest of slowing down the “whack a mole” game that many of us experience, I ask we stop and consider the potential unintended consequences of Prop 200 on the ballot. Community resources are intricately woven together to meet the complex needs of our community. It takes all of us.



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