What Role Does Access to Civil Justice Play in Reducing Homelessness? An Investigation of San Francisco

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Abstract

This paper provides the first evidence on the impacts of access to civil justice on homelessness. Using quasi-experimental and qualitative case study approaches, we find a significant and substantial decrease in rates of homelessness in populations that were exposed to free access to civil justice delivered by a nonprofit operating in San Francisco. In a treatment-control study of a set of individuals who initially approached the nonprofit for legal services, the homelessness rate decreased for the treatment group by 5.38% when compared to the control group. We estimate that 46% of those at risk or currently without homes, who received legal representation, were successfully prevented from becoming homeless in comparison to the hypothetical scenario without such intervention. A synthetic control analysis of SF point-in-time homeless count data suggests a causal impact of a decline in homelessness rates due to access to the nonprofit's legal services. Qualitative interviews provide evidence of specific mechanisms for the causal impact. Finally, our cost estimates suggest such legal representation is a much more cost-effective way to reduce homelessness when compared with recent interventions in financial assistance or housing. Overall, the estimated effects are large enough to fully explain why unsheltered homelessness decreased by half in District 10, San Francisco, from 2013 to 2022, while it increased in other parts of the city.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Homelessness is a pervasive and growing issue in the U.S. In 2022, nearly 582,500 individuals in the U.S. were without a home on any given night. This issue was particularly pronounced in California, where high living costs and economic disparities have exacerbated homelessness. San Francisco has experienced a 20% increase in homelessness since 2011, despite a greater than five-fold increase in the city's financial investment to combat this issue.[1]

The complexity of the homelessness problem necessitates exploring various dimensions beyond traditional housing-first policies (immediate and unconditional access to permanent housing). Among these, the potential role of civil legal representation in mitigating homelessness remains relatively underexplored.

A review of the existing literature reveals no empirical research in the US assessing how and if access to civil justice, or the lack thereof, contributes to homelessness, except for some limited research on the eviction context. The lack of research is surprising because the US is not the only developed country in the world with high housing costs, but is the only one without universal access to legal representation; a fact that many policymakers and academics focused on this issue have neglected.

In this paper, we investigate the impact of free legal assistance on individuals at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness.

Our methodology encompasses a threefold approach to investigate this relationship. The first component is a quasi-experimental analysis, assessing the impact of legal representation on homelessness. This is complemented by a synthetic control analysis of point-in-time homelessness data, aiming to distinguish the specific effects of legal interventions and rule out demographic or housing market effects. Lastly, the study incorporates qualitative interviews with stakeholders, including local government teams and individuals who have received legal assistance. These narratives provide a deeper understanding of how legal services can influence the trajectory of homelessness.

In this context, the work of Open Door Legal (ODL) in San Francisco becomes particularly relevant. Its unique model of providing free universal access to legal representation offers a compelling case study. The districts in which ODL is active experienced a notable decrease in homelessness, coinciding with the entry of universal legal aid, suggesting a potential link between enhanced legal support and the alleviation of homelessness. This study examines the causal links, providing insights into the broader implications of free legal assistance in homelessness prevention.

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[1] The SF Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing ("HSH") was established in 2016; previously, homeless-related services were managed by SF Human Services Agency ("HSA") and other departments. Total funding grew for homeless-related services from $116 million in 2011 to $672 million in 2022. For HSH budgets, see *Overview of Previous HSH Budgets*. (n.d.). Hsh.sfgov.org. Retrieved September 16, 2023, from https://hsh.sfgov.org/about/budget/overview-previous-budgets/. HSA budget 2011-2015, obtained via public records request.

We highlight how ODL's prevention of asset and income expropriation through successful enforcement of property, contract, family, and civil rights contributes to declining homelessness rates and discuss how increasing access to civil justice could significantly decrease homelessness rates.

By exploring the intersection of civil legal assistance and homelessness, this research contributes to a foundational understanding of potential solutions to urban homelessness. It opens avenues for policy considerations that integrate legal assistance as a vital component in addressing the multifaceted nature of homelessness in urban settings.

In section 2 of the paper we discuss the history of homelessness interventions and share a literature review. In section 3 we provide background on Open Door Legal and its model of universal access to legal representation. In section 4 we discuss our data sources and methodology. In section 5 we discuss trends for homelessness in San Francisco. In section 6 we share the quasi-experimental analysis results. In section 7 we report on the synthetic control results. In section 8 we present results from our qualitative interviews. In section 9 we do a cost and cost-comparison analysis. In section 10 we have an expanded discussion of the causal mechanism and provide additional context on access to civil justice in the United States. Finally, in section 11 we conclude with a summary of our findings.

2. Literature Review of Homelessness Interventions

The large and growing homeless population has attracted media attention and rigorous research, both searching for the best ways of addressing homelessness. A range of individual-level predictors of homelessness have also been identified in the literature. Adverse life events, such as physical abuse and foster care experiences, are associated with an increased risk of homelessness (Nilsson, 2019).[2] Male gender and severe drug use problems are also predictive factors (To, 2016).[3] Lack of human capital, social alienation, and mental health/psychiatric illness have been suggested as potential causes of homelessness, although they explain only a small proportion of the variance (Calsyn, 1994).[4] Other predictors include family instability, unemployment, poverty, mental illness, substance use, child maltreatment, and social support (Giano, 2019).[5]

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[2] Nilsson, S. F., Nordentoft, M., & Hjorthøj, C. (2019). Individual-Level Predictors for Becoming Homeless and Exiting Homelessness: a Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Journal of Urban Health*, *96*(5), 741–750. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-019-00377-x.
[3] To, M. J., Palepu, A., Aubry, T., Nisenbaum, R., Gogosis, E., Gadermann, A., Cherner, R., Farrell, S., Misir, V., & Hwang, S. W. (2016). Predictors of homelessness among vulnerably housed adults in 3 Canadian cities: a prospective cohort study. *BMC Public Health*, *16*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3711-8.
[4] Calsyn, R. J., & Roades, L. A. (1994). Predictors of past and current homelessness. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *22*(3), 272–278. https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(199407)22:3%3C272::aid-jcop2290220307%3E3.0.co;2-x.
[5] Williams, A., Giano, Z., & Merten, M. (2019). Running away during adolescence and future homelessness: The amplifying role of mental health. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *89*(2), 268–278. https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000397.

Historically, homelessness was addressed at the local level from an assortment of local agencies, churches, and shelters. In 1995, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) required each locality to submit a single Continuum of Care (CoC) application in order to encourage better coordination of services. Since 2007, HUD has also required CoCs to provide point in time counts of the homeless population under a common definition of homelessness.[6] At the same time, the interventions used to address homelessness changed. Historically, services focused on local homeless shelters which were also used as access points to linear treatment programs. Individuals would start in a shelter, enter a program, and by following its rules graduate into a short-term residential program before finally obtaining permanent housing. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, advocates began arguing for a "housing first" model, where housing was provided immediately and without precondition. These advocates argued that with housing, individuals were better able to solve other problems like finding employment or achieving sobriety.[7]

The Pathways to Housing demonstration project by Tsemberis and Eisenberg (2000) as well as a successful randomized controlled study of "housing first" programs for veterans (Rosenheck et al. 2003) led to a dramatic expansion of "housing first" programs.[8] Funding for "housing first" programs more than doubled in the 2010s, reaching more than $18 billion nationally in 2019 and becoming the preferred treatment option for many populations across the United States.[9] Ly (2015) and Pleace (2019) provide evidence of cost offsets and cost effectiveness of "housing first" programs. However, there is mixed evidence regarding the impact of "housing first" programs on homelessness, with the biggest impacts seen on housing retention.[10]

[6] For a history of homelessness interventions, see Evans, W. N., Phillips, D. C., & Ruffini, K. (2021). Policies to Reduce and Prevent Homelessness: What We Know and Gaps in the Research. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 40(3). https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22283.

[7] For a meta-analysis of homelessness & housing first policy, see Evans, W., Philips, D., Ruffini, K., Gould, I., Fyall, R., Olsen, E., & Sullivan, J. (2019). Reducing and Preventing Homelessness: A Review of the Evidence and Charting a Research Agenda. *NBER Working Paper Series.*.https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w26232/w26232.pdf. O'Flaherty, B. (2019). Homelessness research: A guide for economists (and friends). *Journal of Housing Economics*, *44*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhe.2019.01.003.

[8] The Pathways to Housing demonstration project by Tsemberis and Eisenberg (2000) provided evidence that a "Housing First" model applied to permanent, supportive housing could effectively house chronically homeless people. See Tsemberis, S., & Eisenberg, R. F. (2000). Pathways to housing: supported housing for street-dwelling homeless individuals with psychiatric disabilities. *Psychiatric Services (Washington, D.C.)*, *51*(4), 487–493. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.51.4.487. Similarly, a successful randomized evaluation of Housing First programs for veterans (Rosenheck et al. 2003) led to a massive expansion of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development Veterans Administration Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. See Rosenheck, R., Kasprow, W., Frisman, L., & Liu-Mares, W. (2003). Cost-effectiveness of Supported Housing for Homeless Persons With Mental Illness. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, *60*(9), 940. https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.60.9.940.

[9] United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2019). U.S. Targeted Homelessness Assistance: Discretionary Budget Authority in Millions of Dollars. Technical Report. December 2019, *United States Interagency Council on Homelessness* 2019.

[10] See Evans, W., Philips, D., Ruffini, K., Gould, I., Fyall, R., Olsen, E., & Sullivan, J. (2019). Reducing and Preventing Homelessness: A Review of the Evidence and Charting a
Research Agenda. (Working Paper 26232) National Bureau of Economic Research. Also see, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). Permanent supportive housing: evaluating

The same rationale used in "housing first" has also led to an expansion in financial assistance for "rapid rehousing," which provide immediate temporary subsidies for market housing, as well as prevention programs that provide limited financial assistance to stop a family from becoming homeless. By linking administrative data Cohen (2024) found that rapidly placing individuals in housing programs significantly reduces the likelihood of future homelessness.[11] Financial assistance-based prevention programs can be effective, but targeting is an issue. A study in Chicago found that financial assistance decreased the likelihood of households entered an emergency shelter within 6 months by 1.6%.[12] A randomized study in Santa Clara found that targeted financial assistance prevented 3.8% of households from becoming homeless within 6 months.[13]

Additionally, recent research into housing markets have put an additional emphasis on the importance of housing for homelessness. In *Homelessness is a Housing Problem*, large-scale regressions found that homelessness in the US is closely correlated with a lack of affordable housing; drug abuse and mental health were found to not be significant predictors of homelessness. States with high rates of mental illness and poverty have lower rates of homelessness, compared to states that have low poverty rates and high rates of homelessness.[14] Clarke (2020) and Lucas (2017) both highlight the role of housing policies in perpetuating conditional support and resource misallocation, respectively.[15] Bullen (2018) and O'Flaherty (2019) emphasize the need for affordable housing and housing subsidies to support the implementation of Housing First.[16] Culhane (2013) and Quigley (2001) underscore the

the evidence for improving health outcomes among people experiencing chronic homelessness, *National Academies Press*. O'Flaherty, B. (2019), supra note 6.

[11] Cohen. E. (Forthcoming). Housing the Homeless: The Effect of Placing Single Adults Experiencing Homelessness in Housing Programs on Future Homelessness and Socioeconomic Outcomes. *American Economic Journal*. https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.20220014&from=f.

[12] Evans, W. N., Sullivan, J. X., & Wallskog, M. (2016). The impact of homelessness prevention programs on homelessness. *Science*, *353*(6300), 694–699. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aag0833.

[13] Phillips, D. C., & Sullivan, J. X. (2023). Do Homelessness Prevention Programs Prevent Homelessness? Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1162/rest_a_01344.

[14] Colburn, G., & Clayton Page Aldern. (2022). *Homelessness is a housing problem : how structural factors explain U.S. patterns. University Of California Press*. Also see Demsas, J. (2022, December 12). The Obvious Answer to Homelessness. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/01/homelessness-affordable-housing-crisis-democrats-causes/672224/.

[15] Clarke, A., & Parsell, C. (2020). The Ambiguities of Homelessness Governance: Disentangling Care and Revanchism in the Neoliberalising City. *Antipode*, *52*(6), 1624–1646. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12671. Lucas, D. S. (2017). The Impact of Federal Homelessness Funding on Homelessness. *Southern Economic Journal*, *84*(2), 548–576. https://doi.org/10.1002/soej.12231. Lucas notes that lower bound estimates for the minimum cost of reducing unsheltered homelessness has increased over time, from $16,400 in 2011 to $20,800 in 2013 to $50,000 in 2015, and that increased federal funding is positively related to chronic homelessness.

[16] Bullen, J., & Baldry, E. (2018). 'I waited 12 months': how does a lack of access to housing undermine Housing First?. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, *19*(1), 120–130. https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2018.1521187. O'Flaherty, B. (2019). Homelessness research: A guide for economists (and friends). *Journal of Housing Economics*, *44*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhe.2019.01.003 .

importance of further research on the public health and societal benefits of housing and the economic factors contributing to homelessness.[17]

However, the role of "access to civil justice" in reducing or preventing homelessness is not well studied or understood. Civil justice services are typically not seen as part of the social safety net in the United States. Without asking the right questions, legal issues can become invisible to researchers and policymakers. For example, surveys of homeless individuals typically ask what the proximate cause of their homelessness is, and responses include evictions, job loss, and family disputes. But current surveys don't uncover how many of these were illegal evictions, wrongful terminations, or redressable family disputes. This is shown, for example, in UCSF's 2023 statewide study of people experiencing homelessness in California. In the study, at least 50% of the case studies mentioned in "Pathways to Homelessness" involved unaddressed legal issues.[18] Despite this, a lack of access to legal aid was not mentioned as a reason why people experienced homelessness, and expanding access to legal aid was not mentioned as a policy recommendation.[19]

There is some literature that touches on how legal representation could reduce homelessness. Cassidy & Currie (2023) found that tenants who were represented in eviction proceedings had smaller monetary judgments, were less likely to have eviction warrants issued against them, and were less likely to be evicted.[20] A 2012 randomized study in Quincy, MA likewise found that providing counsel during eviction cases dramatically improved the likelihood of tenants remaining in possession and gave tenants a 5-fold financial benefit, when compared to unrepresented tenants, and speculated that this could reduce homelessness.[21] This finding was

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[17] Ly, A., & Latimer, E. (2015). Housing First Impact on Costs and Associated Cost Offsets: A Review of the Literature. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, *60*(11), 475–487. https://doi.org/10.1177/070674371506001103. Pleace, N., & Bretherton, J. (2019, March 30). *The cost effectiveness of Housing First in England*. https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/145440/. Culhane, D. P., Metraux, S., Byrne, T., Stino, M., & Bainbridge, J. (2013). The Age Structure of Contemporary Homelessness: Evidence and Implications For Public Policy. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, *13*(1), 228–244. https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12004. Quigley, J. M., & Raphael, S. (2001). THE ECONOMICS OF HOMELESSNESS: THE EVIDENCE FROM NORTH AMERICA. *European Journal of Housing Policy*, *1*(3), 323–336. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616710110091525.

[18] Kushel, M., & Moore, T. (2023). *The California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness Toward a New Understanding*. https://homelessness.ucsf.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/CASPEH_Report_62023.pdf. In the report, pages 33-52, of the 12 case studies described, at least 6 had clear unaddressed legal issues. For example, on page 33, the report describes a man named Carlos who was injured on the job but uneligible for worker's compensation. Legally, if you can't seek a remedy through worker's compensation, you can do so through torts. Since tort damages are typically much higher than workers compensation, if Carlos had been able to get legal help, he could potentially have received a large settlement and avoided homelessness.

[19] Id. 85-90.

[20] Cassidy, M., & Currie, J. (2023). The effects of legal representation on tenant outcomes in housing court: Evidence from New York City's Universal Access program. *Journal of Public Economics*, *222*, 104844. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2023.104844.

[21] Boston Bar Association Task Force on the Right to Civil Counsel. (2012). *The Importance of Representation in Eviction Cases and Homeless Prevention: A Report on the BBA Civil Right to Counsel Housing Pilots*. Retrieved September 16, 2023, from https://www.bostonbar.org/app/uploads/2022/06/bba-crtc-final-3-1-12.pdf.

also demonstrated in Steinberg (2011), who found that counsel increased tenant's likelihood of remaining in their home by over 4x and reduced their monetary judgments, while people who received self-help services had no better outcomes when compared to a control.[22] Bernal & Yuan (2023) studied self-help interventions for evictions and other civil issues and found no evidence that self-help reduced defaults or improved outcomes. In fact, it may have led to worse outcomes.[23] Collinson et al. (2024) studied the causal impact of eviction on poverty and other economic outcomes, finding that an eviction order increases homelessness and reduces earnings, among other poverty-related outcomes.[24]

These studies strongly suggest that legal representation, at least in the eviction context, could reduce homelessness, but none of the studies document a causal relationship between legal representation and homelessness. The impact of legal representation in other kinds of civil issues, such as domestic violence, employment, or torts, on homelessness is even less studied. A meta-analysis has found that, depending on the procedural complexity of the issue, a represented individual is between 20% and 1,379% more likely to win their case than one without representation, across a wide variety of civil issues[25] We do not know, however, whether winning a case related to domestic violence, public benefits, torts, employment, or other issue decreases homelessness. We can hypothesize, though, that winning civil cases will improve assets, income, and physical security for "at risk" clients, which could in turn reduce homelessness.

To directly investigate the impact that civil representation has on homelessness, we examined the work of Open Door Legal, which is pioneering the country's first system of free universal access to legal representation in District 10 (D10), a historically low-income neighborhood of San Francisco roughly corresponding to the neighborhoods of Bayview, Hunters Point, Sunnydale, Visitacion Valley, and Potrero Hill.[26] D10 has seen a 46.2% decrease in counted unsheltered homeless individuals since 2013 and is the only part of San Francisco to see a significant decrease during this period.[27] The fact that ODL operated almost exclusively in D10 during the relevant time period creates the intriguing ability to analyze the impact of access to civil justice independently.

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[22] Steinberg, J. (2011). In Pursuit of Justice? Case Outcomes and the Delivery of Unbundled Legal Services. *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy*, *18*, 453.

[23] Bernal, D. & Yuan, A. (2023). The Limits of Self Help: A Field Experiment in an Arizona Housing Court. *Forthcoming at American Law and Economics Review (2024/2025); Northwestern Law & Econ Research Paper No. 23-09*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4426678.

[24] Collinson, Robert, John Eric Humphries, Nicholas Mader, Davin Reed, Daniel Tannenbaum, and Winnie Van Dijk. "Eviction and poverty in American cities." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 139, no. 1 (2024): 57-120.

[25] The median is about 500% more likely. See Sandefur, R. (2010). The Impact of Counsel: An Analysis of Empirical Evidence. *Seattle Journal for Social Justice, 9*, 51.

[26] For a map of the legislative districts of San Francisco, see appendix E

[27] See section 2.1 for point-in-time count data for San Francisco.

3. Background on Open Door Legal

Starting in 2013, private and public funding was pulled together to launch and grow Open Door Legal, which aimed to pioneer the country's first system of universal access to legal representation in D10. Essentially, private and public actors committed to providing everyone who could not afford legal representation access to it, to our knowledge the first time such an intervention had been attempted in the United States. While the intervention was explicitly aimed at reducing poverty, reducing homelessness is a likely spillover effect.

Unlike the conventional model of legal aid in the United States, which aims to serve specific populations on specific issues for a defined number of cases over a wide catchment area, Open Door Legal seeks to completely saturate the need for legal services among income-qualified individuals within a small catchment area. They began operations on January 7, 2013 and until 2019 only served residents of D10, which comprises several low and moderate-income neighborhoods in the southeast part of the city. They aim to ensure that everyone who comes to them asking for legal assistance who resides in the catchment area and is income qualified will be able to obtain guaranteed legal representation on all viable claims or defenses. They have represented community members in over 35 discrete areas of law, including eviction defense, habitability, housing discrimination, domestic violence, child custody, wage theft, employment discrimination, estate planning, torts, consumer fraud, elder abuse, wrongful foreclosures, collection defense, U-visas, asylum, bankruptcy, security deposits and much more. If people come with novel legal issues and no warm handoffs are available, staff will take the time to become competent and provide assistance.[28] In this way, they aim to operate like a "general hospital" for civil legal issues: a provider of last resort to ensure everyone in a defined community can obtain help.

According to geolocation data, ODL has represented roughly 5-10 individuals or families on every block in Bayview, the heart of District 10, in the last 10 years. Figure 1 shows the area around their first office, with every black dot representing a household they have represented.

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[28] For a fuller description of their definition of universal access, see this article.

Figure 1

Geolocation of client households near ODL's first office

Community members start the process of obtaining assistance by completing an electronic intake form either virtually through ODL's website or in-person at one of their offices during normal business hours. When requesting help, guests indicate their address and if they are homeless. They also indicate whether, "if this [legal] issue is not positively resolved, do you think you will likely become homeless?" The latter question is used to mark whether the guest is "at risk" of homelessness.

From there, frontline staff will review their submission to check for income and residency eligibility, and then book an appointment with one of ODL's practice groups. Legal emergencies are triaged to ensure faster appointments. Automated communications help remind the guest to bring in relevant documents before the intake meeting, at which time they will meet with one of ODL's attorneys. The attorney will then assess the client's situation and determine if they have a "viable" legal issue, meaning the issue was something that professional legal services could resolve. "Viability" ultimately is a professional judgment about the strength of the legal claim or defense and is analogous to the decision of a physician to begin a course of treatment.

There are many reasons why an issue may not be viable, including:
- There may not be a relevant legal violation. A guest may have been treated poorly, but not in an illegal manner.
- The issue may not be ripe for legal intervention. The guest may need to attempt self-help remedies first, such as in habitability cases, the tenant must first inform the landlord of the problems before the landlord can be liable.
- There may not be any evidence that can be reasonably obtained to support the guest's position. There may have been a legal violation, but it would be impossible to prove it.
- The issue may be de minimis. For example, a guest may have had their shoes borrowed without permission and then returned an hour later. This would technically be a trespass, but the harm is so minimal as to not be worth legally pursuing.

Of the individuals who request services from ODL, 15.5% are referred out and 70.94% are scheduled intakes with ODL staff (reasons why an intake was not scheduled include an inability to reach the requestor, a conflict of interest, or the issue is facially not a legal one). Of the requestors with intakes scheduled, 84.64% completed their intake. And of the intakes that were finalized, 46.05% were converted into cases.[29] The average case closed in 2022 took 37 direct hours (not including shared direct or indirect hours) and 254.52 days to complete, for an average cost of $2,787.88.[30] The average client had 1.37 cases with ODL.

7.06% of eligible submissions were for guests who were either living on the streets or in a shelter, and 32.56% of submissions were for guests who were "at risk" of homelessness, or a total of 39.62% of all service requestors.

Community members who live outside of ODL's service area are provided with referrals to other legal aid nonprofits. Community members who live inside ODL's service area and have viable cases may also be provided with warm handoffs to other attorneys or organizations, depending on the issue.

In 2019, ODL opened its second office in the Excelsior and began taking cases in District 11. In 2021, ODL opened its third office in the Western Addition and began taking cases in District 5 (which at the time, did not include the Tenderloin and was instead centered on the Western Addition). In 2022 ODL began accepting cases in District 2. In 2023, in its 10th year of operations, ODL opened its fourth office in the Sunset and began taking cases in Districts 1, 4, and 7.

4. Methodology & Description of Data

This paper explores the impact of ODL's initiatives through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.

First, we conducted a quasi-experimental analysis comparing ODL-treated clients with a control group outside ODL's service areas. This involved constructing treatment and control groups using ODL's demographic data, and analyzing homelessness rates post-ODL intervention through HSH's encounter and enrollment system data.

Second, our study includes a synthetic control analysis of San Francisco's Homelessness Point-in-Time (PIT) data, utilizing official PIT count reports and additional public records. This analysis aims to quantify ODL's impact, factoring in multipliers for estimating hidden homelessness in difficult-to-survey locations.

Third, qualitative insights were gathered through interviews with HSH staff, current and formerly homeless individuals, and ODL clients. These interviews aimed to uncover the operational mechanisms of ODL and other factors influencing homelessness trends in District 10. The

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[29] n=4463
[30] n=477. The formula to estimate costs is described in section 9.1

research involved discussions with six HSH teams and street interviews to understand inter-district mobility among the homeless population.

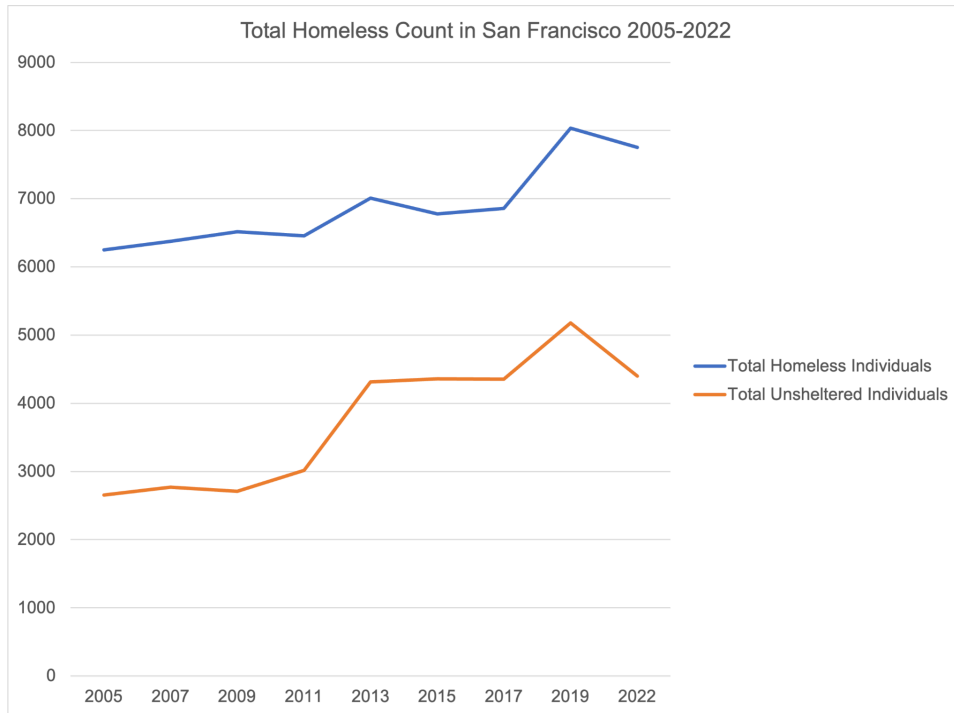# 5. Homelessness in San Francisco

The homelessness crisis in San Francisco has been persistently evident, as demonstrated by the biannual Point-In-Time (PIT) count conducted by the city's Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH). Although the PIT count is the primary nationwide source of homelessness data and adheres to federal requirements, it is generally considered to under-represent the actual numbers.[31]

The 2022 PIT count revealed a modest city-wide decrease in homelessness by 3.5% since 2019, with an encouraging shift of a 15.1% reduction in the unsheltered population and a 17.6% increase in sheltered individuals. This trend indicates progress in sheltering the homeless, yet a long-term view since 2005 shows a steady rise in both overall and unsheltered homelessness, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 3 illustrates the various settings where unsheltered individuals are found, including tents, cars, RVs/Vans, and abandoned vehicles. Notably, tents have been the predominant shelter for the unsheltered population since 2015.

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[31] Studies by Laska and Meisner (1993) and Hopper et al. (2008) done decades apart in New York City both found PIT estimates understate the rate of unsheltered homelessness by about 40—50 percent. See Laska, E., & Meisner, M. (1993). A plant-capture method for estimating the size of a population from a single sample. *PubMed*, *49*(1), 209–220. Hopper, K., Shinn, M., Laska, E., Meisner, M., & Wanderling, J. (2008). Estimating Numbers of Unsheltered Homeless People Through Plant-Capture and Postcount Survey Methods. *American Journal of Public Health*, *98*(8), 1438–1442. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2005.083600.

Figure 2

Total Homeless Count in San Francisco 2005-2022

Trends in Total & Unsheltered Homeless, SF 2005-2022[32]

Figure 3

Unsheltered Individuals by Location Type
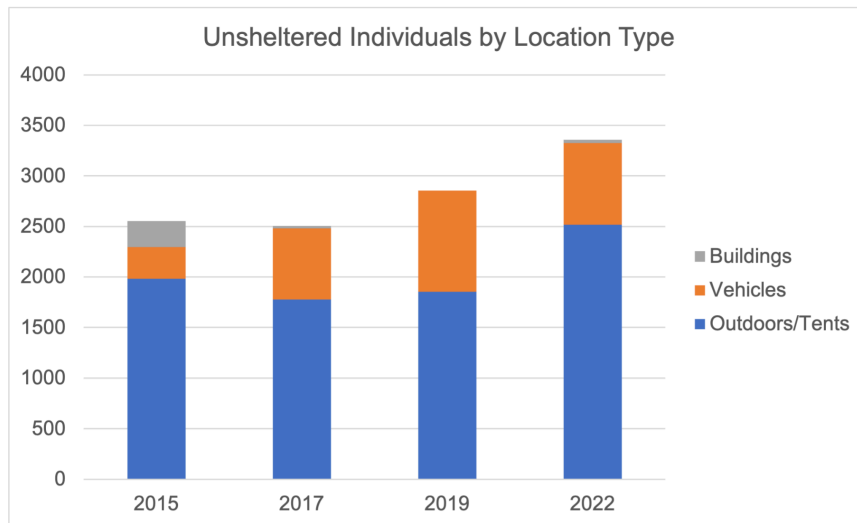
Unsheltered Homeless by Location Type

A decade-long perspective from 2011 to 2022 shows a 20% increase in overall homelessness in San Francisco and a 46% surge in the unsheltered population. Compounding this issue is the

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[32] San Francisco's point in time counts can be accessed at: https://hsh.sfgov.org/about/research-and-reports/pit-hic/, with archived reports at https://hsh.sfgov.org/about/research-and-reports/archived-reports/#pit. Citations to the full reports is found in Appendix E.

rise in substance use disorder among the homeless, from 31% in 2011 to 52% in 2022, and a 26.3% increase in chronic homelessness. These trends point to a growing and more vulnerable homeless population, deeply entangled with substance dependency and prolonged street living.

A district-wise analysis reveals varying patterns of homelessness across San Francisco, with Districts 6 and 10 experiencing the highest concentrations. However, these districts display distinct trends over the years, as shown in Table 1. While District 10 has seen a significant reduction in homelessness over 11 years, driven mainly by a decline in the unsheltered count, District 6 has witnessed a contrasting trend.

Table 1: Change in Homelessness, D6, D10, and Remainder of SF

District	Number of homeless in 2022	Percent of SF homeless population in 2022	2019-2022 percent change	2011-2022 percent change
D6	3848	49.6%	**5.3%**	**47.4%**
D10	1115	14.4%	**-39.4%**	**-47.4%**
SF	7754	100%	**-3.5%**	**20.1%**
SF (excluding D10)	6639	85.6%	**7.2%**	**53.1%**

Figure 4 visually represents this divergence in homelessness trends between D10 and the rest of San Francisco.

Figure 4
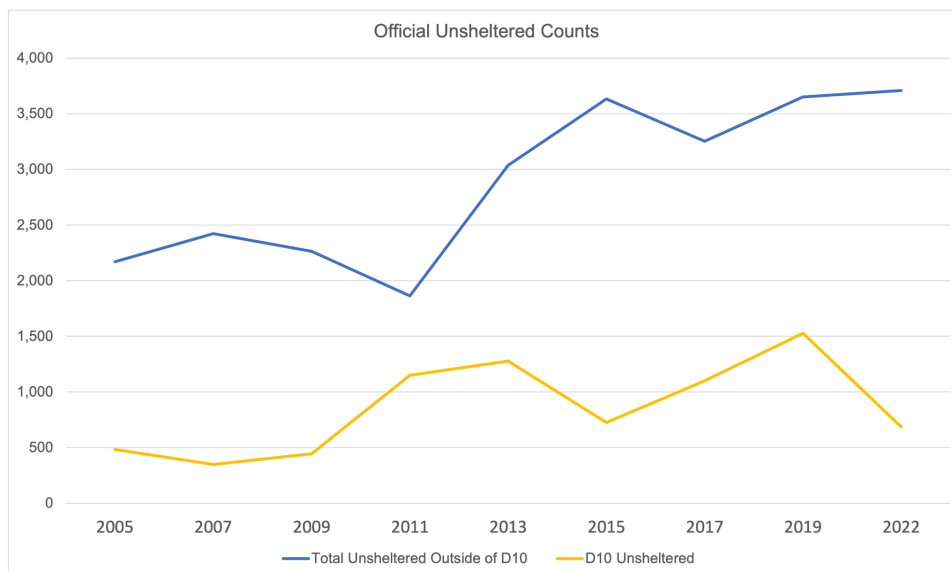
Change in Unsheltered Homelessness Over Time, D10 vs. Rest of SF

The PIT count, managed by HSH's Data & Performance team, involves a combination of street counts and surveys in shelters and transitional housing. This count, typically conducted at the end of January, is the only consistent longitudinal data source on homelessness, despite some methodological changes over the past decade.

The sheltered count is derived from HSH's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), focusing on occupancy rates and client demographics. The unsheltered count involves a visual street count, complemented by follow-up counts in specific areas. Notably, multipliers are employed to estimate the number of individuals living in vehicles, tents, or abandoned buildings, where direct counting is challenging. Table 2 showcases the variation in these multipliers over the years, highlighting the fluctuating estimates, particularly for tents, which have significantly influenced the overall unsheltered count.

Table 2: Changes in Multipliers Used Over Time[33]

| Multiplier Type	2013	2015	2017	2019	2022
Car	1.62	1.64	1.6	1.5	1.19
RV/Van	2.01	2.06	2.85	2.56	1.63
Tent	1	1.31	0.93	2.13	1.37
Abandoned Building	–	–	–	5.05	1.47

Part of the fluctuation is no doubt due to the small sample sizes used to calculate the multiplier. In 2019, the tent multiplier was developed based on a pre-count survey using only 80 responses. Based on those 80 responses, the tent multiplier increased from 0.93 to 2.13 from 2017 to 2019.[34] In District 10, the changes in these multipliers, especially the tent multiplier, play a crucial role in understanding the reported trends in homelessness, as illustrated in Figure 5.

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[33] Based on public records requests, it appears a tent multiplier was not used prior to 2015, and as table 2 shows, the tent multiplier has a large variation between years from 0.93 in 2017 to 2.13 in 2019. Since between 2015 and 2022 tents made up 65-82% of the total unsheltered count, large changes in the multiplier can have a dramatic impact on the overall count. The 2022 tent survey was developed through quotas for observations by the appropriate police district to achieve a 90% confidence interval relative to the City's most recent Healthy Streets Operation Center ("HSOC") quarterly tent count distributions (which are collected for the corresponding police district). In 2019, a similar methodology was followed by setting survey quotas relative to supervisor districts and 2017 PIT count distribution, with an 85% confidence interval. However, HSH notes that for years prior to 2017, the multipliers were generated using very small sample sizes with a high margin of error. The vehicle multiplier that year was generated using 2017 survey data with an N of 27 observations for cars, and 41 observations for RVs and vans

[34] The sample sizes were larger for the 2022 count: According to HSH, the 2022 tent multiplier was derived from a March 2022 survey (N=219) conducted by the SF Homeless Outreach Team ("SF HOT") in districts throughout the city, along with responses in the 2022 PIT survey regarding living situation and household size. The 2022 vehicle multipliers were specifically calculated with an N of 175 observations from the 2022 and 2019 PIT survey responses, as well as a 2019 survey of the Bayview Vehicle Triage Center pilot program.

When considering the variability introduced by these multipliers, a clear downward trend in homelessness in District 10 since 2013 emerges, with 2015 being a potential outlier.[35]

Figure 5
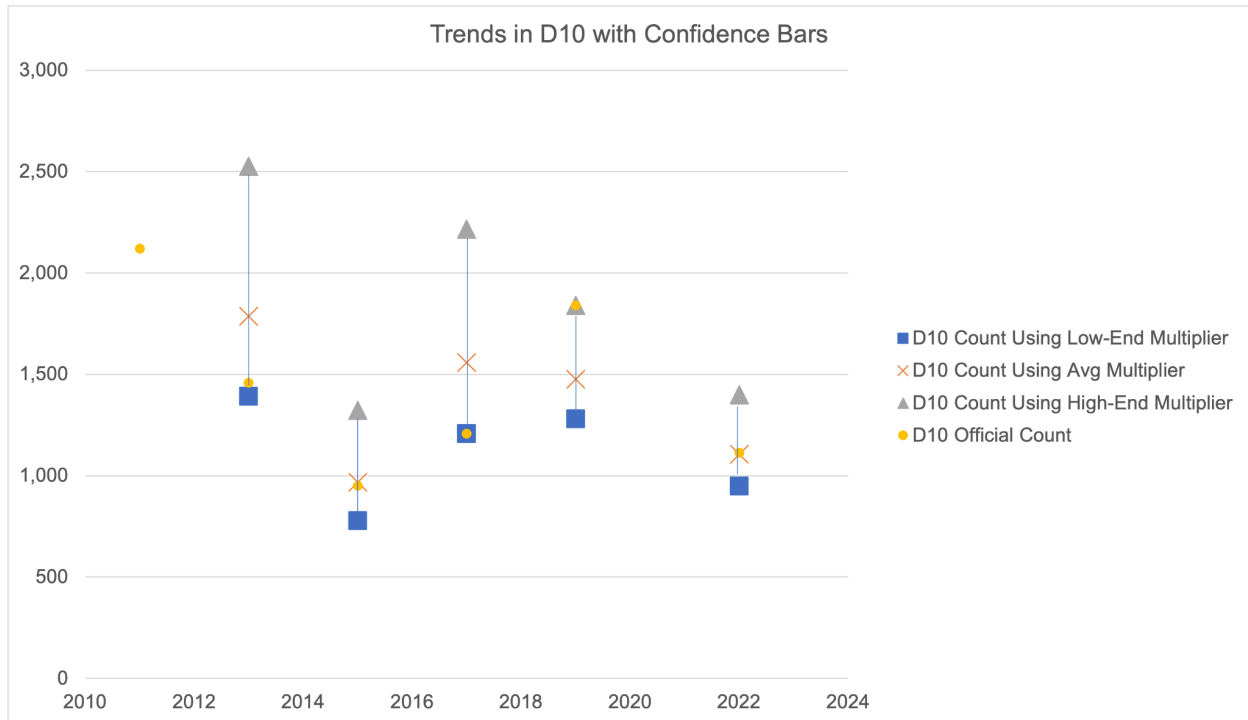
Changes in Homelessness in D10 using different multipliers[36]

To gain a clearer picture of long-term homelessness trends in District 10, we adjusted the unsheltered counts to control for the variability in tent multipliers. Figures 6 and 7 display these adjusted counts, both in total and per capita terms. These charts reveal a notable shift: before 2013, per capita unsheltered homelessness in District 10 was generally on the rise, but post-2013, there has been a consistent decrease. This reversal coincides with the inception of Open Door Legal's operations in 2013, as indicated by the solid blue line in the figures, suggesting a potential causal relationship between their legal services and the observed decline in homelessness. Next, we will turn to an investigation of this potential causal relationship.

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[35] One potential explanation for the low D10 count in 2015 is that the counters, who were mostly volunteers in that year, missed a large number of occupied vehicles. The reported vehicle count was abnormally low, with only 4% of unsheltered respondents reported being in vehicles.

[36] From public records requests, we were only able to acquire district level data for 2022 for weighted counts by shelter type. In 2022, 75% of the weighted unsheltered count for D10 was in tents. For 2019 and earlier, confidence bars use the city-wide estimates of 65% in 2019, 71% in 2017, 82% in 2015, 74% of 2013. To produce consistent district-level estimates, we had to assume that the proportion of people living in tents in the district mirrored the proportion of the city overall.

Figure 6
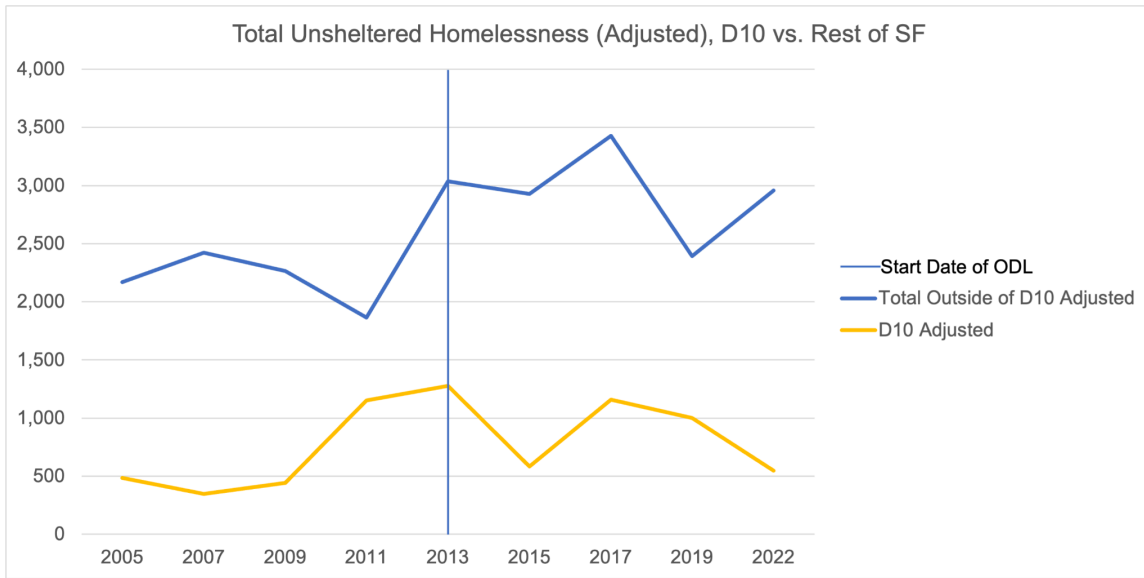
Total Adjusted Homelessness D10 vs. Rest of SF

Figure 7
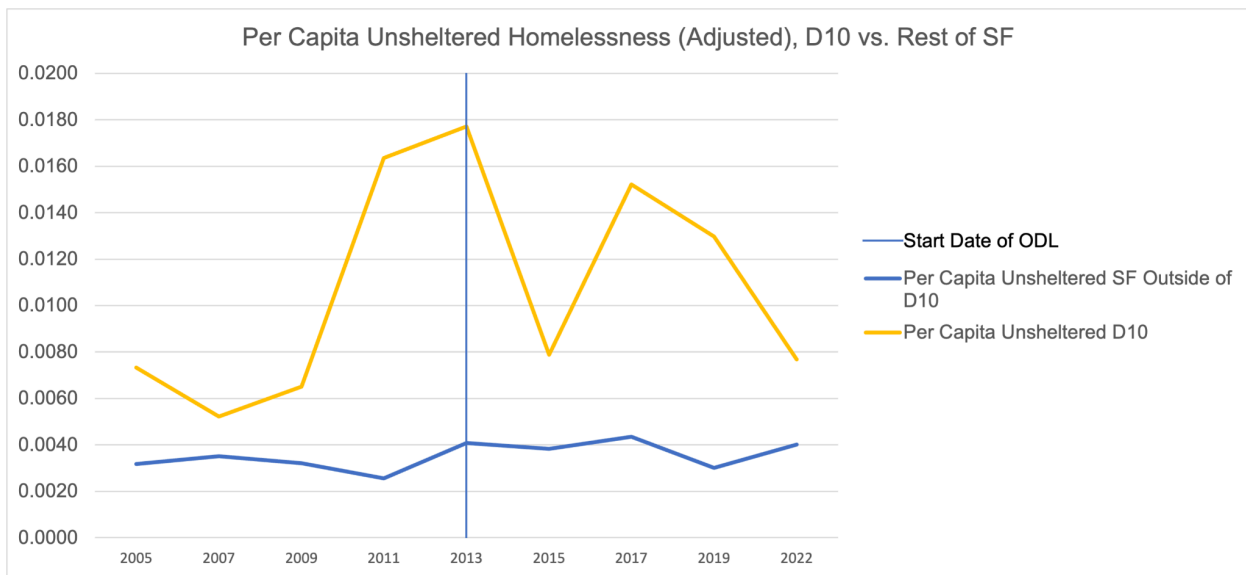
Per Capita Adjusted Homelessness D10 vs. Rest of SF

6. Method #1: Quasi-Experimental

To accurately gauge the impact of Open Door Legal (ODL) on homelessness, we classified all service requests received from San Francisco residents between May 6, 2020, and July 31, 2023 (n=4,292). These service requestors were divided into two groups: control and treatment, based on their residential zip codes at the time of service requests. The treatment group was offered the ability to schedule an intake with ODL on their legal issue, while the control group was only provided referrals to other legal aid providers. It is unknown how many service

requestors from the control group were ultimately able to obtain legal assistance from other organizations.[37]

The breakdown of legal issues faced by homeless or "at risk" service requestors in the treatment group is as follows: 26.1% eviction defense, 20.1% other housing issues, 14.34% family-related, 8.21% torts, 6.65% employment, 6.39% consumer, and 4.95% immigration. This diversity in legal needs, illustrated in Figure 8, reveals that only about a quarter of cases are eviction-related, challenging the predominant focus on eviction defense in current literature.

Figure 8
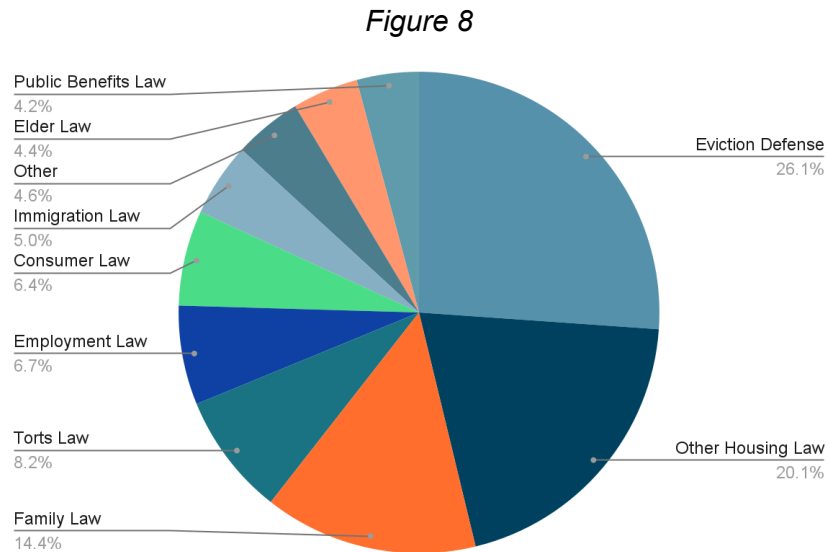
Breakdown of Legal Issues for Homeless or "At Risk" Individuals in the Study

A noteworthy bias in the data is a higher likelihood of currently homeless individuals being in the treatment group, as ODL prioritizes those self-identifying as living on the streets. To address this, we documented the proportion of homeless individuals at the time of their service request from ODL, as shown in Table 4, Row 1. Despite this disparity, both groups are nearly identical statistically, sharing similar income levels, demographics, primary legal issue and proactive legal help-seeking behavior. The primary distinction lies in ODL's capacity to serve them, with zip code assignment serving as a quasi-random element. We conducted a t-test for balance between the treatment and control groups on the primary legal request. We can see only one out of eight tests is significant at the 10% level, consistent with the two groups being balanced in terms of their legal issues.[38]

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[37] The ability to obtain legal representation for indigent persons varies wildly between types of legal issues because the conventional model of legal aid is to only offer representation for specific kinds of issues and some issues have more funding attached to them. As described more in Appendix D, San Francisco has implemented a tenant right to counsel program, which dramatically increased funding for eviction defense. This implies that service requestors in the control group with eviction issues were more likely to obtain assistance as against service requestors with other kinds of issues.

[38] The issue classification typology used in the balance test is different from used in Figure 8. The treated group was n=3,777. The control group was n=515.

Table 3
Balance Test for Control and Treatment Groups

Legal Issue	Treated	Control	t-test
Housing	23.09%	20.97%	0.283
Family	14.83%	16.31%	0.376
Immigration	12.10%	13.79%	0.274
Tort	6.41%	6.60%	0.866
Employment	5.27%	6.21%	0.373
Consumer	3.10%	3.11%	0.991
None Listed	10.03%	11.65%	0.265
Other	25.18%	21.36%	0.061

We collaborated with San Francisco's Department of Homelessness & Supportive Housing to match our lists of treated and untreated individuals with their Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), using first and last names and birth dates as match criteria.

Table 4 provides comparative data on baseline homelessness, post-service request homelessness, racial/ethnic breakdown, gender, and average age between the treated and control groups. The HMIS match identified clients who returned to homelessness after initial contact with ODL, as indicated in Row 2. Row 3 provides standard errors, with the standard error on the control set being higher due to the smaller sample size.

Table 4
Treatment vs. Control Data Sets

		Treated	Control[39]
(1)	Baseline Homeless at ODL Service Request	8.02%	2.33%[40]
(2)	Post-ODL Service	-1.68%	+3.70%

[39] Demographic data was not collected for everyone in the control group. Rather, demographic data was collected from a random sample (n=90) via electronic survey. Respondents that did not answer or complete relevant demographic data are excluded from results.

[40] Since all self-declared homeless persons were considered eligible for services in the dataset, the individuals in the control group declared they were housed, but that they lived in "a registered homeless shelter, transitional housing, or similar setting" outside of ODL's service area.

	Request Homelessness		
(3)	Standard Error of the Mean	0.00101955	0.007679441
(4)	Racial/Ethnic Breakdown	Black (non-hispanic): 32.51% Hispanic/Latino: 37.15% Asian or Pacific Islander: 14.69% White (non-hispanic): 12.44% Other: 3.21%	Black (non-hispanic): 23.33% Hispanic/Latino: 37.78% Asian or Pacific Islander: 18.89% White (non-hispanic): 18.89% Other: 1.11%
(5)	Gender Breakdown	Female: 58.43% Male: 39.33% Other: 2.24%	Female: 50.59% Male: 44.71% Other: 4.69%
(6)	Average Age	48	45

Our analysis reveals a 5.38% difference in homelessness rates between the treated and control groups, suggesting that receiving ODL services reduces the likelihood of becoming homeless, as depicted in Figure 9 (with error bars).

Figure 9
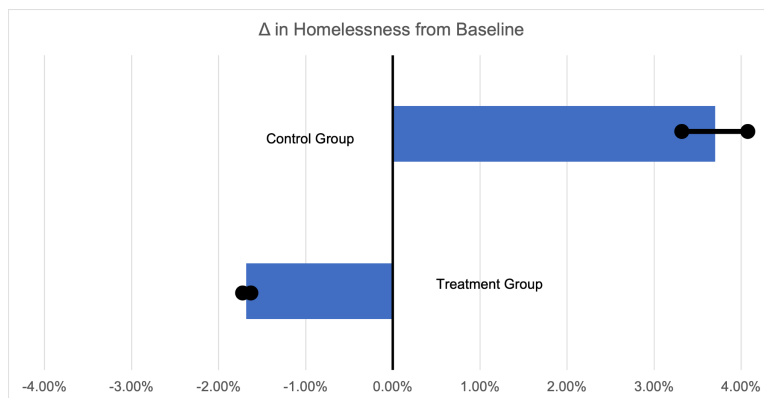
Change in Rates of Homelessness for Treatment and Control

Considering the broad composition of both groups, the observed effect size becomes more pronounced when focusing solely on individuals represented by ODL who were "at risk" or homeless. Simply offering legal representation to individuals who were either "at risk" of homelessness or currently homeless reduced subsequent homelessness by 13.71%. An

estimated 46% of "at risk" or currently homeless individuals who were actually represented by ODL were prevented from being homeless when compared to the counterfactual, as visualized in Figure 10.

Figure 10

ODL's Effect Size by Intake Stages
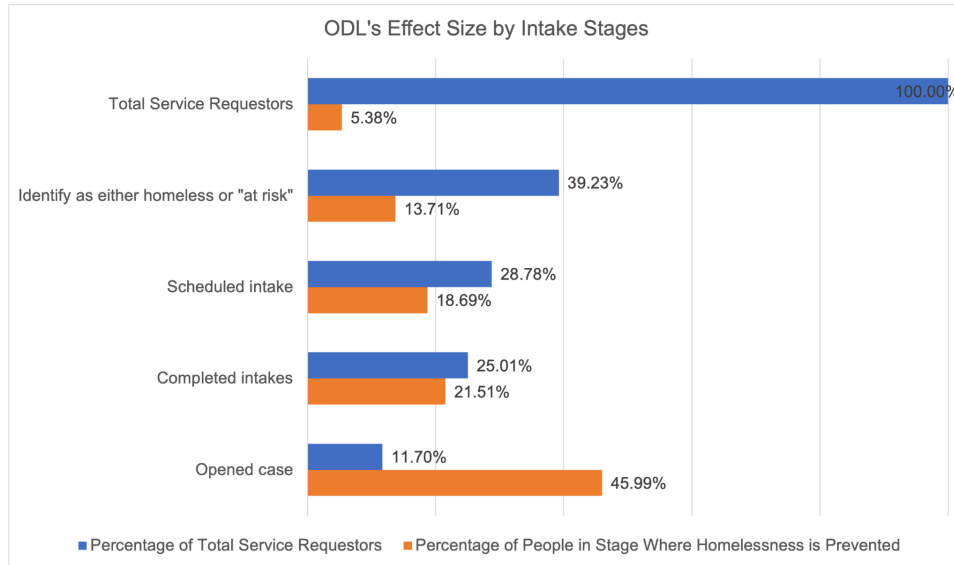
ODL Effect Size by Sub-Group of Service Requestors

Applying these findings to the dataset, we estimate that ODL prevented homelessness or enabled housing for 202 households (478 individuals) between May 6, 2020, and July 31, 2023. This equates to approximately one individual every 2.4 days.

Extending the 5.38% impact ratio to all service requests from D10 residents since 2013, we estimate that ODL prevented homelessness for about 850 individuals over this period.[41] The calculations supporting this estimate are outlined in the following table.

Table 5
Projected Impact of ODL Based on Quasi-Experimental Analysis

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Est. Qualifying Service Requestors	203	325	525	575	493	525	868	818	976	1682
Est. Households Prevented	11	17	28	31	27	28	47	44	53	90
Average Household Size	2.26	2.26	2.26	2.26	2.26	2.26	2.26	2.26	2.26	2.26

[41] For this estimate, we used a household size of 2.26 (instead of 2.37), since that's the all-time average household size for contacts in the target group, rather than the average for just the study period.

Total Individuals	25	40	64	70	60	64	106	99	119	205
Running Total	25	64	128	198	258	322	427	527	645	850

Since unsheltered homeless in D10 was counted at 1,278 in 2013 and declined to 687 in 2022, this modeling estimates that, without Open Door Legal, the unsheltered count in D10 would have increased by about 20% from 2013 levels. In per capita terms. ODL's effect size is estimated to be 0.0119.[42]

The above method focuses on individual-level effects, which may not directly translate to aggregate impacts due to potential equilibrium effects or other variables. Next, we will investigate the aggregate data on homelessness to link the observed decrease in homelessness in District 10 to ODL's intervention.

7. Method #2: Point-in-Time Count Data Analysis

To isolate the impacts of demographics and housing markets on the decline of unsheltered homelessness in District 10 (D10) and estimate the causal impact of Open Door Legal's (ODL) influence, we set up a "synthetic" legislative district D10 unaffected by ODL service. We constructed this synthetic counterfactual by utilizing 2012 American Community Survey data to create a legislative district that was similar to D10 on a set of carefully chosen socio-economic variables, which included: percentage college-educated, percentage Black, the median rent at percent of household income, percentage of population less than 18 years, percentage of population greater than 60 years, percentage speaking Asian or Pacific Islander languages at home[43], share of housing units that are renter-occupied, share of vacant units that are for rent, percentage in poverty, income per capita, and the male unemployment rate.

Figure 11 shows the results of a synthetic control analysis using 2005 through 2011 as a pre-intervention period and the aforementioned socioeconomic characteristics since 2005. The synthetic control is created from a blend of 34% District 6 (roughly corresponding to neighborhoods of SOMA, Mission Bay, Tenderloin, Civic Center, South Beach), 56% District 9 (roughly corresponding to neighborhoods of Mission, Bernal Heights, Portola, Inner Mission, and Excelsior) and 10% District 4. Appendix E gives the balance of predictors between the treated unit (D10) and the synthetic control.

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[42] For 2022, we estimate the population of District 10 to be 71,328. The per capita homelessness rate for D10 is estimated to be 0.0077, while the per capita rate without ODL is estimated to be 0.0196. The difference is 0.0119, which we estimate to be ODL's impact per capita.
[43] For residents age 5 years or older

Figure 11
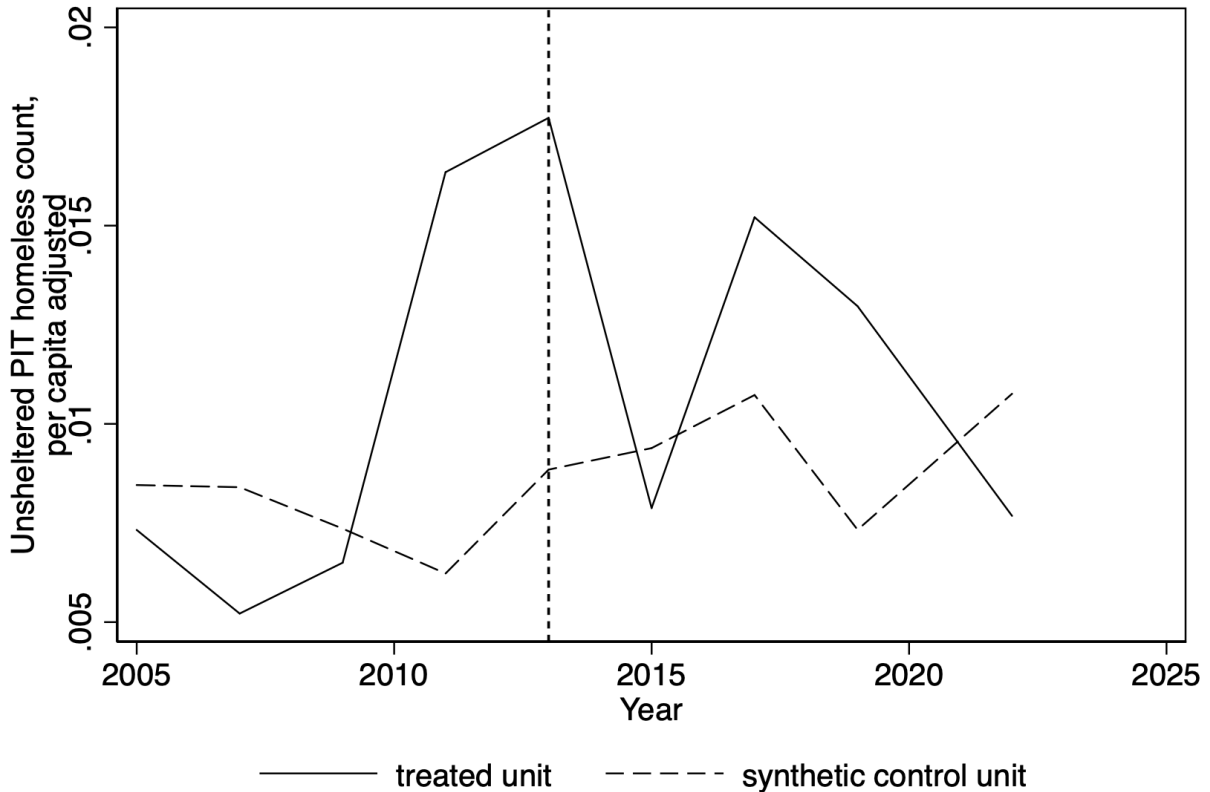
District 11 excluded. Synthetic control consists of 10% District 4, 34% District 6, and 56% District 9

Synthetic Control Matched for Socioeconomic Characteristics

The solid line is D10's adjusted unsheltered counts over time since 2005 with the vertical dashed line showing when ODL first entered District 10. The dotted line is the synthetic control, which is what the counterfactual D10 would have been doing based on the homelessness counts of other districts that were formed to try to replicate D10.[44]

Figure 11 shows that in D10 the unsheltered counts were systematically declining, though the data is a bit inconsistent, with an unexplained large drop in 2015. Meanwhile, in the synthetic D10, the unsheltered counts are increasing, with an unexplained temporary decline in 2019.

Figure 11 also shows that while the pre-trend from 2011 to 2013 matches between the treated D10 and the synthetic D10, the absolute point-in-time per capita homeless counts (adjusted) are offset. Adjusting for the offset gives an initial estimate of ODL decreasing per capita

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[44] In synthetic control analyses, it's normal for the synthetic Y variable to not exactly mirror the raw data. This is because the method creates a composite unit from a pool of non-treated districts to model the counterfactual scenario—what would have occurred without the intervention. Hence, the synthetic Y reflects an aggregation designed to match trends rather than the specific values of the raw data.

Point-in-Time homeless counts by 0.012 units (unhoused persons), over 70% of the original per capita count in 2011.

As an alternative, Figure 12 presents a synthetic control that incorporates absolute homelessness levels, in addition to the socio-economic variates previously described. In this analysis the synthetic control was chosen to be 100% District 6. Appendix E gives the balance of predictors between the treated unit (D10) and the synthetic control. It shows that the synthetic control is significantly more educated (higher share of college educated), higher black share, lower share of youth aged 18 or younger, higher share of renters, more vacant properties that are rentals, higher income per capita, lower male unemployment rate.

Figure 12

Synthetic unit is 100% District 6
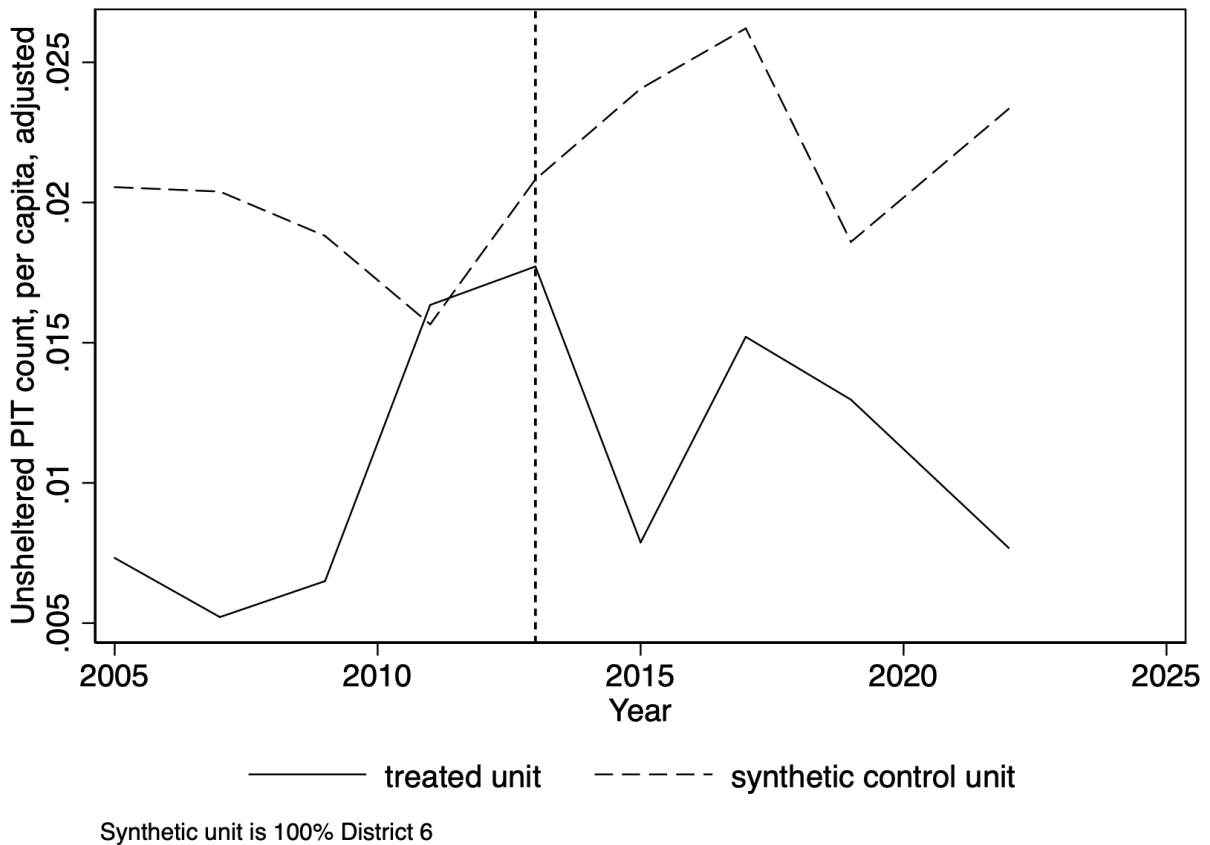
Synthetic Control also Matched for Absolute Homeless Levels

Figure 12 illustrates that, despite aligning absolute counts pre-intervention, there is a divergence in trend lines before 2011, indicating the challenge of matching pre-intervention trends. This suggests that the "donor" districts, intended to replicate D10's treatment effect, significantly differ from D10, highlighting its distinct socio-economic and homelessness characteristics. Given

the potential distinctness of D10, our subsequent analysis adopts a fixed effects methodology to rigorously assess the impact of Open Door Legal active staff numbers on homelessness levels. This approach allows us to control for both the inherent characteristics of Districts 10 and the temporal variations across the study period. By incorporating district fixed effects to account for unobservable district-specific factors and year fixed effects to mitigate the influence of time-specific shocks or trends, we aim to isolate the effect of ODL staffing intensity on homelessness metrics, with a particular focus on the unsheltered population per capita.

Our analysis reveals a statistically significant association between the quantity of ODL case workers within a district and a subsequent decline in the rate of unsheltered individuals. This finding underscores the efficacy of targeted intervention strategies, particularly those emphasizing increased case worker deployment, in mitigating homelessness.

Table 6
ODL's Impact on Homelessness Regression Analysis

Effect of ODL on Homelessness	
	Unsheltered per capita, adjusted
ODL Intensity[45]	-0.0000602**
Standard Error[46]	(0.0000201)
N[47]	99
adj. R-sq	0.914
District Fixed Effects	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes

Standard errors measure the dispersion of the coefficient estimates across hypothetical repeated samples. They are crucial for constructing confidence intervals and conducting hypothesis tests regarding the population parameters. A smaller standard error indicates that the sample estimate is likely to be closer to the true population parameter, enhancing the reliability of the inference drawn from the data. Asterisks denote the levels of statistical significance of the estimated coefficients, reflecting the probability that the observed relationships occur by chance. Three asterisks (**) denote a significance level of 0.05, implying a 95% confidence interval. This convention signals that the probability of observing such an effect, or one more extreme, under the null hypothesis, is 5% or less. In practical terms, it implies that we can reject the null hypothesis with a high degree of confidence, accepting the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant effect or relationship present.

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[45] ODL intensity is defined as the number of staff active in District 10 since 2013 and District 11 since 2019.
[46] Standard errors clustered at the district level in parentheses (* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$).
[47] N = each district with a unique year observation

Taken together, using this analysis we estimate ODL's effect in decreasing homelessness to be about 0.015 per capita. Compared with the quasi-experimental method described in the previous section, where the effect size was found to be 0.0119 per capita, the effect size described here is of a very similar order-of-magnitude, although slightly larger. One interpretation why can be found in the targeted programs HSH deployed to D10, especially the housing choice vouchers and vehicle triage center, which are described more below.

8. Method #3: Qualitative Research

8.1 Interviews with Currently Homeless Individuals

To investigate whether or not homeless individuals in D10 change their sleeping location from one district to another and the potential this has to change district counts, our research team conducted street outreach interviews and care package distribution to people in D10 (specifically on 3rd Street and in the Candlestick RV Park). We were able to speak with 40 individuals experiencing homelessness and conducted semi-structured interviews about their tendencies to stay in one sleeping location, or move their sleeping location to another district (for example, relocating their sleeping location from the Bayview in D10 to the Tenderloin in D6).

Of the 40 homeless individuals directly interviewed, 80% stated that they never leave D10 or move their sleeping location outside of the neighborhood.

We were able to ask 35 individuals of the 40 interviewed where they had been living before they became homeless. Of those 35, 14 were from another neighborhood in San Francisco, another California city, or another country (of the 6 interviewees living in the RV Park, 3 were from countries in Latin America). The other 21 individuals, or 61.7% of those interviewed, had been living in the Bayview Hunters Point neighborhood all their life or for over a decade. We were also able to ask 26 of the 40 individuals about their status as sheltered or unsheltered: 5 of the 26 (19%) were sheltered, and 21 (81%) were unsheltered.

The 8 individuals who did report moving their sleeping location mentioned the following reasons for choosing to move around to other neighborhoods: seeking a safer or more comfortable place to sleep, staying with friends in other neighborhoods, or seeking out better services in other parts of the city (specifically downtown or in the Tenderloin to seek services). Our researchers believed that the desire to be close to more robust homeless services in the Tenderloin would be the strongest reason for individuals to choose to sleep there and not in D10. It is notable that despite the higher density of shelters, soup kitchens, and other services downtown compared to D10, the majority of individuals mentioned their strong preference to stay in D10 for the community of family, friends, and relative peace compared to the turbulence they experienced when going to the Tenderloin. One mentioned, "I go to the Tenderloin about 5 times per month, but I always come back to [D10]. [D10] is home."

Furthermore, just because 20% of respondents report that they sometimes sleep outside of the D10 does not mean that 20% of homeless people move out of D10 each year. Comparing our

findings to the inter-county mobility described in the 2022 PIT, 24% of homeless individuals reported living previously in another county within California, and 4% were out of state when they most recently became homeless. We can infer then that inter-district mobility is quite low, and 80% of respondents reported never leaving or sleeping outside D10 for any reason. This leads us to conclude that investigating the decline in homelessness in D10 as a unit is viable and not disturbed by significant inter-district migration.

8.2 Interviews with HSH Staff

Part of our research included interviewing HSH leaders and staff about their various programs to address homelessness in San Francisco and specifically in D10, to see if the decline could be causally attributed to HSH's interventions. These programs included: increased outreach and problem solving, scattered site permanent supportive housing ("PSH"), investment into homeless prevention, and the emergency housing voucher ("EHV") program. Altogether we completed six semi-structured interviews with HSH staff. Overall, HSH is investing in a number of programs that should impact homelessness in D10, but most of the studied programs do not exhibit enough of a disproportionate benefit to D10 to explain why D10's homeless count would decrease, while the rest of the city's would increase.

Causes, to be statistically relevant, would need to demonstrate a disproportionate *benefit* to D10, and not that it was just a part of a city-wide policy. In other words, if a program operates in D10 and is effective, but also operates effectively in other parts of San Francisco at similar intensity levels, then it alone cannot account for the widely diverging homeless trajectories between D10 and the rest of San Francisco. In fact, it appears that the city has been under-resourcing D10 relative to other parts of San Francisco. According to an analysis of the top 25 nonprofit recipients of HSH's $667.8 million budget, a majority of the funding is directed to the Tenderloin area, with only 12% of services focused on D10, though in 2022 D10 accounted for almost 15% of the city's homeless population.[48]

The majority of HSH's budget is directed to temporary and transitional housing in the Tenderloin and D6 areas (note: as of the 2023 redistricting, the Tenderloin is now part of D5). The programs that are funded by the HSH in D10 are more focused on health and other support services, rather than transitional or permanent housing. Of course, the picture is more complicated since HSH funded properties accept placements from individuals in D10, even when the properties are themselves not located in D10. Still, HSH was not able to demonstrate that a disproportionate share of the housing placements went to D10 residents.

Interviews with HSH employees revealed that where there was ramped up investment for homeless programs in D10, these did not necessarily result in changes to the overall homeless count. For example, the creation of two navigation centers or service-rich temporary shelters, Bayshore Navigation Center (opened in 2018) and Bayview Safe Navigation Center (opened in January 2021), which are located in D10 and receive the majority of their referrals from SF

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[48] Sjostedt, D., & Jones Thompson, M. (2022). The Nonprofits Getting the Most from SF's $668M Homelessness Budget. *The San Francisco Standard*. https://sfstandard.com/public-health/the-standard-top-25-san-franciscos-top-paid-homeless-nonprofits/.

HOT's Bayview street outreach. One of these shelters replaced a previously existing congregate shelter at Providence Church, and shelters alone would not have reduced the overall D10 homeless count since the count includes individuals residing in shelters. If these shelters had a substantially higher exit rate into housing than shelters in other parts of San Francisco, then they could help explain the relative decline in the overall homeless count in D10, but this does not appear to be the case. In any case, D10 does not appear to have a disproportionately high number of shelter beds relative to the rest of San Francisco and in 2022. In 2022, 61% of D10's homeless population was unsheltered, compared to the citywide rate of 57%.

Another program which illustrates this point is the increased investment in D10's Vehicle Triage Center, or safe parking sites for RVs and cars. These sites greatly increased the security and safety of its residents, and helped connect them with services. This program could be viewed as an disprorporate benefit to D10, but it's important to note that participants would still be considered as "sheltered" homeless in federal definition. It's possible that the Vehicle Triage Center led to a disproportionately high number of exits from homelessness when compared to traditional shelter, but this could not be independently confirmed, and in any case the Vehicle Triage Center is being shut down.

One program described by HSH which could definitely demonstrate a disproportionate benefit to D10 was the emergency housing voucher program ("EHV"). This program was specifically designed to target BIPOC households and aimed to deliver at least 40% of vouchers to D10, using location as a proxy to meet its equity target, given that much of D10 is a historically Black community. As of August 17 2023, the EHV program in total was able to distribute 906 vouchers, resulting in 698 actual move-ins from 2020-2023. Of those who were housed by EHV to date, 304 had valid last permanent zip codes - this indicates that these individuals were either at risk of homelessness or had been previously homeless but were living at a permanent address before their EHV move-in. Of those 304 who were housed but "at risk," 115, or 38%, were Bayview residents.

As a result, 304 of the 698 move-ins were preventative in nature rather than resulting in an exit out of homelessness. This prevention work is incredibly important but, in order for it to contribute to the D10 decline in homelessness, the prevention would need to be targeted towards people who would have become homeless without the voucher, which is difficult. The remaining 394 vouchers served individuals who were already homeless. If we assume the target rate of 40% went to unhoused individuals in the Bayview, this would result in 158 homeless exits for D10 from 2020-2023 (the entire lifespan of the EHV program). Of these exits, about 100 represent a disproportionate impact for D10. It seems reasonable to conclude that most of the participants would not have been able to become housed but for the EHV program and that this contributed to the relative decline in homelessness in D10. Unfortunately, the funding for the EHV program was one-time and at present has been exhausted.

Other HSH programs are described in Appendix A.

8.3 Case Studies with ODL's Clients

To investigate the causal mechanism for how legal aid can reduce homelessness at the individual level, we contacted over two dozen former clients of ODL who were either homeless at the time they requested services or "at risk" of homelessness and had them explain in their own words how ODL prevented them from becoming homeless or enabled them to become housed. We collated the responses into three general mechanisms for how civil legal reduces homelessness: first: the protection of property rights, second: the enforcement of contracts, and third: enablement of physical security and public services. Within each of these mechanisms, we conducted in-depth case studies with clients whose cases well represented each of these categories. We refer to the clients in these case studies as Clients 1, 2, and 3, with additional details from cases of other former clients.

8.3.1 Property Rights

Without access to civil justice, individuals are unable to enforce property rights and are vulnerable to expropriation. This can directly or indirectly make them homeless. One example of this is Client 1, a 57 year-old Black male and native San Franciscan who had lived with his grandmother and sister his whole life. His grandmother had raised them from childhood in her home in the Bayview Hunters Point neighborhood, and in her old age, Client 1 and his sister served as her full-time caretakers. It was understood, both verbally and in their grandmother's written will, that the house would pass onto Client 1 and his sister after her passing.

In 2020, Client 1's grandmother contracted Covid, and after a long battle with her symptoms, passed away. At her funeral, in the midst of their grieving, Client 1's aunt served them eviction papers with a 90-day notice to get out of the house they had lived in their entire lives.

Immediately after receiving the notice, Client 1 began calling around to seek legal representation. He said, "I reached out to a private attorney for their free consultation - but it was a tremendous amount of money, there was no way we could have afforded it. Just $7K for the retainer, plus accumulating fees for every court appearance - we just didn't have the money." Desperate for support, Client 1 said that he and his sister were certain that if they did not find legal help, they would become homeless.

"My sister was the one who found Open Door Legal," said Client 1. "She was walking in the neighborhood, saw their sign, walked in, and signed us up . . . Once they got involved, everything started to make sense." With ODL leading the case, their team discovered that Client 1 and his sister's aunt had taken their grandmother to write a different, contradictory trust that had them written out of the will just a few months after their grandmother had commissioned the original. ODL was able to file a case on suspicion of coercion, and got the clients a settlement in the "low six figures." This settlement gave the siblings the chance to stabilize and make a down payment on another property.

"Open Door Legal made all the difference," Client 1 stated confidently. "There is absolutely no question that we would have ended up homeless and on the streets without their help…My aunt was calling us squatters, acting like we were vagabonds when we'd been living with and caring

for our grandmother for over 40 years. It was a huge embarrassment - but ODL became our haven…I was able to stay housed, and keep my dignity."

In this case study, the client was the victim of probate fraud, where another family member falsely claimed title to the home, and ODL enabled them to contest title. Other examples of enforcing property rights include: one client quit his apartment after a sewage leak destroyed all of his personal property, which the landlord had refused to fix or compensate him for. ODL helped him get a small settlement, which he used as a security deposit on a new apartment. Another client was living in a trailer which ended up destroyed by another car during a police chase, causing her to sleep in a park. ODL helped her obtain a settlement to replace her destroyed property and expunged her criminal record, which enabled her to move into a trailer park and get a job as a mechanic. Another client had her funds stolen by a caretaker, which ODL got back. Another client had their deposits illegally seized by their bank, which ODL returned. In all these examples, ODL was able to prevent or obtain compensation for lost property, which either prevented clients from becoming homeless or enabled them to exit.

8.3.2 Contract Rights

Individuals may be unable to enforce contract rights, which can also lead to homelessness. Client 2 is a Black woman who was 75 years old when she moved to D10 into a subsidized unit run by a local nonprofit. Client 2 had been living there only a few months before she began to experience troubles with her then-roommate's girlfriend. Client 2's roommate at the time was an employee of the nonprofit, and the girlfriend, who Client 2 suspected had bipolar disorder, began to verbally harass Client 2. "That was the beginning of my troubles with the nonprofit," said Client 2. "The girlfriend was so aggressive, and always cussing me out. She had crazy mood swings: she would be perfectly pleasant in the morning, and then act like a terror at nighttime, accusing me of things I hadn't done and lying about me. I was frightened - but then, the living situation changed, and the girlfriend became my full-time roommate! The rumor was, the leadership at the nonprofit put her in there to try and run me out of the house because they didn't like me."

The housing troubles came to a climax when Client 2 was told that the nonprofit was going to be shut down, meaning she would lose her furniture and could only stay in the unit if she paid market-rate rent. The locks were changed on her room, and she was only able to re-enter her home by begging one of the janitors to let her in. It was at that point that she reached out to Adult Protective Services, who connected her to Open Door Legal.

It quickly became clear that there were no actual plans to close down the nonprofit, and the announcement had been made to Client 2 alone, in an attempt to scare her into moving out. During the time she was supported by Open Door Legal, Client 2 said that the threats and intimidation tactics continued - but now, at least, she had "someone in her corner" who she could call whenever something happened. "One day, I came home, and I saw they had moved all my belongings out onto the street by the garbage. Luckily, I got there before the garbage trucks came by. Another time, they moved my mattress into another one of their properties down the street. ODL was able to help me get it back."

"If it were not for Open Door Legal, I am sure these folks would have put me and my things onto the street," says Client 2. She still lives in the subsidized apartment - because the nonprofit never put anything into writing, she was unable to pursue full legal action against them and says she now puts up with their inane rules, cooking her meals with a microwave and hot plate in her room without access to the communal spaces. Still, she says ODL made all the difference: "ODL calmed the storm. They knew I had representation and couldn't be intimidated. ODL supported my case without prejudice, and I know I can go back anytime."

In this case study, the adverse landlord was very clearly attempting to violate the contract they had signed with Client 2. Leases are contracts to occupy housing and, like all contracts, come with certain implied warranties. The warranties for leases include "good faith and fair dealing," "quiet enjoyment," and "habitability." In this case study, both "good faith" and "quiet enjoyment" were clearly breached in order to induce the client to move. ODL helped her enforce the contract, which prevented her from becoming homeless. In other cases, landlords attempted to breach the contract by failing to provide habitable premises or ignored the lease altogether by treating the tenants as squatters (a so-called "forcible detainer"), or more directly by changing the locks themselves.

However, contracts for housing are not the only important contracts. Several clients have also come to ODL seeking redress for wage theft or wrongful termination, and without the ability to enforce their work contracts, they would not have had the money available for rent. In all these cases, without ODL, clients would have lost their bargained-for contract benefits, likely causing them to become homeless.

The above also applies in cases where clients are themselves sued for an alleged breach of contract, such as in evictions or in collection defense causes. In these situations, legal representation is often necessary, due to procedural complexity, just to ensure a fair outcome. In several cases, ODL was able to keep clients housed by proving that the tenants had not, in fact, breached the lease or did not owe money to the landlord or creditor.

8.3.3 Physical Security and Public Services

Lastly, individuals may be unable to enforce rights to physical security and public services, causing them to become homeless. Client 3 is a 40 year old Latina woman who legally immigrated from Guatemala when she was a teenager and went to high school in San Francisco. She married her high school sweetheart and had two children with him, but over the course of eight years, the relationship turned increasingly abusive. The violence grew to the point where she was assaulted twice a week on average. Despite hospitalization due to the abuse and police involvement, the abuse never ended and her husband was never arrested. "I remember [one] day we got into an argument. He didn't like what I said, so he grabbed me and pushed me to the bed with his knee on top of my chest. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't talk, I couldn't scream, but somehow he went with his head and knocked me down."

Then one day, her husband called the cops and reported that *she* had hit *him*, which was not true. Yet the police arrested her and she spent five nights in jail. When she was released, she was handed an emergency protective order (eventually converted to a temporary restraining order) that prevented her from going home, seeing her children, withdrawing any money, or even getting a change of clothes.

Client 3 ended up homeless, living in her car in Bayview. She desperately needed legal help defending the restraining order so she could go back home, but had trouble finding help. "When you are being thrown out from 10 places saying they cannot help you - 'We don't have this help' or 'We cannot help you with this one' . . . and you're being thrown to the street saying 'No, we cannot help you'... [When I came to ODL] and heard, 'Oh, we're going to take care of you, we got you.' I didn't believe it."

Open Door Legal helped Client 3 defeat the restraining order, get back into the home, get her husband out of the home, obtain sole custody of her children, and obtain a divorce – even though her husband tried to hide the community assets. Client 3 states, "They were so aggressive to defend me in court, that I will never forget it. And I feel protected, I can't even believe that I'm here today. There was trial after trial, court after court, and I was becoming a strong woman, and it was unbelievable because I thought that my life was over." Subsequent to the case, Client 3 remained continually housed, re-entered the workforce, and even completed her US citizenship.

In this case study, Client 3's ex-husband, who had legal representation, forced her to become homeless. Eventually, ODL was able to help Client 3 obtain a court order mandating her ex-husband leave the home and enabled her to return home. Such direct orders can also be used to ensure public agencies complete legal obligations, as shown in the following brief examples. Another client was an overseas adoptee who became homeless after his parents died without giving him his naturalization certificate. Without the certificate, he was unable to obtain public benefits, including a section 8 voucher. He sent in a request for a replacement to USCIS, but several years later, had not heard anything back. ODL helped him get his certificate (which required congressional intervention), and he was able to use it to get his voucher, and ultimately, housing. Another client became homeless after the government claimed he was "overpaid" unemployment benefits following the misrepresentations of his former employer. ODL helped him appeal the decision, cancel $15,000 in debt, and obtain another $15,000 in benefits he was owed, which he used to obtain housing. Another client almost became homeless because their subsidized housing provider refused to complete a recertification until ordered by the court. In all of these examples, ODL was able to use the legal system to force adverse parties to complete specific actions and obtain public services, which enabled their clients to exit homelessness or likely prevented them from becoming homeless.

9. Cost Effectiveness & Comparisons

While prior sections documented caustion and effect size of ODL's intervention, this section analyzes ODL's service costs and compares it to studied alternative ways of addressing homelessness.

9.1 Modeling ODL's Impact

Figure 13 integrates data from previous sections to illustrate the estimated effect of Open Door Legal (ODL) on reducing homelessness in District 10 (D10). The plot juxtaposes the adjusted unsheltered homelessness counts in D10 against ODL's impact.

Figure 13
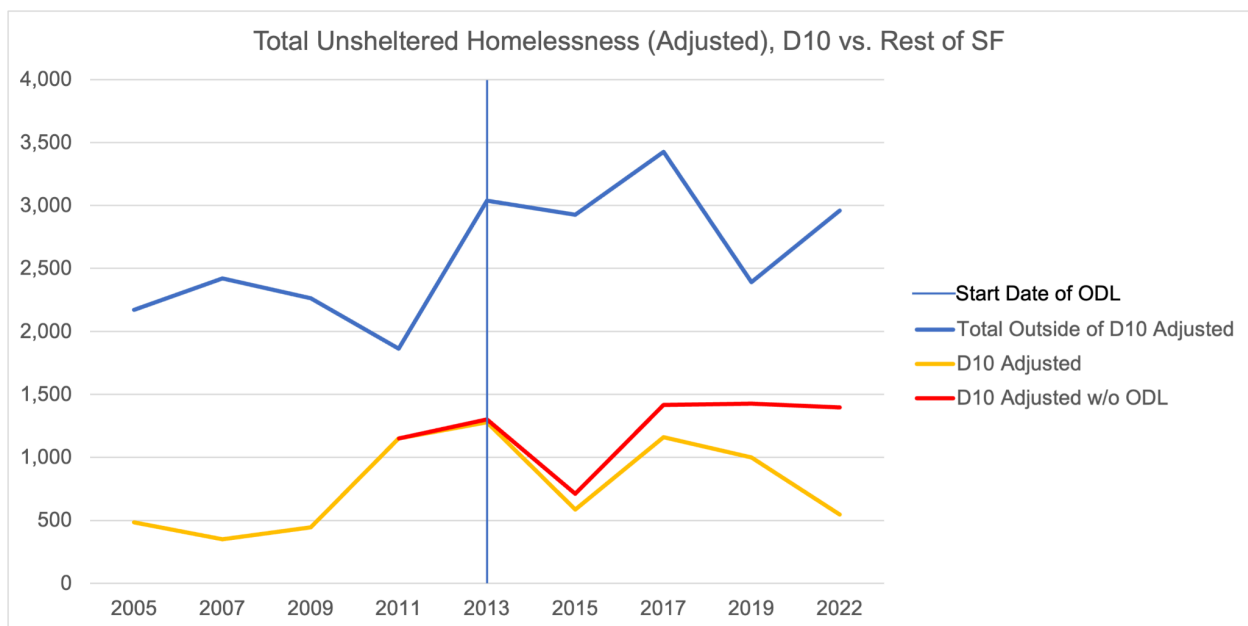
ODL's Estimated Effect Size on Reducing Homelessness

It is important to note that this model is built on certain assumptions and primarily serves as an estimate of ODL's magnitude of effect.[49] Specifically, we have not incorporated longitudinal effects and have relied on the accuracy of point-in-time counts. Nevertheless, the chart documents what our modeling predicts: that ODL is likely caused unsheltered homelessness in D10 to fall by half between 2013 and 2022.

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[49] These assumptions or limitations include: 1) It's impossible to determine exactly who was eligible for services from 2013-2019 using the data ODL now has available. Some people were eligible at the time they requested help, but now have left SF, for example. 2) Homeless counts are typically done in the first quarter of the year, but ODL's work on homelessness for that year is spread out over the course of that year, so there are timing issues regarding if ODL's impact is seen before or after the count.

9.2 Estimating ODL's Service Costs

To calculate the average cost per beneficiary for ODL's services, we use the formula C = (h * r) * (1 + s) * (1 + i) * M. Here, 'C' represents the total average cost per client, 'h' is the average hours for case closure, 'r' is the blended hourly rate for ODL direct service staff, 's' is the shared direct rate for case preparation and management, 'i' is the indirect rate covering financial and administrative costs, and 'M' is the mean number of cases per client. Based on 411 cases since 2021, our estimates are: h = 25 hours, r = $46.8/hr, s = 85%, i = 15%, and M = 1.36, leading to an average cost of $3,385.28 per household beneficiary.

This means that ODL can prevent someone from becoming homeless, or get them out of homelessness, for an average cost of $3,385.28 per household. If we are assuming that services are targeted at households who are "at risk" or currently homeless (as defined in section 3), then to estimated cost to prevent one spell of homelessness is approximately $7,359.30. For an individual, it's around $3,105.19. This cost includes the full administrative cost of managing the case, including a prorated cost for assessing non-viable issues.

In addition to preventing homelessness, the average client in the target group also received a cash award of $1,737.32, cancelled debt of $26,658.93, $25.04 in additional monthly income, and a variety of additional non-cash outcomes.[50] These financial outcomes compare favorably even to the financial assistance program discussed below.

9.3 Financial Assistance vs. Legal Assistance

It's worth comparing the cost and efficacy of universal access to legal assistance, as documented in the previous sections, with financial assistance programs that aim to prevent homelessness. Two recent empirical studies have investigated the efficacy of financial assistance programs. Evans et al. (2016) (the "Chicago Study") used fluctuations in the amount of available homelessness prevention funds in Chicago as a quasi-random element to find that financial assistance led to a 1.6% decrease in the probability of entering shelter. In Chicago, residents at risk of becoming homeless can call 311 and request temporary financial assistance for rent, security deposits, or utility bills. These calls are routed to a Homelessness Prevention Call Center (HPCC), which screens callers for eligibility and then connects them with local funding agencies. To be eligibile, callers need to have an eligible crisis, be self-suffient, and face imminent risk of homelessness or utility-shut off.[51] The average amount of funds HPCC calculates callers are eligible for is $763, however only 71% of those referred for rent assistance end up receiving funds, so the average cost per referral, including administrative costs, is calculated to be $719. Given the cost and efficacy rate, the study estimates that the program costs $47,900 to prevent one household from becoming homeless.[52]

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[50] n=443, based on ODL's data pulled 9/2/23

[51] Evans, W. N., Sullivan, J. X., & Wallskog, M. (2016). The impact of homelessness prevention programs on homelessness. *Science*, *353*(6300), 694–699. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aag0833.

[52] Since the HMIS data set used in this study only tracked shelter participants in shelters that shared data with HMIS, the authors hypothesized that if all forms of homelessness were captured and costs were applied per person (as opposed to per household), the cost to avert one spell of homelessness for one person would be $10,300. Id. Suppl.

Phillips and Sullivan (2023) (the "Santa Clara Study") found that randomized access to financial assistance for people at risk of homelessness reduced subsequent homelessness rates by 3.8%. Unlike the Chicago Study, the Santa Clara Study focused on tenants who barely met the program's criteria for eligibility and who could not demonstrate an ability to pay rent after the emergency ended, because for this group there was typically not sufficient funding or alternative programs. Within this group, tenants were randomly selected for treatment. The average person assigned to treatment was paid $1,898 and the total cost per participant was $2,138.

The following figure compares the cost, efficiacy, and results of the Chicago Study, the Santa Clara Study, and free legal services studied in this paper.

Figure 14
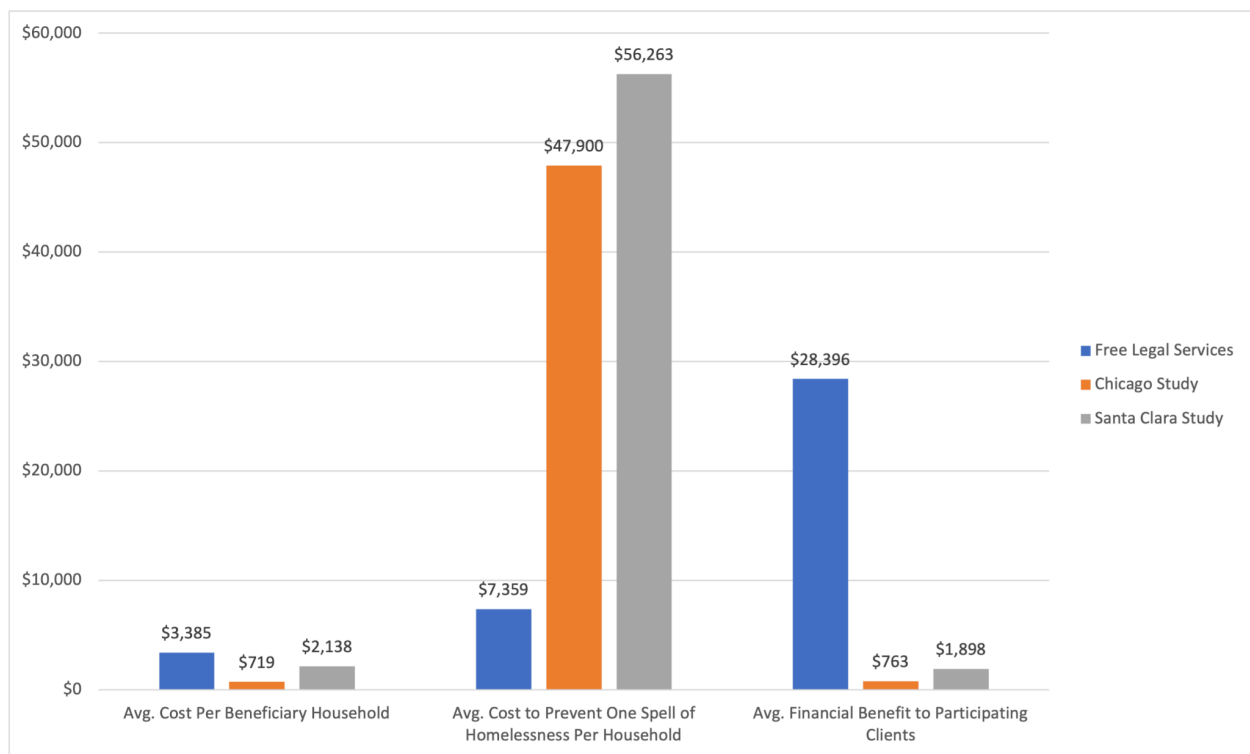
Cost & Efficacy of Legal Services vs. Financial Assistance

There are some differences in methodology between the studies that should not be discounted.[53] Nevertheless, the order of magnitude of the effect size seems clear. This evidence

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[53] The HMIS data in Chicago does not include all of the city's shelters, and this may overstate the cost to prevent one spell of homelessness, but it is unclear if the database is systematically less inclusive than the HMIS databases used in Santa Clara or San Francisco. Also, the Santa Clara and Chicago studies only focused on individuals who became homelessness within 6 months of contact, while the time horizon in this study was 12+ months. This may understate the impact of legal services when compared to financial assistance. Finally, as described in section 9.1, the financial benefits accrued to beneficiaries of legal services include both cash and debt cancelled, while the financial benefit from financial assistance programs is solely cash.

indicates that legal representation, including outside the eviction context, to households at risk of homelessness can be a very cost-effective way to reduce homelessness.

9.4 Comparison with Shelter & Permanent Supportive Housing

Finally, we compare the cost-effectiveness of legal services with shelter and permanent supportive housing in San Francisco. Khadduri et. al.(2010) estimated that a first-time homeless episode costs $2,400 in 2012 dollars to housing programs, but this study is based on localities that seem to have much different cost structures from San Francisco.[54] Because families access a variety of services across multiple spells of homelessness, these costs can accumulate quickly. Gubits et al. (2016) document that homeless families receiving "usual care" average about $30,000 of housing services in the 18 months following shelter entry.[55] According to HSH's "A Place for All" report, the current cost for shelter in San Francisco breaks down as the following. These costs are less than the accrued costs as they do not include the up-front costs involved in the construction and/or retrofitting needed to create the different shelter types.

Table 7: Shelter Costs in San Francisco[56]

Shelter Model	FY23-24 Annual Cost Per Slot	Average Households Served Per Year	Adjusted Cost Per Household Per Year
Non-congregate Shelter (Adult)	$63,900	1.2	$53,250
Cabins	$67,700	-	$67,700
Congregate Shelter (Adult)	$60,200	3.5	$17,200
Safe Sleep	$90,200	1.4	$64,429
Non-congregate Shelter (Family)	$73,000	2.2	$33,182
Congregate Shelter (Family)	$64,500	9.6	$6,718.75

The current ongoing (annual) cost per unit/slot for permanent housing is as follows:

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[54] Khadduri, J., Leopold, J., Sokol, B., & Spellman, B. (2010). Costs Associated with First-Time Homelessness for Families and Individuals. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1581492.

[55] Gubits, D., Shinn, M., Wood, M., Bell, S., Dastrup, S., Solari, C. D., Brown, S. R., McInnis, D., McCall, T., & Kattel, U. (2016). Family Options Study: 3-Year Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3055295.

[56] San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. (2023). *A Place for All*. https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Final-APFA-Report_Revised-03.24.2023.pdf.

Table 8[57]
Permanent Support Housing Costs in San Francisco

PSH Model	FY23-24 Annual Cost Per Slot
Project-Based Permanent Housing – Leased (Adult)	$40,200
Project-Based Permanent Housing – Acquired (Adult)	$20,500
Scattered-Site Permanent Housing (Adult)	$42,800
Project-Based Permanent Housing – Leased (Family)	$65,200
Project-Based Permanent Housing – Acquired (Family)	$26,500
Scattered-Site Permanent Housing (Family)	$59,300

These cost figures would seem to align with Gubits et al. (2016) referenced above, but since HSH does not publish average cost or average length of stay figures, we cannot be sure.

As detailed in the cost tables, legal services surpass the cost-effectiveness of sheltering individuals for one year in nearly all scenarios, except for family congregate shelter. Moreover, legal services prove to be more economical than providing permanent supportive housing due to the absence of ongoing subsidies and initial infrastructure costs. Even without these costs, supporting a family in permanent housing is more than three times more expensive in the first year alone compared to preventing homelessness through legal services.

10. Discussion of How Legal Aid Reduces Homelessness

10.1 International & National Civil Justice Context

Lastly, we want to place this study's results within a broader national and international context in order to understand why legal representation could be so effective in addressing homelessness. The World Justice Project collects data regarding the functioning of civil justice systems in countries around the world. Under the criteria "people can access and afford civil justice," the United States ranks 126th out of 139 surveyed countries.[58] This is illustrated further in Figure 15

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[57] Id.
[58] World Justice Project. (2021). (rep.). *WJP Rule of Law Index: Factor 7.1 "PEOPLE CAN ACCESS AND AFFORD CIVIL JUSTICE"*. Retrieved from:

below, where each blue-colored country is rated by the World Justice Project on the accessibility of their civil justice system. The US is the absolute worst country for access to civil justice among high-income countries, with a rank of 46 out of 46.[59] Unlike almost all other high-income countries, where legal representation is available by right in almost all areas of civil law and in civil court proceedings, in the United States, civil legal representation is only available for specific issues and populations. As a result, the vast majority of individuals who cannot afford legal representation are unable to receive it.

Figure 15
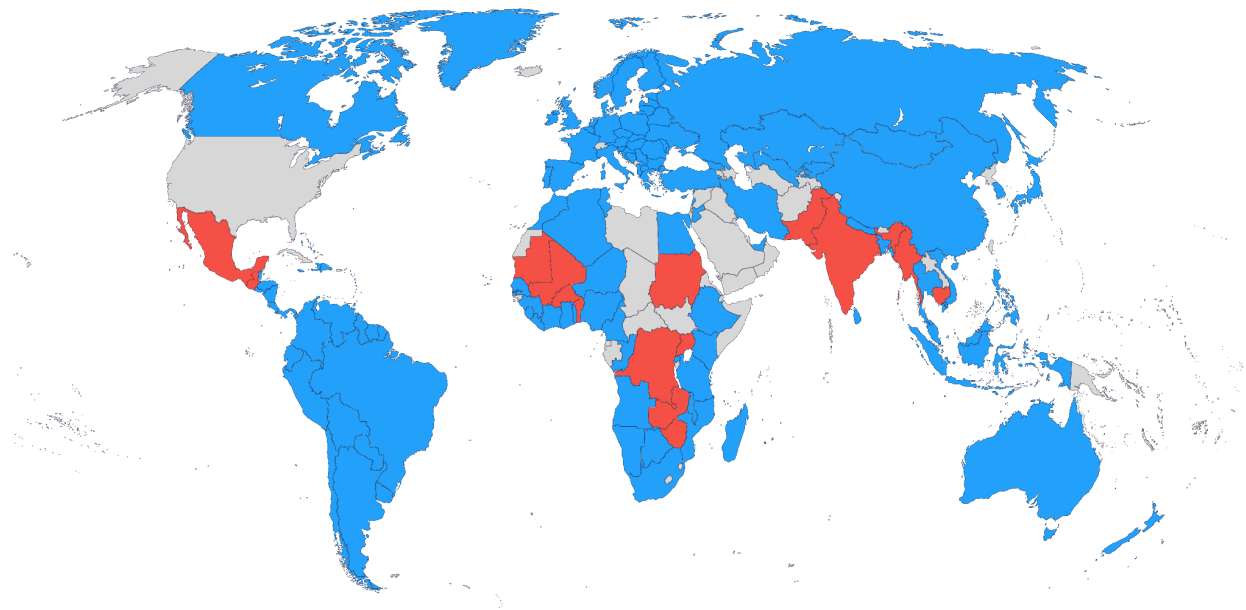
Access to Civil Justice: International Rankings
(every blue colored country is ranked as having a more accessible civil justice system than the US)

For example, in France, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Brazil, and virtually all over developed countries, if you are facing an eviction, domestic violence, wage theft, consumer fraud, property destruction, or almost any other legal issue, and you cannot afford an attorney, the state will provide one for you. Very few people proceed with their legal case unrepresented. In the United States, the state does not provide by right an attorney in any of the examples mentioned, leaving the vast majority of low-income individuals to be unrepresented. It's estimated, for example, that only 0-20% of tenants are represented nationwide, compared to 80-90% of

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https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/downloads/FINAL_2021_wjp_rule_of_law_index_HISTORICAL_DATA_FILE.xlsx.

[59] Id. See Appendix B for full data from the World Justice Project.

landlords.[60] The level of support the United States provides its low-income residents to access civil justice is roughly comparable to Ethiopia. See Appendix B for a more detailed description of international access to civil justice data and an international comparison of legal aid systems.

Evidence from international development strongly demonstrates that improving access to civil justice reduces poverty, improves assets, and reduces violence directed at low-income residents. See Appendix C for a more detailed summary of international findings.

Within the United States, low-income Americans are unable to get legal help for 92% of their substantial civil legal problems, which include problems with consumer issues, health care, housing, and income maintenance.[61] Out of a sample size of 10,058 people, 67% of individuals who earn under $25,000 per year, encountered at least one legal issue in the last 4 years.[62] 74% of low-income households experienced at least one civil legal problem in the past year.[63] 54% of low-income Americans have experienced negative impacts from housing issues, 52% from family and safety issues, 51% from employment issues, 50% from income maintenance issues.[64]

Even within the United States, California is behind other states and districts in its ability to provide access to civil justice for low-income people. According to the National Center for Access to Justice's 2020 data, California, which has over 10 million residents living below 200% of the federal poverty level, only has 776.1 legal aid attorneys in the *entire state*. This comes out to a rate of 0.72 legal aid attorneys per 10,000 people in poverty, significantly below the national average of 0.97 per 10,000. New York, by contrast, has 4.39 legal aid attorneys per 10,000 and Washington DC has 12.22 per 10,000.[65]

According to the 2019 Justice Gap report from the State Bar of California, only 32% of Californians who experienced a legal problem actually sought out legal help to solve that problem. Of the ones who sought out help at legal aid organizations, only 30% were "fully served." This means that only an estimated 15% of low-income Californians who experienced a legal issue obtained adequate legal assistance.[66]

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[60] Engler, Russell. (2010). "Connecting Self-Representation to Civil Gideon: What Existing Data Reveal About When Counsel is Most Needed." *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 37 (1): 37-92. Also see *Eviction representation statistics for landlords* and tenants absent special intervention** Last modified Sept 2023.* (n.d.). Retrieved August 15, 2023, from http://civilrighttocounsel.org/uploaded_files/280/Landlord_and_tenant_eviction_rep_stats__NCCRC_.pdf.

[61] Legal Services Corporation. (2022, April 24). The Justice Gap Study. https://justicegap.lsc.gov/resource/executive-summary/

[62] Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System. (2021, September 1). Justice needs and satisfaction in the United States of America. https://iaals.du.edu/publications/justice-needs-and-satisfaction-united-states-america.

[63] Legal Services Corporation. (2022, April 24).

[64] Legal Services Corporation. (2022, April 24).

[65] National Center for Access to Justice. (2020). (rep.). Attorney Access. Retrieved from https://ncaj.org/state-rankings/2020/attorney-access.

[66] The State Bar of California. (n.d.). (rep.). 2019 California Justice Gap Study. Retrieved from https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/0/documents/accessJustice/California-Justice-Gap-Report.pdf.

10.2 How Providing Access to Civil Justice Reduces Homelessness

Does legal representation matter? A meta-analysis has found that, depending on the procedural complexity of the issue, a represented individual is between 20% and 1,379% more likely to win their case than one without representation. The median is about 500% more likely. And, of course, the actual difference in outcomes is likely to be much higher, since to be included in this meta-analysis, a self-represented litigant must have been procedurally competent enough to file their own case in the first place.[67]

The most common legal issues of Californians were health, finance, employment, housing, immigration, and income maintenance.[68] But, as described in section 2, evictions are the most obvious kind of legal issues that can lead to homelessness and the best studied. In evictions, represented tenants were far more likely to stay in their homes than unrepresented ones and also received significantly larger financial benefits.[69] Another common issue impacting homelessness is domestic violence, with between 22% and 57% of all homeless women reporting that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness.[70] 98% of households with domestic violence had one or more civil legal problems in the past year, in addition to issues involving domestic violence.[71] Only the provision of legal services was able to impact the likelihood of abuse, and women living in counties with legal assistance programs, as compared to areas with shelters, hotline, safe homes, and programs, were significantly less likely to report domestic abuse.[72]

Currently homeless individuals also seem to have an abundance of legal issues, despite the deficiency of current survey instruments to measure the need. According to one study, a majority of homeless service sites have reported that access to legal services would benefit patients, but only 60% of the sites had a process for screening for civil legal issues, and only 19% of the sites received training on screening for legal services.[73] An interview with a former employee of Project Homeless Connect revealed that "Every time there was a Community Day

[67] Sandefur, R. (2010). The Impact of Counsel: An Analysis of Empirical Evidence. *Seattle Journal for Social Justice, 9*, 51.

[68] The State Bar of California. (2019).

[69] Cassidy & Currie (2023), J Steinberg (2013), and Boston Bar Association Task Force on the Right to Civil Counsel. (2012) supra notes 19-21.

[70] See Wilder Research Center, Homelessness in Minnesota (2004); Center for Impact Research, Pathways to and from Homelessness: Women and Children in Chicago Shelters (2004); Nat'l Center on Family Homelessness & Health Care for the Homeless Clinicians' Network, Social Supports for Homeless Mothers, (2003); Inst. For Children & Poverty, The Hidden Migration: Why New York City Shelters Are Overflowing with Families (2004); Homes for the Homeless & Inst. For Children & Poverty, Ten Cities 1997-1998: A Snapshot of Family Homelessness Across America (1998); Virginia Coalition for the Homeless, 1995 Shelter Provider Survey (1995)(out of print), cited in Nat'l Coalition for the Homeless, Domestic Violence and Homelessness: NCH Fact Sheet #8 (1999).

[71] Legal Services Corporation. (2022, April 24). The Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans (2022). The Justice Gap Report. https://justicegap.lsc.gov/resource/2022-justice-gap-report/.

[72] Farmer, A. (2003).

[73] Tsai, J., Jenkins, D., & Lawton, E. (2017). Civil Legal Services and Medical-Legal Partnerships Needed by the Homeless Population: A National Survey. *American journal of public health*, *107*(3), 398–401. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303596.

of Service [where service providers came together in a pop-up event to serve homeless individuals], there was a huge line requesting legal services . . . most of our guests were unable to receive the legal representation they needed for their specific issues."[74]

Despite this, there does not seem to be any prior study in the US attempting to systematically estimate the legal needs of people who are homeless, or the legal issues that cause homelessness outside of evictions. In fact, even experts who study homelessness seem to be missing the connection. As described in section 2, UCSF's 2023 statewide study of people experiencing homelessness in California, the largest representative study on homelessness since the mid-1990s, did not survey the legal needs of respondents, despite the fact that at least 50% of the case studies mentioned in "Pathways to Homelessness" involved unaddressed legal issues.[75] A lack of access to civil justice was not mentioned as a reason why people experienced homelessness, and expanding access to legal aid was not mentioned as a policy recommendation.[76] For example, the paper explains the way domestic violence causes homelessness but does not discuss the role legal aid plays in ameliorating it, despite the fact that legal aid has been found to be the only intervention associated with a reduction in domestic violence incidence rates.[77] Instead, they recommended improving emergency shelter and permanent housing options for those impacted by domestic violence.

Despite this, based on evidence from international development, ethnographies detailed section 8.3, and the research from the United States detailed in section 2, we can infer that without access to civil justice, low-income residents in the United States are unable to adequately enforce property, contract, family, and civil rights.This leaves them extremely vulnerable to expropriation and violence from more powerful actors and can easily cause homelessness.

In other words, both this paper and prior research would predict that, when there is low access to civil justice, there will be significantly more homeless individuals in a given population, even when controlling for other factors. Since the United States is essentially the only developed country not to provide universal access to civil legal representation, remedying this could be an extremely cost-effective way to reduce homelessness.

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[74] Loya, S. (2023 C.E., September). Interviewee was a current employee of ODL.

[75] Kushel, S., & Moore, TB. (2023). *The California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness Toward a New Understanding*. https://homelessness.ucsf.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/CASPEH_Report_62023.pdf. In the report, pages 33-52, of the 12 case studies described, at least 6 had clear unaddressed legal issues. For example, on page 33, the report describes a man named Carlos who was injured on the job but uneligible for worker's compensation. Legally, if you can't seek a remedy through worker's compensation, you can do so through torts. Since tort damages are typically much higher than workers compensation, if Carlos had been able to get legal help, he could potentially have received a large settlement and avoided homelessness.

[76] While expanding "expanding targeted homelessness prevention" including legal services, was mentioned in the summary as a policy recommendation, the detailed recommendations seem to make clear this has to do with embedding prevention into other systems, as opposed to expanding the accessibility of civil justice. Id. 85-90.

[77] Farmer, A. & Tiefenthaler, J. (2003). Explaining the Recent Decline in Domestic Violence. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1093/cep/byg002.

10.3 Limitations to this Study

This study has presented the first quasi-experimental evidence about how general civil legal services directly impacts homelessness in the United States. However, there are several inherent limitations. A primary concern is the reliability of the Point-In-Time (PIT) count data. While the PIT count offers San Francisco's most consistent method of estimating the homeless population, its methodology has undergone significant changes between 2011 and 2022, notably the introduction of multipliers for tents in 2015. These methodological shifts, coupled with relatively small sample sizes, challenge our ability to model long-term homelessness trends accurately by district.

Furthermore, even if the data suggest a relative decline in homelessness in District 10 (D10) compared to other areas of San Francisco, attributing this decline solely to specific interventions is fraught with uncertainty. Homelessness is influenced by a multitude of social factors, making it challenging to isolate a single cause for observed trends. Our study incorporated interviews with the Homeless Services Staff, exploration of other potential contributing factors, and quasi-experimental data on Open Door Legal's impact. However, it's impossible to discount the influence of other variables, including broader macroeconomic trends. Other social or economic dynamics specific to D10, including the efforts of various nonprofits, might have concurrently played a role in reducing homelessness alongside ODL's operations. Lastly, the use of zip codes as a quasi-random element comes with certain inherent limitations. Zip codes may be a proxy for certain types of need that cannot be controlled for. While these factors do not negate the quasi-experimental findings of our study, they necessitate caution in directly attributing the decline in homelessness in D10 solely to the activities of ODL.

11. Conclusion

Homelessness, a persistent issue in many parts of the world, stems from likely interactions between economic policies, societal structures, and individual circumstances. This paper contributes to our broader understanding by examining the role of free legal representation in mitigating homelessness, a factor often overlooked in previous analyses.

Our research, set against the backdrop of rising homelessness in urban areas in the U.S., particularly in San Francisco, adopts a novel lens to assess the impact of legal aid on this social phenomenon. By implementing a quasi-experimental design in San Francisco, we isolated the effects of legal representation provided by an innovative form of legal services on homelessness rates. The analysis revealed a significant 5.38% reduction in homelessness among those with access to legal services compared to the control group. Offering legal representation to individuals who were either "at risk" of homelessness or currently homeless reduced subsequent homelessness by 13.71%. An estimated 46% of "at risk" or currently homeless households who were actually represented by ODL were prevented from becoming homeless when compared to the counterfactual.

This finding aligns with and expands upon established economic theories that emphasize the significance of institutional and legal frameworks in shaping individual and societal outcomes. It challenges the conventional view that primarily attributes homelessness to market failures in housing or personal issues like mental health and substance abuse. Instead, it suggests that enhancing access to civil justice can effectively address homelessness, a viewpoint that resonates with broader economic principles emphasizing the role of institutional structures in economic welfare.

Furthermore, our results highlight the cost-effectiveness of legal interventions, which, in comparison to traditional forms of assistance like shelter and permanent housing, present a more economically efficient method of reducing homelessness. Quantitatively, our findings reveal that legal representation, across a broad swath of legal issues, is over six times more cost-effective in reducing homelessness compared to empirically-tested financial assistance programs. This cost-effectiveness ratio underscores the potential for legal aid to deliver significant social benefits at a relatively lower cost, thereby presenting a compelling case for reevaluating resource allocation in public policy.

However, we do not suggest that legal services are a solitary solution to homelessness. It's evident that not every case of homelessness stems directly from legal issues. Essential components like shelter, housing, and financial assistance will always remain critical in the broader strategy to combat homelessness. However, this study highlights the significant role of legal services. Where applicable, they stand out as a highly cost-effective method to either prevent or address homelessness, offering a vital tool in the comprehensive approach required to tackle this complex issue.

In conclusion, our research underscores the need to broaden the scope of economic inquiry into social welfare issues. By demonstrating the significant role universal access to legal representation can play in addressing homelessness, it argues for a more inclusive approach in policy formulation, one that considers a diverse range of interventions beyond the conventional focus on market solutions and direct financial assistance. This study, therefore, not only adds a new dimension to our understanding of homelessness but also calls for a reevaluation of the economic theories guiding social welfare policies, emphasizing the importance of legal and institutional frameworks in economic analysis.

Appendix A: Alternative Explanations for the D10 Decrease in Homelessness

Navigation Centers

As discussed, two new navigation centers, or "service-rich" temporary shelters which provide dedicated, onsite case management and higher ratios of case managers to clients, were opened in D10 in 2018 and 2021. Navigation centers are classified as temporary shelters according to federal guidelines, and so its residents would be counted as "sheltered" homeless in the PIT reports. If the navigation centers were able to disproportionately place homeless individuals from D10 into housing, at a higher rate than they were able to place homeless individuals from other districts, then we would expect the navigation centers to contribute a modest effect on the D10 decline.

However, conversations with the HSH Shelter System team revealed that there was no disproportionately high placement rate at the D10 navigation centers (where not all residents are necessarily from D10, as they are placed by referral based on availability of beds), or higher placement of individuals hailing from D10. The city currently operates six navigation centers: outside of the two in D10, they are located in the Embarcadero, Civic Center, and Mission/SoMa. The navigation centers are reported to have similar program construction and similar placement rates. The Tenderloin also has several other large, older, legacy-style shelters which are in the process of being updated as well as new non-congregate shelters. Judging based on the availability of shelter capacity, D6 continues to receive the lion's share of resources and support services, rendering D10's navigation centers a minimal causal factor in the observed decline.

Stepped up Outreach

HSH employees described an increase in street outreach to connect unsheltered individuals to homeless services across the city. The HSH Problem Solving team connects individuals to the appropriate level of service, including shelter placement, move-in assistance, relocation services out of the Bay Area, and more. Problem Solving works with and through coordinated entry access points and housing providers, two of which are located in the Bayview. However, similar to our discussion on navigation centers, a much higher proportion of resources have been invested for D6 compared with D10 when adjusting for the size of the homeless population. As a result, we cannot confidently attribute the D10 decline to outreach efforts.

Targeted Prevention Services

It is possible that the Bayview's decline may be attributable not to a higher rate of exits out of homelessness but due to a reduction of the inflow of individuals becoming homeless in the district compared to other neighborhoods. This would be possible if, for example, prevention services were increased and focused on D10, with a higher proportion of resources being diverted to D10 compared to other districts.

The HSH Prevention team stated that while they had increased investment in their programs - such as the new emergency rental program which began in summer 2021, which provides cash assistance to help at risk households for move-in costs, paying rent, or limited assistance for future rent payments - but that none of these programs specifically supported the Bayview or helped a higher proportion of individuals coming from the Bayview. As a result, we do not believe that general increases in prevention city-wide can explain the decline seen in D10.

Appendix B: International Comparison on Access to Civil Justice

The World Justice Project (WJP) has created an index to estimate the strength of justice systems for countries around the world. For methodology, they developed a set of five questionnaires administered to experts and the general public in each country, the raw scores of which are used to calculate each country's position in the index. A fuller description of the methodology is available at
https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/research-and-data/wjp-rule-law-index-2021/methodology

The WJP Indexes countries along 7 dimensions: 1) constraints on government powers, 2) absence of corruption, 3) open government, 4) fundamental rights, 5) order and security, 6) regulatory environment, 7) civil justice, and 8) criminal justice. The civil justice dimension is the only one discussed in this paper. The research cited in Appendix B indicates that this is the most important dimension for poverty reduction, as it is the most directly related to the ability to enforce contracts, property rights, and family rights.

The index also categorizes factors within each dimension. For civil justice these factors are 1) people can access and afford civil justice, 2) civil justice system is free of discrimination, 3) civil justice system is free of corruption, 4) civil justice system is free of improper government influence, 5) civil justice is not subject to unreasonable delay, 6) civil justice is effectively enforced, 7) alternative dispute resolution mechanisms are accessible, impartial, and effective. The United States performs well on most of these factors, but on factor 7.1 "people can access and afford civil justice" the United States scores within the bottom quarter of all countries worldwide. This indicates that the entire civil justice system has almost a single point of failure.

The 2021 WJP country scores for "people can access and afford civil justice" are below (ascending - United States and United Kingdom highlighted). This is the data that's mapped in Figure 8.

Guatemala	0.34
Cambodia	0.35
Myanmar	0.35
Burkina Faso	0.35
Sudan	0.36
Congo, Dem. Rep.	0.36
Uganda	0.38
India	0.39

Pakistan	0.40
Mauritania	0.40
Zambia	0.41
Mexico	0.41
Zimbabwe	0.43
United States	0.44
Mali	0.44
Benin	0.44
Ethiopia	0.45
Madagascar	0.45
Bangladesh	0.45
Haiti	0.45
Mozambique	0.45
Afghanistan	0.45
Peru	0.45
Venezuela, RB	0.45
Honduras	0.45
Guinea	0.46
Congo, Rep.	0.46
Nepal	0.46
Kenya	0.47
Namibia	0.47
Suriname	0.47
Tanzania	0.47
Bolivia	0.47

Sierra Leone	0.47
Niger	0.48
Egypt, Arab Rep.	0.48
Sri Lanka	0.48
Nicaragua	0.48
Uzbekistan	0.48
Cameroon	0.48
Malawi	0.49
The Gambia	0.49
Cote d'Ivoire	0.49
Angola	0.50
Vietnam	0.50
Jamaica	0.50
Belize	0.50
Indonesia	0.50
Hungary	0.51
Liberia	0.51
Botswana	0.51
United Kingdom	0.51
Dominican Republic	0.51
Morocco	0.52
South Africa	0.52
Philippines	0.53
Paraguay	0.53

Mongolia	0.53
Lebanon	0.54
Moldova	0.54
Togo	0.55
Turkey	0.56
Albania	0.56
Colombia	0.56
Senegal	0.56
Ghana	0.57
Malaysia	0.57
Guyana	0.57
Panama	0.57
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.58
Kazakhstan	0.58
Tunisia	0.58
El Salvador	0.58
Algeria	0.58
Canada	0.58
Romania	0.58
Australia	0.58
Kyrgyz Republic	0.59
North Macedonia	0.59
Ecuador	0.59
Trinidad and Tobago	0.59
Grenada	0.59

Slovak Republic	0.59
Nigeria	0.60
Serbia	0.60
United Arab Emirates	0.60
The Bahamas	0.60
Jordan	0.60
Italy	0.60
China	0.60
Thailand	0.60
Ireland	0.62
Hong Kong SAR, China	0.62
Kosovo	0.62
Mauritius	0.62
Russian Federation	0.63
Latvia	0.63
Iran, Islamic Rep.	0.63
Brazil	0.63
Singapore	0.63
Belarus	0.63
Ukraine	0.63
Greece	0.64
Georgia	0.64
Czech Republic	0.65

France	0.65
Japan	0.66
Malta	0.66
Poland	0.66
St. Kitts and Nevis	0.67
Costa Rica	0.67
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	0.67
St. Lucia	0.68
Slovenia	0.68
Chile	0.68
Bulgaria	0.68
Cyprus	0.68
Korea, Rep.	0.69
Austria	0.69
Lithuania	0.69
Croatia	0.70
Rwanda	0.70
Estonia	0.70
Finland	0.71
Portugal	0.71
Luxembourg	0.72
Norway	0.72
Belgium	0.72
New Zealand	0.73
Spain	0.73

Argentina	0.74
Antigua and Barbuda	0.74
Barbados	0.75
Dominica	0.77
Sweden	0.77
Germany	0.78
Denmark	0.78
Netherlands	0.79
Uruguay	0.80

The data presented above can be contextualized through a study of comparative legal aid systems. The best, most recent, and most comprehensive treatment of comparative legal aid systems is Anna Barlow, which compares UK systems, Republic of Ireland, and Scandanavian systems.[78] Other important comparative treatments include Jon T. Johnsen (2018) and Kyu Aung (2020).[79] A summary of how other country's achieve universal access to legal representation is described below.

Countries like the UK, Canada, and Norway employ a "judicare" model, where the government reimburses private attorneys the cost of representing indigent clients at market rates. So for example, if a low-income tenant needs assistance defending an eviction, they can go to a private attorney, and that attorney will bill the government. This type of private reimbursement system functions similar to how Medicare does in the US, and like Medicare, it improves consumer choice in exchange for increased costs. In the UK, a reaction against the perceived high cost of legal aid, when compared to other northern European countries, led the government to pass reforms to exclude certain types of cases, most importantly employment cases and personal injury, from legal aid funding.[80] This is why the UK is ranked as the second-worst developed country for access to civil justice by the WJP. In the UK, however, this is mediated by

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[78] Anna Barlow. (2019). The machinery of legal aid : a critical comparison, from a public law perspective, of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and the Nordic countries. *Åbo Akademi University Press*.
[79] Johnsen, J. T. (2018). Nordic Legal Aid and 'Access to Justice' in Human Rights: A European Perspective. Outsourcing Legal Aid in the Nordic Welfare States, 227. Aung, K. (2020). The Comparative Study of the Government Spending on Nationwide Legal Aid System in Selected Countries: Australia, England and Wales, Finland and Ireland (Doctoral dissertation or Master's thesis). Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University.
[80] The reform was called the LAPSO act. Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012). Despite this reform, all the case studies described in this paper would have been covered by legal aid in the UK.

the fact that the "loser" in a case typically pays the legal fees of the winner, making it easier to obtain privately-funded counsel.

Countries like Brazil, Argentina, and many Latin American countries simply have public defender offices also represent individuals in civil cases. The 1988 Brazilian Constitution, for example, guarantees the right to be represented by anyone who cannot afford an attorney in any civil case, whatever the scope of jurisdiction. It also includes the right to receive legal advice and establishes the "professional staff model" as the main form for legal aid services to be delivered by the state, thus requiring both federal and state governments to maintain a public defender institution. Brazilian Public Defenders represent clients (and deliver legal advice) both in criminal and as well as in any kind of civil case (family cases, tort cases, consumer rights cases, etc) including the possibility of filing lawsuits against governmental agencies.[81] Latin America has also established the Inter-American Association of Public Defenders Offices, a regional network of public defender offices established in 2003, one of whose goals is to " to promote the independence and functional autonomy of Public Defender's Offices so as to ensure the provision of high quality legal aid in all matters (not only in criminal matters)."

Finally, countries like Finland and most of continental Europe guarantee legal aid through nonprofit intermediaries which ultimately report to the Ministry of Justice. In Finland, legal aid is delivered through a national network of publicly funded offices staffed by salaried attorneys who operate under a set of general guidelines around scope, eligibility, and merit. Representation is guaranteed in almost every case where "professional assistance" is required to solve the problem, including immigration issues. 75% of the population is eligible to receive legal aid, but there are contribution requirements as one's income rises. When compared to Norway's judicare model, Finlands is thought of as more cost-efficient, costing less than ¼ per inhabitant, while scoring as comparably accessible to Norway by the WJP.[82]

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[81] See CHALLENGES TO LEGAL AID IN BRAZIL: NATIONAL REPORT (2018), Prof. Dr. Cleber Francisco Alves, Dr. Andre Luis Machado de Castro. CONSTITUQIAO FEDERAL [C.F.] [CONSTITUTION] art. 133 (Braz.). Also see the UN's global study of Legal Aid https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/LegalAid/Global-Study-on-Legal-Aid_Report01.pdf

[82] Johnsen, J. T. (2018) at 252.

Appendix C: International Evidence of Legal Aid Reducing Poverty

According to the law & economics literature, the legal system has 3 main anti-poverty purposes:
- Preventing expropriation, which is essentially preventing more powerful actors from stealing the assets or earning potential or less powerful actors.
- Enabling entrepreneurship, largely by ensuring contracts can be reliably enforced. With contract enforcement, business owners and individuals are able to engage in arms-length transactions, reduce transaction costs, and enable a more efficient allocation of labor and capital.
- Ensuring basic services are delivered, that is, bringing enforcement actions against the government itself to enforce rights to education, healthcare, and other public goods. This can have a significant impact on reducing corruption, for example.

Some significant studies in this area include:
- Legal representation reduced land expropriation in Kenya, leading to dramatically improved income of $310/household/month (Aberra and Chemin, 2018; also see Chari et.al, 2017).
- The inability to enforce tenancy rights led to forced expropriation and violence in India (Field, Levinson, Pande and Visara, 2008).
- Secure land title freed up 17% of total time, formerly spent on protection, for more productive uses (Field, 2007), and increased investment in residential properties by 68% (Field, 2005).
- Frequent expropriation of land owned by widows' in Zambia lead to lower land investment and dramatically lower productivity (Dillon and Voena, 2018).
- In Pakistan, a reform geared towards reduced bias in judicial decisions prevented land expropriation worth 0.14% of GDP or USD 390 million every year (Mehmood, 2021).
- In Peru, legal aid for vulnerable women reduced domestic violence, female deaths due to aggression, and hospitalizations due to mental health, and increased children's school enrollment, test scores, attendance (Sviatschi and Trako 2021).
- In Ecuador, access to legal aid services for poor women increased the probability of child support award, and decreased the probability of severe physical violence after separation (Owen and Portillo 2003).
- An inability to enforce contracts affects firms' incentives to invest and distorts production decisions. (Shvets, 2012; Chemin 2009) and decreases creditors' willingness to lend (Shvets, 2013).
- The inability to reliably enforce contracts (legal uncertainty) reduced the overall size of economic activity and credit markets; 10% increase in legal uncertainty reduced loan volume by 0.61% (Lee, Schoenherr, and Starman, 2022).
- The creation of special tribunals in Brazil, which increased access to justice and its efficiency, led to a reduced risk of expropriation and led to a 3% increase in entrepreneurship (Lichand and Soares, 2011).
- A judicial reform that provided judges with more training in Pakistan led to greater disposition of cases and higher entry rates of new firms. Estimates suggest that this

reform increased firm entry rate by 50% and Pakistan's GDP by 0.5% (Chemin, 2009).

- Shortening judicial lags in India led to fewer breaches of contract, encouraged investment, and facilitated access to finance. 25th percentile increase in judicial efficiency increased firm productivity by 3.6 percentage points. For a 12% reduction in case delay, state GDP increased by 3% (Chemin, 2012), (Ahsan, 2013), (Amirapu, 2017), (Boehm and Oberfield, 2018).
- In Brazilian local governments, state judiciary presence reduced waste or corruption by about 10 percent or 0.3 standard deviations. (Litschig and Zamboni, 2015).
- In Liberia, people who are offered legal aid report being significantly more satisfied with case outcomes, pay fewer bribes, and enjoy greater food security (Sandefur and Siddiqi, 2015).
- Simply sharing information about speedier justice in Pakistan improved reliance on formal courts and increased trust in formal institutions (Acemoglu et.al, 2018).

These studies are not all strictly about legal aid, but rather about the effects of a well-functioning civil justice system in general. However, they can be generalizable to the United States to the extent that our justice system is not functioning well, especially for marginalized groups. The information in Appendix A suggests our entire civil justice system has almost a single point of failure, which is our failure to guarantee representation in civil cases. To the extent that we are able to provide legal representation, then, we would expect expropriation, violence, and government waste/corruption to decrease, while entrepreneurship and GDP would increase.

Appendix D: Right to Counsel Programs & Homelessness Across California

In June 2018, voters in San Francisco approved Proposition F, which established as city policy that all residential tenants facing eviction have the right to full-scope legal defense (called Tenant Right to Counsel, or TRC). Importantly, there was no means testing on this right: tenants could access publicly-funded attorneys irrespective of their income. Almost immediately after passing Prop F, funding for eviction defense services in San Francisco increased and increased again after funding from Proposition C, Our City Our Home, came online. Prop C was passed with the intent of funding additional homeless and homeless prevention services, with the ultimate goal of reducing homelessness in San Francisco.

Of course, as documented in Appendix A, compared to other developed countries TRC is really a small step. Countries as diverse as Brazil, Finland, and Canada have had a right to counsel for tenants for decades. They don't break out representation for tenants as a separate program: it's embedded in a right to counsel that includes family, consumer, torts, employment, immigration, foreclosure, and other case types. Guaranteed representation is simply considered part of a well-functioning justice system and it does not appear to be widely controversial.

The data presented in section 6 indicates that evictions are not the dominant type of legal issue that causes homelessness. Also, because TRC is not means tested, it's also not necessarily targeted at people who are at high risk of becoming homeless. Nevertheless, even with these caveats, it's likely that TRC has had an impact on homelessness city-wide.

Using the case ratios shown in Figure 8, we can estimate that of the estimated 850 people prevented from becoming homeless, about 222 were due to ODL's eviction defense work, which since 2019 has largely been funded by the TRC initiative. Since the control group described in section 6 was provided referrals to other legal aid nonprofits, service requestors who had eviction issues were referred to another agency who would likely take their case. This implies that if a universal access model was implemented in a county without an existing TRC program, the effect size on homelessness would be even greater than documented in this study.

Overall, the effect size of TRC could be significant and could explain the variance in homeless counts between San Francisco and other urban California counties between 2019 and 2022, since no other county in California has adopted a TRC program, and no other major county has seen a decrease.

County	2019	2022	% Change
San Francisco	8,035	7,754	-3.5%
Alameda	8,022	9,747	21.5%
Santa Clara	9,706	10,028	33.2%

Sacramento	5,561	9,278	66.8%
San Diego	8,102	8,427	4%
Los Angeles	56,257	65,111	15.7%

Data from HUD exchange "2007 - 2022 Point-in-Time Estimates by CoC" at
https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3031/pit-and-hic-data-since-2007/

Appendix E: Miscellaneous

Official San Francisco Point in Time Counts

Applied Survey Research. (2022). *San Francisco 2022 Homeless Count & Survey: Comprehensive Report*. https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2022-PIT-Count-Report-San-Francisco-Updated-8.19.22.pdf. Applied Survey Research. (2019). *San Francisco 2019 Homeless Count & Survey: Comprehensive Report.* https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019HIRDReport_SanFrancisco_FinalDraft-1.pdf. Applied Survey Research. (2017). *San Francisco 2017 Homeless Count & Survey: Comprehensive Report*. https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-SF-Point-in-Time-Count-General-FINAL-6.21.17-1.pdf. Applied Survey Research. (2015). *San Francisco 2015 Homeless Count & Survey: Comprehensive Report*. https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2015-San-Francisco-Homeless-Count-Report_0-1.pdf. Applied Survey Research. (2013). *San Francisco 2013 Homeless Count & Survey: Comprehensive Report*. https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2013-Youth.pdf. Applied Survey Research. (2011). *San Francisco 2011 Homeless Count & Survey: Comprehensive Report*. https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2011SanFranciscoHomelessComprehensiveReport_FINAL.pdf. San Francisco Human Services Agency, with Applied Survey Research. (2009). *2009 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey.* https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/HomelessCountFINALReportSF2009.pdf. San Francisco Human Services Agency. (2007). *San Francisco 2007 Homeless Count*. https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2007-SF-PIT-Report.pdf San Francisco Department of Human Services. (2005). *San Francisco Homeless Count 2005*. https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/San_Francisco_Homeless_Count_2005_Final_Report.pdf.

District 11 Count Info

Another piece of evidence to support that ODL significantly reduced homelessness in D10 is evidence from D11. In 2019 ODL began accepting cases for residents in D11, but the caseload didn't ramp up significantly until 2020-2021, when ODL began processing 150+ cases per year. Between 2019 and 2022, D10 and D11 were the only districts to show a significant percentage drop in their homeless counts:

District Changes in Homelessness 2019-2022

District	2019	2022	% Change
1	245	221	-9.8%
2	171	158	-7.6%
3	341	391	14.7%
4	34	81	138.2%

5	363	697	92%
6[83]	3656	3848	5.3%
7	168	163	-3%
8	317	287	-9.5%
9	643	664	3.3%
10	1841	1115	-39.4%
11	99	66	-39.4%

Synthetic Control analysis: Predictor Balance for Figure 11

Predictor Balance:

	Treated	Synthetic
pct_collplus	.34	.46779
median_rent_pct_hhinc	.26	.26
pct_black	.18	.05363
pct_lt18	.22	.12759
pct_gt60	.17	.18063
pct_collplus	.34	.46779
pct_api_language	.34	.23049
renter_occupied	.5	.63937
pct_vacant_rental	.15	.17505
pct_poverty	.16	.15477
income_pc	34925	49026.84

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[83] For the studied period, District 6 included the Tenderloin. In 2022 San Francisco redistricted so that the Tenderloin was not included into District 5. This will make future district comparisons based on historical data very difficult.

Synthetic Control analysis: Predictor Balance for Figure 12

Predictor Balance:

	Treated	Synthetic
unsheltered_pc_adj	.0163482	.0156559
pct_collplus	.34	.5
median_rent_pct_hhinc	.26	.26
pct_black	.18	.09
pct_lt18	.22	.08
pct_gt60	.17	.18
pct_collplus	.34	.5
pct_api_language	.34	.25
renter_occupied	.5	.81
pct_vacant_rental	.15	.28
pct_poverty	.16	.23
income_pc	34925	59183

# San Francisco Legislative Districts

The below map shows how (pre-2023) legislative districts map onto zip codes and the location of District 10.

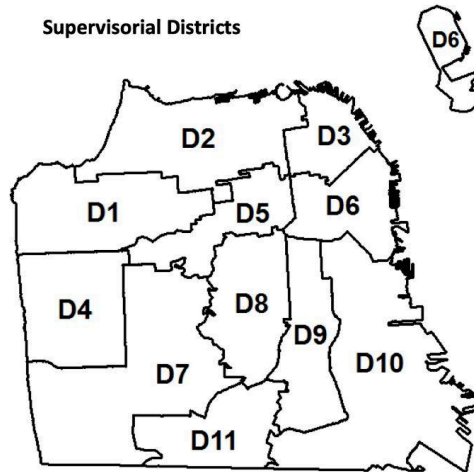**Overview of San Francisco Zip Codes & Supervisorial Districts**

SF Zip Codes & Associated Neighborhoods

SF Zip Code	San Francisco Neighborhood
94102	Hayes Valley/Civic Center/Tenderloin
94103	South of Market
94104	Financial District
94105	Rincon Hill
94107	Potrero Hill/SOMA
94108	Chinatown
94109	Polk/Russian Hill/Nob Hill
94110	Mission District/Bernal Heights
94111	Embarcadero
94112	Ingleside/Excelsior
94114	Castro/Noe Valley
94115	Western Addition/Japantown
94116	Sunset/Parkside/Forest Hill
94117	Haight-Ashbury
94118	Inner Richmond
94121	Outer Richmond
94122	Sunset
94123	Marina/Cow Hollow
94124	Bayview/Hunters Point
94127	St. Francis Wood/Miraloma/West Portal
94129	Presidio
94130	Treasure Island
94131	Twin Peaks/Glen Park
94132	Lake Merced/Lakeside
94133	North Beach
94134	Visitacion Valley
94158	Mission Bay
94142	General Delivery

Overlay: Zip Codes & Supervisorial Districts
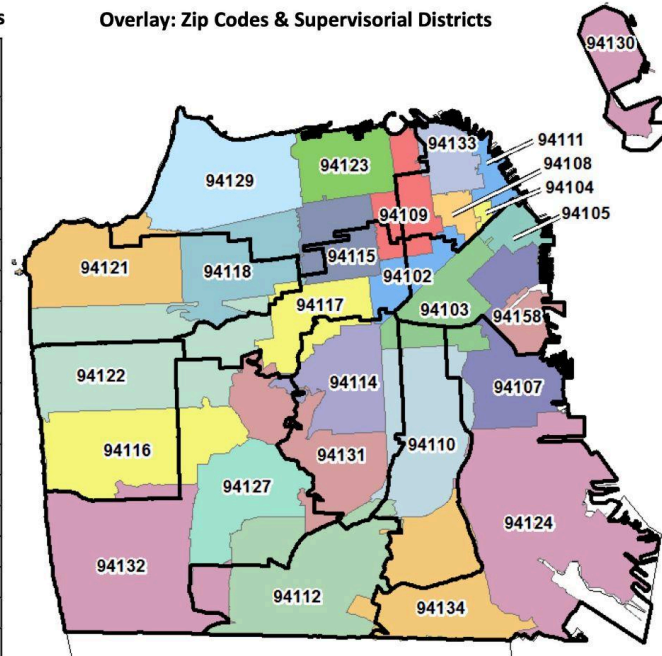
Supervisorial Districts

Updated 6/25/19