



COMPASS FAMILY SERVICES

POLICY AGENDA



COMPASS FAMILY SERVICES
Housing. Support. Hope.

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Our mission at Compass Family Services is to help homeless and at-risk families achieve housing stability, economic self-sufficiency, and overall wellbeing. Staff at Compass believe passionately that every child deserves to grow up in a stable home.

Housing is central to our mission and service delivery strategies, but lasting stability requires more than a lease and a key: it requires living-wage work that can support the whole family, high-quality early care and education, and physical and mental healthcare to help families recover from inherently traumatic experiences of homelessness. Family stability requires the transformation of underfunded systems and a human services model that puts people first, welcoming families in for help rather than prioritizing and disqualifying families based on the limited availability of housing and services.

The COVID-19 pandemic—and what many have called a preexisting pandemic of institutionalized racism—is literally making it impossible for people of color to breathe. In San Francisco, more than 80% of homeless families are families of color, and the pandemic continues to amplify the fundamental injustice of poverty and homelessness. Ultimately, our mission at Compass, and the historical moment we're living in, call for the economic liberation of all people and families, starting with and centering communities of color.

Our mission also calls for building family leadership and amplifying family voices in the decision-making that impacts their lives. We must weave leadership development and advocacy into the cultural fabric of Compass, creating space for families to take leadership opportunities both within and outside of the agency.



WE MUST SUPPORT EACH FAMILY TO BUILD STABILITY IN THEIR HOUSING, INCOME, CHILDCARE, AND WELLNESS

We must invest in family housing as the primary solution to family homelessness. We must galvanize substantial, ongoing federal, state, and local investments to create and protect deeply affordable family housing. These investments must also support flexible housing subsidy options that provide longer-term rental support. Rapid re-housing is the most available housing option in our homeless response system, but it's not necessarily the most effective: many families need deeper and longer-term subsidies to stabilize and sufficiently increase their incomes. Existing funding streams—many of them local—cannot sustain this without meaningful new investments.

Compass particularly supports housing options that counteract displacement by keeping San Francisco families in San Francisco. We support extending rapid re-housing subsidy timelines and pairing subsidies with targeted workforce services and paid training opportunities, so that families can build up their incomes as their subsidies taper off.

Our workforce systems must provide permanent pathways out of poverty for job-seeking parents, including in the human services sector. Publicly funded workforce programs must prioritize homeless jobseekers—including single moms—and provide them with career-track opportunities to participate in San Francisco's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Compass believes in meeting parents where they're at, with paid training and flexible funds to remove practical barriers (e.g., childcare, food, transportation) to finding and keeping a job.

Compass works within a workforce collaborative to help bring about a range of living-wage opportunities across sectors and skill levels, prioritizing sectors that do not externalize harm to communities of color. Our own human services sector must also create employment pathways, and families should see themselves reflected in our leadership.



Our childcare systems must offer full-day, enriched childcare options in safe environments, supporting early care educators in the process. Compass operates within a network of early care and education programs that develop school readiness and reduce opportunity gaps. Infancy through age five are the most critical years, but structural racism and a broad cultural devaluation of caregiving have underfunded the field and undercompensated the women of color disproportionately holding frontline roles.

Compass stands in solidarity with our partners demanding wage equity in the early care field, including wage parity with public school educators. We call for an immediate end to inequitable compensation structures and for policymaking that values early care educators, whose work is the glue holding our families and communities together.

Our homeless response and healthcare systems must coordinate to bring trauma-informed, low-barrier treatment to parents and kids. Homelessness carries trauma: it is an inherently traumatic experience, and it is often caused by traumatic experiences, including domestic and family violence, systemic racism, and discrimination and marginalization. Compass supports flexible funding streams that bring low-barrier mental healthcare to families experiencing trauma, in accessible locations and with childcare as needed for individual therapy.

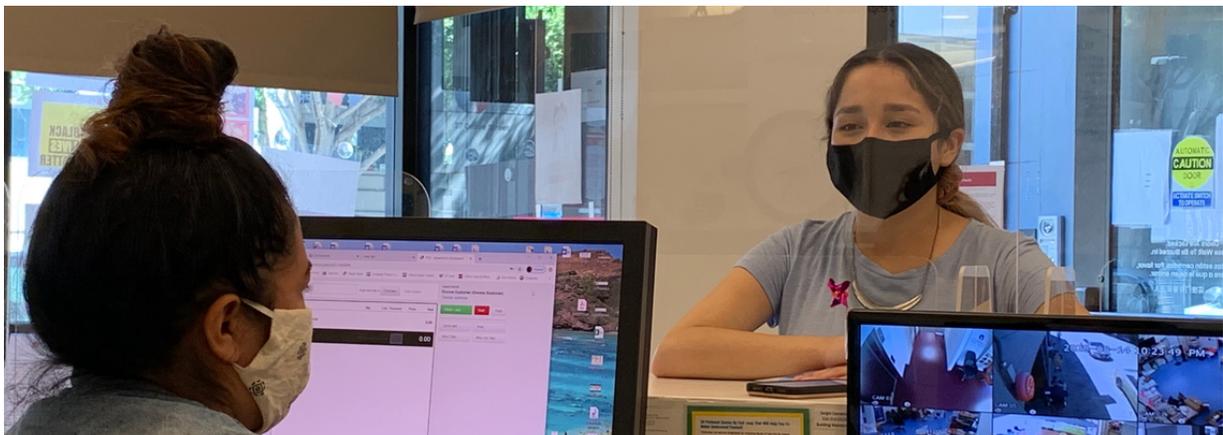
WE MUST IMPROVE SYSTEMS, INCREASE RESOURCES, AND APPLY AN ANTI-RACIST LENS TO DATA, OUTCOMES, AND STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

Our homeless response systems must welcome families in, not keep them out until they are “homeless enough” to gain entry.

An underfunded homeless response system relies on eligibility requirements—and in the COVID-19 pandemic, medical vulnerability criteria—to disqualify people until they’re vulnerable enough to compete for limited shelter rooms, hotel vouchers, and housing referrals. This puts families at a higher risk of unsheltered homelessness before they can access help. A scarcity model for human services is completely unacceptable and cuts against the core values of the field.

Compass supports effective strategies to meet family needs over the long term. We do not support tactics that use criteria, definitions, and other tools to shrink the needs until they fit the available inventory of housing and services. Putting people—not inventory—first requires a sustained commitment to racial equity and data transparency across our homeless response system and beyond.

Compass leverages coalitions and partnerships to push for equitable, transparent, and fully funded systems capable of ending the problem of homelessness, rather than simply managing it by making it look smaller than it is.



Federal and state entities must make substantial, ongoing investments in family stability, with sufficiently flexible revenue streams.

The federal government must incentivize and invest in deeply affordable housing creation and preservation, as well as make deeper, more flexible investments in housing subsidies. In a complementary way, the state government must shift its one-time, block-grant approach towards deep, ongoing revenue streams for housing and essential services. Importantly, government at all levels must redress historical underinvestment in the human services sector, which underserves homeless people and underpays nonprofit workers.

Compass advocates for all public revenue streams to operate flexibly, without regulatory hurdles that create practical barriers for people accessing services and administrative barriers for agencies providing services. Compass works continuously with our partners to identify and eliminate access and eligibility barriers.



All systems that intersect to serve families must prioritize racial and economic justice and promote anti-racism “upstream.” We must target housing and services to the families of color, including immigrant families, who are disproportionately impacted by homelessness and structurally at the greatest risk. Compass strives to bring a racial justice lens to our programs and operations, and we advocate for racial equity across the homeless response system, from wage equity for front-line nonprofit workers to contract equity for our partner agencies lead by people of color.

Compass also advocates for systems transformation “upstream,” at all levels of government and particularly at the federal level, where discriminatory housing, tax, immigration, criminal justice, and other policies create massive inequities that are major drivers of poverty, homelessness, and family instability in every community across the country.

WE MUST BUILD LEADERSHIP AND AMPLIFY FAMILY VOICES IN THE DECISION AND POLICYMAKING THAT IMPACTS THEIR LIVES

Families with lived experience of homelessness must have regular, compensated opportunities to participate in public policymaking.

Compass provides housing, support, and hope—the hope that prosperity is possible and within reach for every family. We provide regular, compensated opportunities for families to participate in public decision-making and build their leadership skills. Family homelessness means fundamentally that public systems have failed: we need to lift up family voices in the process of holding these systems accountable.

The human services sector must build a culture of capacity building, leadership development, and policy advocacy that values racial equity and lived experience. Compass works actively within coalitions and partnerships to deepen our learning, share best practices, and create a culture of leadership development that prioritizes racial equity and lived experience. This work is fundamental. It must be done within nonprofit agencies and across the human services field, and it must be appropriately and equitably resourced by all funders who are serious about ending homelessness.





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