

ANTI-HOMELESS ARCHITECTURE SHOULD BE ABOLISHED

Discussing constructive alternatives to hostile architecture



39%

of the US' homeless population resides in California
*According to a study conducted by the Benioff Homeless and Housing Initiative

50%

of the US' unhoused population resides in California
*According to a study conducted by the Benioff Homeless and Housing Initiative

20K

homeless people in San Francisco
noted that unemployment and expensive housing removed them from their homes
*According to a study conducted by the Benioff Homeless and Housing Initiative

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Metal partitions divide all surfaces in sight. Armrest look-alikes split benches in half. Spiked metal fences line ledges. Boulders lie under window sills, just conspicuous enough that their presence makes passersby wonder, “Why is that here?”

While these objects all seem harmless enough, the agenda behind them is actually much more antagonistic. Design elements such as the ones listed above implemented within public spaces are known as hostile architecture and are typically placed to repel the homeless community from occupying public property or using it as housing substitution.

Across the nation, California is the state with the largest homeless population. According to a 2021–2022 study by the University of California, San Francisco Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, more than 171,000 people in California experience homelessness daily — almost twice as many as New York, the state with the next highest homeless population. 30% of the United States’ homeless population and half of its unsheltered population reside in California.

However, anti-homeless architecture is not a true solution to the problem — it only perpetuates stigma against homeless people

A major ethical concern regarding anti-homeless architecture is that it maintains a polarized perception of a person’s character and lifestyle based on socioeconomic status. Many argue for anti-homeless architecture with the sentiment that homeless people should not be on the streets of the homes and businesses that residents pay to inhabit. However, this argument addresses the wrong issue — the reason why most homeless individuals occupy public spaces is because they do not have options for private residences. Utilizing hostile architecture against the homeless

“**MANY BEGAN COVERING SPIKED AREAS WITH CUSHIONS TO MAKE THEM MORE COMFORTABLE FOR THE HOMELESS — THEY HAVE EVEN GONE AS FAR AS POURING CEMENT OVER ARCHITECTURE TO FORCE THEIR REMOVAL.**”

NOAH KANG”

community does not provide them with residence, thereby avoiding the issue, and only causes more problems for other community members, including those with disabilities and mobility issues that are prevented from accessing much-needed places to sit or rest.

The few homeless shelters currently offered are frequently underfunded and overcrowded, and often lack privacy and stability, which is why many unhoused people avoid them. The funding that goes into implementing metal spikes or bench dividers could more beneficially be used to provide resources that help homeless people find a residence or improve those currently offered. In particular, the California government should make a greater effort to tackle the root of the homelessness crisis by reforming their unemployment insurance funding as well as implementing new networks within California’s housing system.

20,000 individuals from San Francisco who experienced homelessness in 2022 noted that unemployment and expensive housing were some of the main contributors to their homelessness. Countering the myth of “homeless migration,” the idea that the majority of homeless people in California arrived in the state after losing their housing, the aforementioned UCSF Benioff Homeless and Housing Initiative study revealed that 90% of participants previously lived in California prior to becoming homeless.

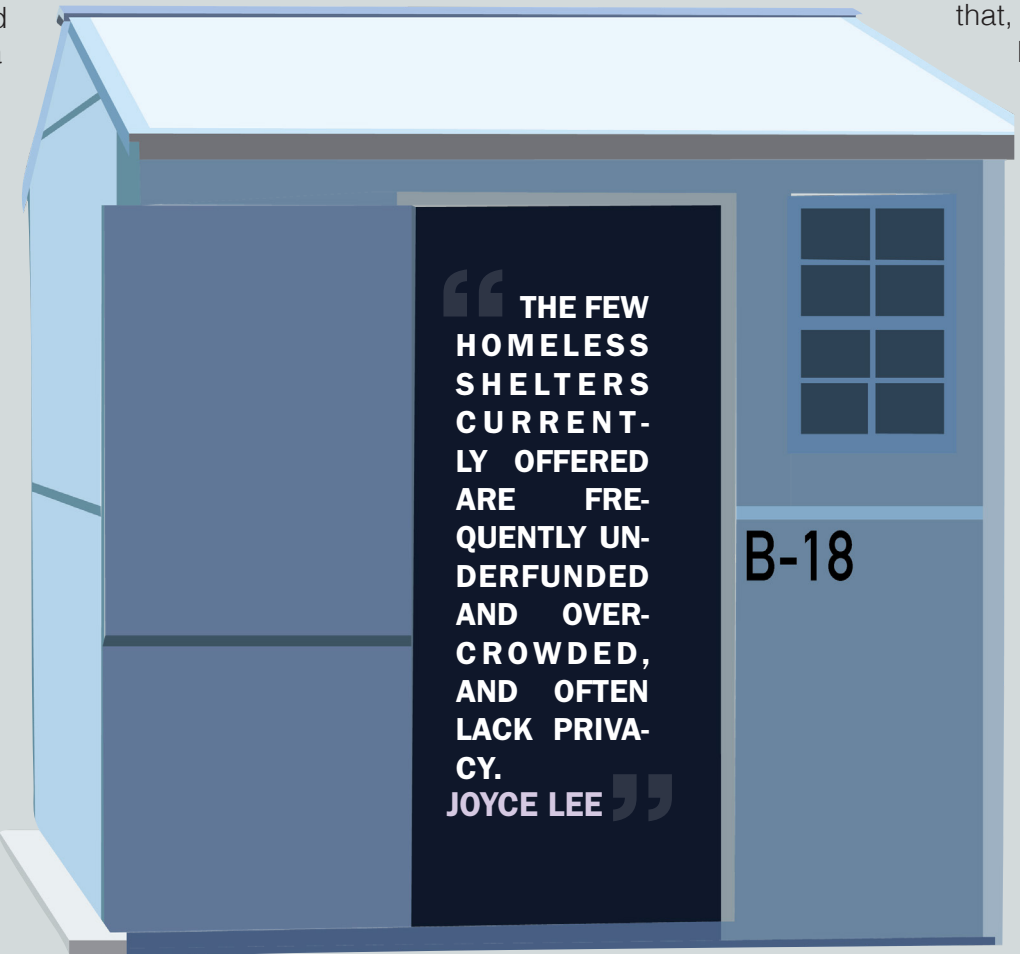
Unemployment insurance is a program of financial aid for workers who have been recently laid off — it is currently one of the most used methods by laid-off workers, helping millions across America. During the Coronavirus, the federal government gave billions of funds per state for UI. Despite this, the California government was still in twenty billion dollars of debt under this program by 2022. To pay off these debts, the government instituted higher taxes for low-wage workers and small businesses, discouraging them from working. California could potentially clear this debt by making taxing to fund UI propor-

tionate to full-time minimum wages, which could expectedly raise ten billion dollars in a year with just an average tax of two percent. This would provide greater financial aid for unemployed workers and encourage employment. Ultimately, alleviating the amount of debt the California UI program is under could benefit the employed and unemployed financially, proving to be a possible

ever, the state government can implement other alternatives besides just funding.

There have been numerous calls to action to make housing a human right in the constitutional amendments. Additionally, further political solutions have been suggested, such as laws that ease restrictions for homeowners who would want to build a second house, called a duplex, within their homes. Other than that, civilians have been taking daily

measures to counter these pieces of architecture. For instance, many began covering spiked areas with cushions to make them more comfortable for the homeless — they have even gone as far as pouring cement over architecture to force their removal■



alternative that could tackle the root of homelessness.

More funds for housing would be effective in reducing homelessness. For instance, in 2023, California recently invested \$8.1 billion in housing, shelter and supportive services, which would alleviate the homelessness crisis by reducing housing prices; how-