



U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) has pushed for dedicating more federal funds to address the nation's homeless crisis. "It's going to be expensive to end homelessness," she said. "Let's put a price on it."

PHOTO BY RODNEY CHOICE

Making waves

Congresswoman Maxine Waters has never shied away from controversy or her commitment to ending homelessness, supporting services and community organizing

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Reginald Black is a vendor and writer with Street Roots' sister paper, Street Sense Media in Washington, D.C. He requested an interview with Congresswoman Maxine Waters for the paper to talk about her proposals to end homelessness. Olivia Richter worked with Black to compile this interview.

Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) has been an outspoken Democrat in Congress since she was elected in 1990. She has been re-elected consistently to represent California's 29th Congressional District and is the longest-serving black woman in the House of Representatives.

Waters has a well-earned reputation for unfaltering candidness. She has made headlines repeatedly for frank criticisms of President Trump, referring to him as a "crook" and a "liar," and to his staff as the "Kremlin Klan." She has called for Trump's impeachment and openly supported the public harassment of members of Trump's Cabinet — a statement that drew severe backlash laced with overt racism and even death threats.

Her outspoken opinions on the Trump administration have made her a viral

sensation among folks on both sides of the aisle, who frequently refer to her as "Auntie Waters" on social media.

Throughout her political career, Waters has been a steadfast advocate for ending homelessness in the United States. Two years ago she introduced the pioneering Ending Homelessness Act of 2016. The bill would provide \$13.27 billion in funding over five years for federal initiatives to help the thousands of Americans facing homelessness and create affordable housing. She reintroduced the bill in 2017, but it was not passed.

Reginald Black: *In D.C. I've noticed most of our homeless community are African Americans. Do you see that in your home state of California?*

Maxine Waters: Increasingly. This business of homelessness has evolved a lot over the last 15 years or so. It has to do with public policy, the cost of housing, decisions that politicians make about whether or not they're going to support the ability of people to afford rent, whether or not we're going to build more housing, and whether or not we're going to have policies that support people in public housing rather than putting people out of public housing. It has to do with joblessness, discrimination

and the lack of ability to easily get a job.

All of that has had negative impacts on the African American community. And when you go into cities, even in downtown L.A., you will see black men and increasingly black families and women. Drugs played an important part. In the '80s, when crack cocaine became prevalent, like in South Central Los Angeles, people got addicted. Some lost jobs, some were never able to apply for jobs, and some went to jail or prison, came back, could not get jobs and ended up on the street. So it became a combination of things that have had negative impacts on the African-American community. You know this better than I do.

R.B.: *What work is being done to specifically stop the cycle of African Americans becoming homeless?*

M.W.: In Los Angeles, it has gone on so long that it's a crisis. Now, the city of Los Angeles and the county are passing legislation to raise tremendous amounts of dollars to do something about homelessness. They have a problem because they don't really know how to spend the money. A lot of Los Angeles is landlocked, so acquiring the property and packaging it in ways that developers are interested in, and making sure you have

enough subsidies for developers to want to do some low-income housing — it has just not come together. L.A. is really being criticized for not having a strong plan to spend all of this money.

We know that simply having shelters won't solve the problem. We need supportive services to go along with them, even if we're able to develop the housing. This means that sometimes the people who have been on the street for a long time need more than just a (housing) unit. They need some help, whether it is how to go about getting a job, maybe mental health care, or other kinds of things. So supportive services, along with the development of low-income housing, is very important.

R.B.: *In D.C. we have reports that say we've lost over 40,000 African American residents due to displacement and gentrification. Is that something that's happening in California, too?*

M.W.: Oh yeah, gentrification is real. As a matter of fact, public policy makers have not resolved the attempts to do economic development and understand what that means in terms of displacement. For example, in one of my cities, Inglewood, we have tremendous economic development going on with the Rams moving in, and

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