

HOMELESSNESS IN STOCKTON

In this episode, we discuss how the City of Stockton and San Joaquin County are dealing with the humanitarian crisis that is affecting our city and much of California. From homeless court to the CareLink program, this episode informs us about how our city and state are working to end the crisis. This episode is hosted by Caroleta Washington and Megan Silva



Audio editor and website designer Megan Silva hops on as a guest host today. She enjoyed talking with Caroleta and Mayor Lincoln, and was moved by Lincoln's family story shared in this episode.

TRANSCRIPT:

Caroleta: What's up Stockton? You're listening to 209 Talk on 93.5 KWDC Stockton 209 talk is a collaboration where local college students sit down with the mayor. The show you're tuned into right now was put together by students enrolled in the broadcasting courses in the digital media department at San Joaquin College. Thanks for listening and supporting college radio. This week we're going to be talking about homelessness and the 209 homelessness.

Caroleta: How are you doing today, Mayor? Ah, we have Megan Silva and we have Mayor Lincoln with us.

Lincoln: How are we doing?

Megan: Good

Caroleta: it's early in the morning.

Lincoln: It's early in the morning. We're in Stockton in the 209 and I believe the semester just got started. Getting back in the swing of things, it's all good.

Caroleta: A lot of homework

Megan: Oh yeah

Caroleta: I'm taking nine courses

Megan: Nine?

Caroleta: Yeah but some of them are like workout classes

Megan: I'm only doing three this time, just wrapping things up before graduating this semester.

Caroleta: Yeah, me too. Yeah. Yeah. Just pushing through it, I guess.

Lincoln: when do you graduate?

Megan: May 18th.

Caroleta: You know the day already?

Megan: I'm counting down the days. I'm ready.

Caroleta: This will be my second time graduating.

Megan: This is my first cause class of 2020..

Lincoln: Congratulations both of you, And I may see you guys on May 18th because my son is projected to graduate as well.

Caroleta: Oh, congratulation. That's a big step. That's his. Because he's graduating high school in college, right? He's getting an AA.

Lincoln: Well, he's graduating college, and then next year he graduates high school.

Megan: Oh so kinda backwards I like that. That's cool to be able to say like, yeah, I got my AA before I was even done in high school.

Caroleta: So today we're getting into homelessness and that has a big been a big part in Stockton. So I just wanted to get your take on the homeless, the homeless and I want to call it a situation, but I guess it is here in Stockton. How do you feel like that is affecting Stockton?

Lincoln: Well, what we first refer to it as is like a homeless crisis or humanitarian crisis. And I think it is important for the community to understand that even through COVID and in the various situations that we've had to deal with as a community over the past couple of years, homelessness has still remained the number one issue or concern or crisis for our community. And so our local government, I mean, we're working really hard, you know, to do the best we can to mitigate this crisis that we're dealing with right now.

Caroleta: Has it been boosted since COVID like did homelessness go up since COVID?

Lincoln: That's interesting that you ask that question, because there's what's called a point in time count. So back in 2019, we had a point in time count. And when COVID hit in 2020, we didn't have our next point in time count until January of 2022. So that was essentially three years later. Yeah, right. And so what we found when we did our point in time count in January of 2022 was that our homeless population or unsheltered residents in Stockton declined by 3%. So what that tells us is that the efforts that we've been making and partnering with various organizations in our community in outreach and providing supportive services in collaboration with the county of San Joaquin, we're moving in the right direction.

Caroleta: And how do you do that count? How is that count taken?

Lincoln: So point in time, count means you pick a day and it's it signifies a specific point in time that the community comes together. Various organizations, government agencies, and we go out and we canvass the entire county, the entire city on that particular day, within that particular time frame, and we count those unsheltered residents.

Caroleta: You ask the people if they're unsheltered or you just count them like, could you see them sleeping?

Lincoln: Yes. So we go to the various encampments, locations.

Caroleta: So you have conversations with them?

Lincoln: Absolutely. In fact, there's a survey and provided so long as they're willing to participate in answering just a few questions, we're able to capture that information in that data. And what that allows us to do as a county, as a city, it allows us to really align our resources so that we can be very intentional, very strategic about meeting the needs because homelessness is so complex, right? It impacts every community differently. And so it's important for us that as we work hard to advocate for additional financial resources at the state and federal level, we have a strategic plan to address homelessness and mitigate homelessness within our communities.

Caroleta: You said it impacts different communities differently. How do you think it impacts Stockton?

Lincoln: So what we should understand about Stockton is that over two thirds of our unsheltered population, our homeless community, is really impacted by some sort of behavioral health challenge. And whether that's substance use disorder or mental health challenges. And so those are the two main drivers that we've seen that those who are experiencing homelessness right now, those who are unsheltered, that's what they're dealing with. And so for us as a city of Stockton, we work really hard to partner with specific organizations that specialize in those areas so that when we are continuing our outreach in the community through, our homeless outreach team, and we make contact with our unsheltered residents when they're ready to take the next step towards healing in their life and to receive help accept help, we're able to point them in the door in the right direction. And that's what it's all about, because we want people to take the next step toward healing in their life. It's not compassionate for us to allow our unsheltered community just to wither under a bridge or on the street. We want to make sure that they go from where they're at to temporary shelter to emergency shelter, find some housing stability, food research, whatever they may need. We want to we want to help them take the next step toward healing in life, but also receive the services that they need. Right. So that they can overcome any challenges that they're dealing with. If it has to do with mental health or substance use disorder.

Megan: I was reading about like the housing first approach that seems like a lot of people have been talking about. Is that kind of like what you guys doing? Are you guys doing something different?

Lincoln: We are doing as much as we can across the board, right? And so as I said earlier, that homelessness is so complex, and because it's so complex, you have to take a multifaceted approach to dealing with it. So we understand that housing is a big component of homeless homelessness as well. A twofold one, from a from a standpoint of preventing homeless, When people have stable housing, we're able to prevent homelessness from happening in the future, but also increasing our housing options in housing stock so that when people are ready to take the next step toward healing, ready to go from where they're at in their unsheltered environment to more stable housing, we have that available for them as well. Here's an interesting statistic, in fact, about the city of Stockton. Over the last ten years, our population has grown approximately 10% in our households have grown, growing approximately 8%.

Caroleta: By household, you mean like people in the household.

Lincoln: Total Households, So you have your total population as a city as a whole but then you-

Caroleta: So you're saying there's not enough housing?

Lincoln: Exactly. Because the vacancy rate ten years ago, meaning houses available for people to rent move into was right around was right around 4%.

Caroleta: It was it was low.

Lincoln: It was low or vacant. Bakeries, vacancy rate excuse me, ten years ago was right around 4%. Our vacancy rate today is base has basically been flat. So what that means is, is we don't our housing stock isn't keeping up with the growth of our population, which could in turn lead to more homelessness. And so focusing on housing, focusing on shelter, focusing on supportive services, again, that multifaceted approach is absolutely critical for us to be able to mitigate homelessness moving forward.

Caroleta: Do you think it has anything also to do with the affordability of housing? Because ten years ago I thought it would have been high because there is a lot of vacant houses and the reason I know that was 2008 and that time, but there's a lot of vacant housing. But you said it was low. So I'm wondering if it has to do with a lot of affordability that people can't get into these houses as well.

Lincoln: Well You have this supply and demand, right? So because of that, that is increasing, that that's played a part in factored into the increase in prices of the homes and the cost to rent a home as well.

Caroleta: Yeah. So the cost of rent a home is out of this world right now.

Megan: Yeah.

Lincoln: You know, it is. It is. And but you know what's crazy is I argue that Stockton still is the most affordable place to live, you know, in the state of California. Now, when the median home sale price in California is well over 700,000 and I know in San Joaquin County, it's over 500,000 and Stockton is in the mid 400,000s.

Caroleta: Is there anything you can do about pricing of renting homes or renting even apartments or anything? Is there anything that you can do to kind of flat out the so it doesn't go any higher? Because I know every year my rent goes up higher. Is there anything you can put on these owners of these apartment building housing where they stop it from going higher?

Lincoln: There has been a policy in the city of Stockton where there's 5% cap each year for rent increases. So that's something that's in place. But one of the most important things that we could do as local government is, is really we can work with our affordable housing developers, we could work with, you know, the private sector or market rate housing developers as well internally as it relates to our processes, our permitting process and timeline to be able to streamline certain opportunities that that's all going to help us increase our housing stock here within the City of Stockton and ultimately potentially make things little bit more affordable as well as we get more supply into the market.

Caroleta: Right. See, so you bring up that addiction is also a problem of homelessness and you bring up there are places in place that we can tend to help them with mental health crisis or addiction crisis. Do you know the name or where are these places are they're on every corner of southwest, northeast, west, or are there just one place you can go? And a lot of homelessness doesn't have cars, don't have cars, so they can get to it?

Lincoln: That's right. That's right. One of the things that we did last year is, you know, through COVID, we recognize that there are several needs, especially needs that impact or situations that impacted our homeless community. And so what we did was with the additional funding that we received through our ARPA funding, we set aside \$5.7 million for what we call a Carelink program here in the City of Stockton, and that's in partnership with Community Medical Center. Okay. And that Carelink program allows us to respond to certain calls for service in the community that impact our unsheltered residents here in Stockton that are dealing with some sort of behavioral health challenge. So substance use disorder, mental health, we want to make sure as a city that we are responding with the right people in the right resources. And then from there, we can get them to, you know, some sort of transitional housing, one of our transitional housing partners getting them into a detox center or into a program where they could start the process of recovery. And so there are several different community based organizations, partners that deal specifically in this space. It's Gospel Center Rescue Mission. There's the Salvation Army, there's also even other supportive services like Saint Mary's Dining Hall, Stockton Shelter for the homeless. The list could do on, on and on.

Megan: So if we see somebody like clearly having a mental health crisis, is this who we reach out to if we're worried for either their safety or our safety, if this is impacting us.

Caroleta: And what is the number?

Lincoln: So if you see somebody in the community who is experiencing a mental health crisis mean the first thing we want to do is because we don't know the details of those circumstances in their situation and we want to make sure everybody is safe in the process is call 9-1-1 or [9-8-8 (mental health crisis line)]

<PSA Break>

Lincoln: our dispatch works closely with the Carelink program and our law enforcement to make sure the right person is responding to that particular call. So the first step would be just to call on one, we can get medical services out there. Do that. 911 call. You know, we can get the Carelink program out there.

Caroleta: So the police would come first and then they would assess the situation and then the Carelink program would go. or everybody comes out at once.

Lincoln: The dispatch will receive the call. If it's a situation where it's more in line with what we're talking about. Behavioral challenge dispatch is trained to vet that call and would dispatch Carelink. Carelink would essentially be the lead in the response, not law enforcement. Because again, we want to make sure that we have the right personnel, the right services, engaging in interacting and meeting the needs of our homeless, unsheltered residents.

Caroleta: so it's called Carelink?

Lincoln: Carelink, Carelink.

Caroleta: Oh, Carelink. I was like, what is Carelink?

Megan: I heard that too, we should have a little graphic at the bottom clarifying,

Caroleta: So Carelink, is that like a program we can donate to? So or is it just like a program that Stockton has put together?

Lincoln: So it's a program that Stockton has invested in that is ran by the community Medical Center. And so there's opportunities to donate to the community medical center, to volunteer with the Community Medical Center or any other agencies that the city partners with or nonprofit organizations in our community that meet the needs of our unsheltered population.

Megan: We have a community medical center, that's the one we have here.

Caroleta: they're putting them up all across Stockton, we have one in the middle of campus.

Megan: That's good because have I've recently read a statistic from an ABC article, actually, it was about our laundry service, but it said from Delta that 18% of our student population is experiencing homelessness right now.

Caroleta: Yes. So we have a thing in Danner Hall where they did a presentation and told us about that. And then they said that they want to let people know that also at Delta, they have a place where you can go get a shower and they have a place where you can go get medical needs. They have a place where you can go brush your teeth and all that. I don't know about sleep, but I know that they have stuff where you can make sure you're clean now that you're on campus.

Lincoln: Yeah, I know that Delta College is doing a lot of great work to meet the needs of homeless and unsheltered students, and that's important because there is a large population of homeless teenagers. And a big portion of that is a result of those foster youth that have aged out of the system.

Caroleta: Right.

Lincoln: And so the city of Stockton has recognized that, and we've also invested in that space as well with our affordable housing partners, we've set aside funding specifically to help acquire property so that our foster youth, our youth that are aging out of the foster system, who want, you know, who have a job and you know, who are going to school, who want to, you know, take that next step in their life. They have to have a place to go. And so that's very, very important, not only for our youth, but also our seniors as well. We've invested as a city in that space, too.

Caroleta: Is there any safe shelters for teenage young adults that don't have a space at all? Because I know there's a shelter downtown. Is there a different one or is that the same shelter they would go to for safe shelter?

Lincoln: Yes, we have family shelters. We have safe shelters for youth. The children's home here in Stockton is one of those locations.

Megan: What is our shelter capacity like right now? Do we have room for people?

Lincoln: We do. We do have room for people. And that's a great question, because even right now, as we speak, we are closing out a NOFA. It's called notice of funding available to grant opportunity for organizations to participate in so that they receive money specifically to fund the expansion of shelter. So we have about 850 beds in the city of Stockton. We're looking to add an additional 300 beds over this next year in Stockton to in specifically low barrier beds, meaning that if somebody has pets, if they have a pet, if they have possessions, if they a partner and they need privacy, there's that type of shelter for them. It's more non congregate.

Caroleta: Right. Right. They're doing that in front of Saint Mary's Dining Hall, right where they're bringing like little mobile homes out there or something. We went there to help the St Mary's dining hall and they were telling us about that.

Lincoln: The Saint Mary's Dining Hall is one of those partners for the city of Stockton. And they are looking at, you know, bringing micro homes out there. Yeah. And there's a couple other agencies within the city of Stockton who are looking to do the same thing as well. And that's pretty revolutionary for us in how we're going meet the needs of our homeless and our unsheltered population is because up until this point we haven't had that type of shelter capacity. And so our last point in time count, we put our homeless, we counted about 900 homeless in Stockton. And so ultimately what that means is essentially we would we'd have enough beds, theoretically we'd have enough beds for our unsheltered population. But you can't force somebody to take shelter, right? They have to want to. And that's a challenge. You know, that's one of the challenges that we're being very intentional about overcoming is, you know, a lot of people who are unsheltered, There's trust concerns and trust issues. And so through our efforts and our partnerships with the community based organizations, we want consistent faces that are doing outreach. We have our homeless outreach team that consist of public safety, fire PD, community based organizations, the county behavioral health, they're out there every week, the same faces, the same groups, going to encampments, going to these different areas, engaging our and shelter population, so that they can build those bridges of trust and rapport so that again, those individuals who are unsheltered, they can reach out for a hand up for help and we'll be able to provide that assistance and take them to that next step.

Caroleta: So and these shelters are do they get tested or anything before they like for drugs or any type of addiction or they're just allowed to go in no matter what.

Lincoln: Each shelter has different protocols, different requirements. And so with the low barriers shelter expansion, however, you don't have to be sober to take shelter. You can't use drugs while you're there. But again, it's about eliminating as many barriers as possible to get people from where they're at, you know, under a bridge or on the street into more of a safe and secure environment so that we can connect them with case management and services and then assess it so that they can get the help that they need. Our shelter expansion at Stockton Shelter for the Homeless is going to include a navigation center. And essentially what that would do is serve as a triage point for our unsheltered residents to better understand their needs and then aligning with the right resources.

Megan: Something else that I was reading about the Saint Mary's Dining Hall offers that I think a lot of people aren't familiar with. I hadn't heard about it until I read about it. It's like an alternate court system, like homeless court. What is that?

Lincoln: So what's unique about San Joaquin County is that we have what's called collaborative courts. And so it's actually a program through the court system in Seattle, King County. So, you know, instead of criminalizing homeless because it's not a crime to be homeless. And again, the whole purpose is to get people back on their feet. However, if you are unsheltered and maybe you made the wrong choice and you've broken the law, we have what's called that collaborative core homeless court, where there's accountability and we're connecting those individuals with the resources in a program, in a plan so that they can be rehabilitated, get back on their feet and be able to go back into the community and be productive and give back. And so it's a very, very innovative approach. You know, we're one of the few counties that have that service in that opportunity. And we really as a county, we pride ourselves with that because, again, this about getting people help. This is about getting them back on their feet. One of the things that many people don't know about me is homelessness has impacted me personally as and this is before I became mayor, not that I was homeless myself, but my father was homeless for a while and this was during my teenage years. And I was raised by my stepdad. But my biological father, he, you know, he was the one that was homeless and I hadn't seen him for years. And I just got done playing basketball at Lincoln High School. And my mom and I stop at a store just to pick up a few things. And as I'm walking in, this gentleman says, "yo, man, you have a dollar." And I looked at him and it was my dad that I hadn't seen. And I, you know, I had to tell him no at that time. And I walked out when Mom and I went into the store and I walked out and I, I said bye to him. I told him that I loved him and, you know, he will tell you. And he's told me this because he knew what he was going to do with that dollar, that I'd given him. And so, you know, following that, he made some poor choices. He was held accountable. You know, from a law standpoint. But while he was in his last two years in jail, you know, he just, he got his life together. He got his life right. And when he got out of jail, he committed his life to giving back to the community and at risk youth, what he could never give me. And I'm thankful for that because I don't hold that against him, you know, my father not being a part of my life growing up. It made him making the decisions that he made. I don't hold that against him. I forgave him a long time ago. But I tell people there's nothing more that a son in my situation could ask for is the fact that his father could give other young people what he could never give me. And when I walk in throughout this community, when I interact with people, they come up to me and they tell me, people young and old, because he also sponsors other adults through the AA. And they come up to me all the time and they say, Oh, you're Kevin Lincoln's son, because his name is Kevin Lincoln too. And I said, Yeah, oh man, you had such a great guy, right? So my whole point was sharing that story is, is our present circumstances in life should not define us. Okay? There's opportunities for us to make changes and it isn't a matter of how young you are. Does it matter how old you are? We have the ability to control our destiny. And what I would tell the community and the residents of Stockton, whether you're unsheltered right now, whether you have everything that you wished for, is look for ways to just make a 1% improvement in your life so that you can make a difference in somebody else's life and use your past experiences, the struggles, the setbacks to really prepare. Use them as a catalyst to propel you forward. And in effect, once you make it through that difficult season in your life, go back in and serve the community in that area, because nobody can relate to other people in that area like you will be able to. And that's what I that's what I'm thankful for my dad doing, and that's what he modeled for me. And so even today, even though he didn't raise me, I'm still learning for him, learning from him. And it really feels me to give back to our city and to serve our community the best I can.

Caroleta: So since your father was homeless, when you were a youth, is that why you treat homelessness not as like a bad thing, but as something that we can change together? We don't look at them as bad, but we give them these things and maybe they'll get better. Is that why you look at that way? Do you know how some people look at it? Like homeless is like bad and the people need to go. But you're looking at it as give them AA courses, give them mental health courses, give them all these things. Is that why you look at it that way?

Lincoln: You said it, you a key phrase, we can change things together.

Caroleta: Right

Lincoln: And that's the absolute truth. Because what we have to remember is that every person that's homeless has a story. They are their unique story and every story is important. So we have to see people for who they are and we have to see the value in them. Because if we see the value in them and we take that approach by putting the individual first, not the problem first, but putting the individual first, then maybe they could begin to trust. Maybe they could begin to see the value in themselves and in and accept their help and take the next step towards healing. Now, don't get me wrong, homelessness is a blight in our community, it's a quality of life issue. It is for every resident in Stockton, for our families, for our business. It's important that, you know, we understand that there is a level of accountability as well. You can't be unsheltered and break the law and not expect to be held accountable for. Right. Because, you know, there's nothing more that I want as a father is for families in our communities to be able to take their kids and their families and their children to the park and not have to worry about, you know, experience seeing or seeing something that they shouldn't see right as a result of it, an encampment or whatever the situation might be. And so we are working very hard as well as, the city, to make sure that we protect our critical infrastructure while we are providing the necessary services for our unsheltered population.

Caroleta: Is there anything the city of Stockton has coming through the pipeline that is going to help homeless crisis or humanitarian crisis?

Lincoln: Absolutely. So one of them, one of the big things is a collaboration with San Joaquin County, where we're looking at 6.5 million being allocated from the county to the city and the city will be able to take that \$6.5 million and distribute that to organizations who are looking to expand our low barrier shelter capacity. So that's big. And what the city of Stockton is going to do in that partnership is we're going to provide operate some of the operational funding as well to get these programs going with these organizations against Stockton Shelter for the Homeless is in the middle of a shelter expansion right now of approximately 180 beds and to include a navigation center and Gospel Center Rescue Mission is also expanding another 178 beds. Me, myself as mayor, I'm advocating at the state and federal level regarding funding for our homeless programs and projects that we have in place now in what we're looking forward to in the future. So this is an all hands on deck know type of situation. There's a lot, and that's just naming a few of the things that we currently have in motion that are tangible for the public to see and should make an impact in mitigating homelessness. Our community moving forward again, the affordable housing expansion projects that we have in place with our affordable housing developers is another key because that's more permanent supportive housing. And so again, homelessness is complex. It takes a multifaceted approach and that's what we're committed to.

Caroleta: Okay. So we have our last question. And I want to know, or we want to know, what we can do as individuals to help the humanitarian crisis?

Lincoln: What we can all do, individuals to help the humanitarian crisis. Regarding homelessness in Stockton and San Joaquin County, we can volunteer to serve and volunteer to give to those organizations who are making an impact within the city of Stockton and San Joaquin County in the area of homelessness. Because they have the system, they have programs, they have the resources in place, but they need the community to come in and partner with them so that they can sustain what they're doing out in the community. Also, we can all volunteer with the city of Stockton. We have a Clean City initiative where we focus on reducing the blight through trash and debris, picking up trash and debris throughout our community over this past year. And so in 2022, we were able to pick up upwards of 2.1 million pounds of trash and debris from this from the streets of Stockton through our Clean City initiative. So this in the city of Stockton, quality of life issues very, very seriously. And that's a priority of mine and our entire council. And so but we need the community, you know, to join in as well, because we also have beautification projects as a result, as a part of our Clean City initiatives, where, you know, we're painting facilities, public facilities and helping with some rehabilitation projects for our parks, public spaces.

Megan: I always see these projects on the news, like after they happen, where do we go so that we can find out ahead of time? And so I sign up or know where to be.

Lincoln: Well you can visit my website. Stocktonmayor.org, visit the city of Stockton's website search Clean City Initiative. You can register with what we call Ask Stockton through the City of Stockton website or my website Stockton Mayor Talk. You could follow me on social media. We put information out on a regular basis. There's a host of events and again this opportunities like this discussing critical issues and concerns impacting our community. You know DMedia you guys do a great job in this 209 Talk that we had here this is an incredible opportunity to get the word out there you know and provide those links right? And again, we want to just keep chipping away you know, we want to be consistent with onboarding more and more people, you know, to be a part of the change and making a difference. And again, together we can make this thing happen.

Caroleta: We can change Stockton.

Lincoln: That's right, we are.

Caroleta: So thank you for coming in. That was a nice conversation.

Megan: Thank you.

Lincoln: Thank you. No, thank you. The entire team. Yeah. You guys are all a blessing to our entire city. So keep up the great work.

Outro: 209 Talk has been a production of KWDC 93.5 LPFM Delta College Radio. This program is made possible by listeners like you. Programing is produced by the students, staff and faculty of San Joaquin Delta College's Digital media Department. It is supported by the Delta College, Department of Arts, Humanities and Multimedia, the Career Technical, Education and Workforce Development Office and the State of California this is a collaboration with the city of Stockton
