

VALLEY LAWYER

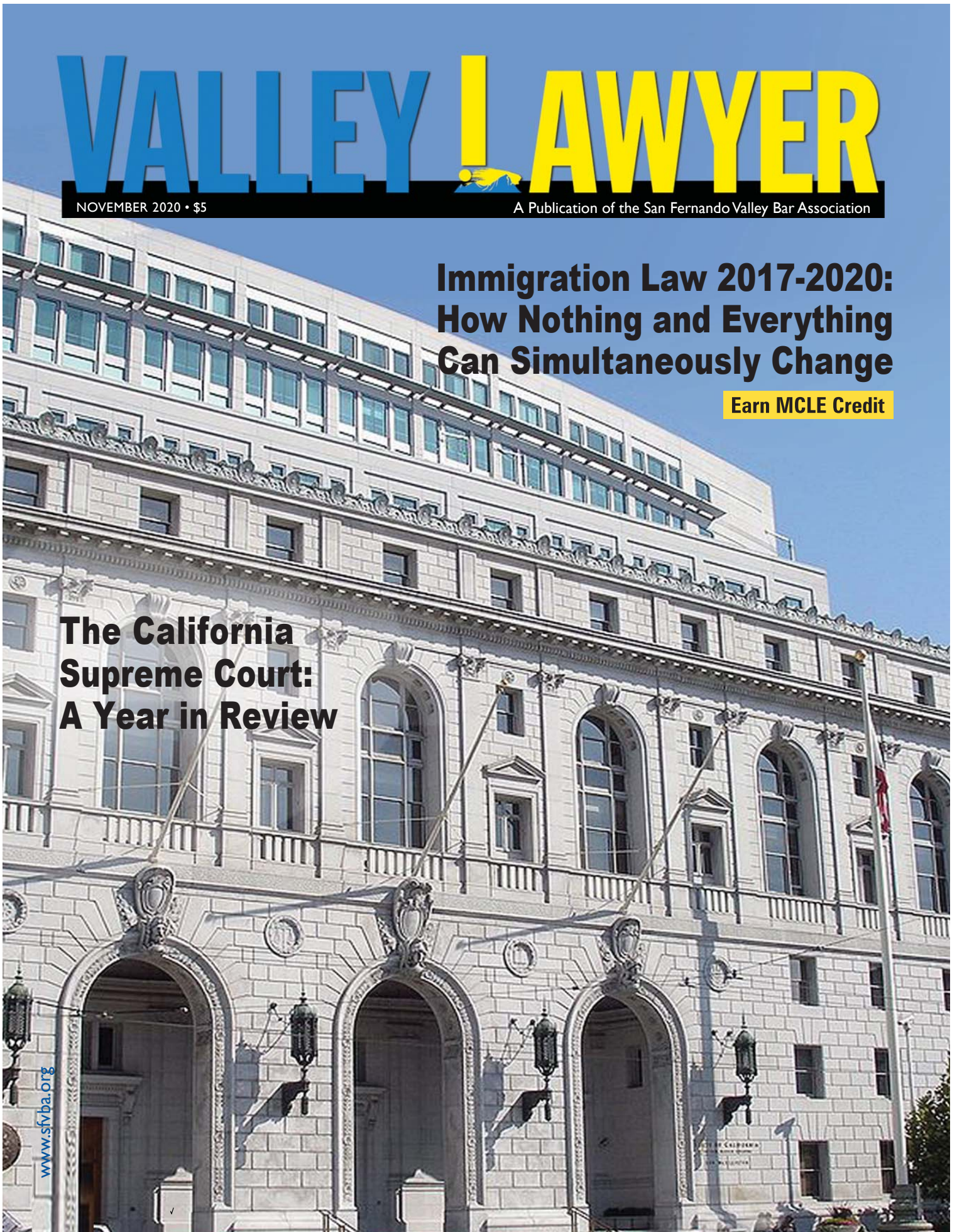
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Homelessness: Addressing a Human Need

AT THE OCTOBER 21 VCLF board meeting, we were joined by three champions for building communities that are humane and caring for all their residents.

We at the Valley Community Legal Foundation are exploring the various ways that we can support these efforts to better our community.

I am a member of Congregation Or Ami in Calabasas and have spent some time traveling cross-country filming and interviewing people experiencing homelessness.

At a recent meeting, I had the opportunity to introduce Or Ami Rabbi Julia Weisz, Pastor Kathy Huck and community leader Steve Keleman, who presented the challenges facing the Valley’s unhoused community and how our community and governmental agencies are working together to facilitate the transitioning of unhoused individuals to both temporary and permanent residences.

Rabbi Weisz leads the social justice committee called Sukkat Shalom, literally “the dwelling of peace,” while Pastor Huck is the founder and Executive Director of About My Father’s Business Homeless Outreach Ministry (AMFB), and Steve Keleman actively participates in both organizations.

At the meeting, they shared how they, together with the members of their respective organizations, work tirelessly to advocate for dignity and humanity of persons experiencing homelessness.

The AFMB primarily serves Los Angeles City Council Districts 3 and 12, which include the Valley communities of

Chatsworth, Canoga Park, West Hills and Woodland Hills with volunteers who provide for the unhoused’s immediate needs with loving compassion—food and water, tents, sleeping bags, seasonal clothing, and personal hygiene and sanitation supplies.

While risking COVID-19, it is critical for the unhoused to learn how to protect themselves and others in the community. The AMFB addresses those needs by providing personal protective equipment, information, and resources.

Rabbi Weisz underscored the critical need to solve the problem of housing at its source and transition these individuals from their tents and blankets and their temporary existences, to permanent supportive housing with social work services and job training.

That, she shared, would diminish or perhaps even eliminate many of the resulting challenges of living on the streets.

Examples of current projects including holding drives within the

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Valley community to collect and distribute the basic necessities of life, funding and locating shower/bath/laundry units, working with state and local representatives and community agencies to find properties for constructing temporary or permanent housing.

For example, as an interim step, a Sukkat Shalom team member—a real estate developer—recently built yurt-like popup structures, that are more sturdy, protective, safe and secure than tents or cardboard boxes. Six are now housing individuals who, previously, had been living on the streets.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that any permanent housing needs to be integrated into the greater community, while the planning process must involve input from and coordination with the members of the already-established community.

Steve Keleman summed up our combined efforts when he said that there is a “hole that needs to be filled...a human need to be satisfied.” 

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