

# MARGARET WILLIS

Human Services Executive

Maui County  
Department of Management  
Via email: MDOffice@mauicounty.gov

October 20, 2025

RE: Director of the Department of Human Concerns - Application

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To Whom it Does Concern:

Please accept this letter as my application for the position of Director of the Department of Human Concerns. It is my hope that you will find my extensive experience and proven ability to lead teams to deliver exceptional service to vulnerable populations worthy of consideration alongside candidate with current ties to the county and community. If selected, my first priority will be to actively engage in individual conversations with County staff, representatives from elected offices, service providers, and community stakeholders including people who utilize county-funded programs and their families/care givers to allow their perspectives to shape my approach to the duties of the Director. I would be honored to lead the department to fully realize the strategies laid out in the 2024 Recommendations to Address Homelessness in Maui Country report.

For over 23 years, I have been designing and implementing innovative programs to help people who are unhoused, seniors and people with disabilities to secure and maintain stable housing, have access to food, healthcare and behavioral health treatment, and improve their quality of life. My approach is based on collaboration, coordination and compassion – with clients needs firmly at the center. The past 15 years as a government employee has also taught me how to balance political/community/client/staff needs in a highly-charged environment of lawsuits, political in-fighting and resident anger at the state of the homeless services system in LA.

The skills I acquired earning a bachelor's degree in communication from the University of Texas at Austin have contributed to my success as a grant writer, public speaker and author of numerous staff reports. My career in human services began as a grants manager at a homeless services non-profit, where I quickly became fluent in HUD (U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development), managing multiple Continuum of Care, Community Services Block Grant and what were then Emergency Shelter Grant (now Emergency Solutions Grant) contracts. Managing grants and writing proposals honed my expertise in contract compliance, program operations, program outcomes, staffing and budgeting. When proposals were

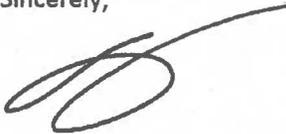
successful, I was tapped to implement the programs I had designed. During my tenure at the non-profit, I served as executive director of two subsidiary agencies, expanded the agency to cities outside of LA County and California and launched a technical assistance division to help other communities replicate our models.

I left non-profit work to explore the homeless services system “upstream” and use my program knowledge to inform local homeless policies in a high-profile beach city. For over ten years, I led a team that oversaw programs and policies for unhoused people, seniors and people with disabilities, including managing the Request for Proposal process for over \$4.5m in grants to serve those populations. I managed the homeless point-in-time count which our jurisdiction choose to conduct annually, recruiting over 250 volunteers, working with various departments on necessary logistics, and presented the findings each year to city council. I worked closely with first responders to coordinate responses to calls for service to vulnerable residents, acted as liaison to the Social Services Commission, the Commission for the Senior Community and the Disability Commission.

When an opportunity arose to join LA County Health Service’s Housing for Health division, I accepted the challenge to right-size a program that was facing a 30% funding reduction. By leveraging existing services provided outside of my program and creating efficiencies in the program operations, I was able cut the operations budget by \$10m while preserving services to clients and 110 staff positions. The program continues to achieve an 88% success rate in securing Social Security Disability awards – more than twice the 35% national average.

As a Japanese-American visiting Hawaii, I always enjoy the unique nisei culture that is distinct from that of the mainland. This year I had the great pleasure to join thousands of residents at the opening day of the return of the Maui County Fair. The mood was jubilant and I enjoyed talking to families, comparing notes about the wonderful array of food options, supporting local businesses, and chatting with county staff at the expo. It was here that I learned of the employment opportunity that had just been posted. It is with deep humility that I submit this application to become a part of this vibrant, resilient community.

Sincerely,



Margaret “Maggie” Willis

Attachments:

- A. Resume
- B. Letter of Reference – Corri Plank
- C. Letter of Reference – Aliya Buttar
- D. Letter of Reference – Setareh Yavari

# Margaret Willis

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23 Years as a Private and Public Social Services Management Professional  
Grants Managements, Policy & Program Design and Implementation  
Homelessness and Homeless Prevention for Vulnerable Populations

## **Education:**

Bachelor of Science, Communications - University of Texas at Austin, 1992

## **Qualifications:**

Executive Management - Well versed in building and leading highly successful teams within both public and private nonprofit organizations through difficult transitions and growth. Able to assess organizational strengths and challenges, develop effective plans for stability and growth, analyze and develop budgets and cash flow projections, provide encouragement to staff, and ensure program quality. Experienced in board development and board engagement. Able to effectively represent the agency's mission and goals to diverse audiences.

Program Development - Passionate designer of new interventions and programs to bring accessible and effective services to vulnerable populations. Experience in working with diverse stakeholders to design facilities and programs that can meet the needs of vulnerable populations while addressing community concerns.

Grants Management - Extensive experience in both grant writing and grants management as both a grantee and grantor. Experience as a grantee in managing dozens of public (federal, state, local government) and private grants, from proposal development and program implementation to grant reporting and contract compliance. Experience as a grantor in managing competitive grant procedures from developing Requests for Proposals to reviewing, evaluating and awarding grants, as well as contract negotiations, grant monitoring and technical assistance to build grantee capacity.

Strategic Planning - Adept in developing and executing strategic plans in the areas of social service program delivery and community engagement. Proven collaborator adept at bringing together stakeholders to co-design solutions that incorporate the voices and needs of people with lived homeless experience, consumers of social services, service providers, elected officials and community groups.

Trusted Partner - Demonstrated ability to forge productive working relationships with internal and external partners to advance organizational priorities and achieve goals. Widely viewed as a thoughtful subject matter expert and a trustworthy partner for collaboration.

Engaging Communicator - Accomplished speaker and writer, capable of conversing with people about complex and contentious issues in both informal and formal settings. Extensive experience drafting inter-departmental staff reports and presentations to city council and commissions. Excellent presentation skills honed as speaker at national and regional conferences (including National Alliance to End Homelessness), city council meetings, press briefings and community meetings.

**Work Experience:**

2023-Present. Los Angeles County Dept. of Health Services

*Director, Countywide Benefits Entitlement Services Team (CBEST), Housing for Health*  
Direct a \$20 million program and team of 120 staff aiding over 5,000 disabled or elderly individuals a year to apply for Social Security Disability Insurance, Social Security Supplemental Income, and California Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants benefits. Successfully led team through reorganization necessitated by a 30% operational funding reduction while maintaining an 86% award rate at final determination for benefits applicants and reducing the time between program enrollment and application submittal. As part of the Housing for Health executive leadership team, acting as key thought partner and workgroup leader in the implementation planning process to create the new county Dept. of Homeless Services and Housing to be operational January 1, 2026. Recognized by L.A. County Quality and Productivity Commission for special commission "Mega Million" award in 2025 for efficiency and cost avoidance strategies that saved the county over \$13million.

2010 - 2023. City of Santa Monica

*Housing & Human Services Administrator (2013 - 2023); Sr. Analyst (2010-2013)*  
Provide subject matter expertise to City management and lead policy and programming for vulnerable populations with a focus on people experiencing homelessness, seniors and people with disabilities. Supervise team that managed over \$3 million in contracts and grants annually for social services. Key participant in drafting Request for Proposal for \$8 million Human Services Grants Program. Designed and implemented innovative programs to address and prevent homelessness, including pandemic relief programs and multi-disciplinary homeless outreach programs. Responsible for drafting communication to Council including informal updates and formal staff reports, as well as making presentations to Council on complex and contentious issues. Liaison to multiple city commissions, including Social Services Commission, Commission for the Senior Community, and Disabilities Commission.

2002 - 2010. PATH (People Assisting the Homeless)

*Managing Partner, PATH Partners (2007 - 2010); Executive Director, PATH ACHIEVE Glendale (2006 - 2007); Grant Director, Chief Development Officer, Associate Executive Director (2002 - 2005).*

Oversaw the development of new management and consulting department, PATH Partners Associates that provided technical assistance to PATH Partners agencies and other communities to develop and improve services to people experiencing homelessness. Secured over \$1 million in new contracts to replicate PATH programs in new communities, launching the growth of PATH into a national organization that continues today. Led successful transition of \$1.5 million homeless day center and shelter from City of Glendale to PATH, creating a new subsidiary agency including building a new board of directors and addressing funding gaps. Established strong community and organizational foundation upon which current stand-alone non-profit Ascencia was built. As Chief Development Officer, managed events and over 25 grants to support \$3.8 million agency budget. Responsible for strategic fund-development planning to diversify and expand resources for new and existing programs; facilitated the creation of collaborative partnerships for program expansion and fund development; worked with community stakeholders to advocate for service support and responsible public policy regarding the homeless and poor; supervised program staff and program operations, including contract compliance and achievement of programmatic goals.

**Community Involvement:**

Project New Hope, Board Member, Secretary 2016 - present  
Glendale Sunrise Rotary Club, Secretary 2006 - 2010  
Pico Union Neighborhood Council - 2005-2006

**Letters of Reference (Attached):**

Corri Plank, colleague  
Aliya Buttar, former direct report  
Setareh Yavari, former supervisor

**Additional References:**

- Richard Bloom, (former) Mayor of Santa Monica and (former) California Assemblymember, [REDACTED]
- David Canavan, Owner, Canavan Associates, [REDACTED], [REDACTED]
- Brigitte Tweddell, Executive Director, Project New Hope, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**Media:**

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation:

LA Times

LA County Productivity and Quality Awards 2025

Santa Monica City Council Meeting - Nov 28, 2017 Item 8A Homeless Update

Oct. 6, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in strong support of the candidacy of Maggie Willis to serve as the Maui County Director of Human Concerns. I had the honor of working with Maggie for more than a decade as a treasured and trusted colleague working on issues related to homelessness, mental health, substance abuse treatment, housing and poverty.

While we worked for different cities, we were part of several working groups as part of our regional Council of Governments (COG), specifically on the Westside Cities COG Homeless Working Group, where Maggie was a key voice of experience and a truly collaborative partner. Additionally, I was able to work with Maggie, representing municipal concerns, in the work to create the homeless strategies for Los Angeles County.

From her experience working for non-profit service providers, an influential municipality and now for the largest county government in the United States, Maggie understands how systems work and, also importantly, how some don't. Her deep knowledge, as well as her commitment to those who access government services, make her an ideal candidate for this position.

Maggie is thoughtful in all aspects of her work, is a smart and visionary strategic planner and responsibly leveraged vital resources for the good of the community. She has been diligent and forthright in her work with various stakeholders from unhoused community members, residents, first responders, non-profit service providers, and elected and appointed officials.

In my previous roles, I had the opportunity to work with many municipalities and county departments. Quite simply, Maggie Willis is one of the finest public servants I had the pleasure of working with. The Los Angeles region's loss would most definitely be Maui County's gain.

Sincerely,



Corri Planck  
Former Human Services Manager, City of West Hollywood  
Managing Partner, Advocacy Marketing Group

October 15, 2025

Dear County of Maui Hiring Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I recommend **Margaret (Maggie) Willis** for the position of **Director of Human Concerns**. I first met Maggie in 2019 at the City of Santa Monica when I joined her team as a Senior Human Services Analyst. From the start, Maggie stood out as a leader who combines compassion, vision, and innovation. She invests deeply in her team's professional growth and models how to navigate complex change with steadiness and creativity.

When I began working with Maggie, I was hardworking but reserved, often hesitant to step into leadership roles. Maggie immediately recognized my potential and provided intentional coaching to help me develop my voice and confidence. She encouraged me to take on visible opportunities such as presenting to the City Council and leading the annual homeless count. With her mentorship, I grew into a more confident leader; so much so that when Maggie advanced to a new role, I successfully stepped into her position during an especially challenging period.

Maggie's leadership shone particularly during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our team faced unprecedented challenges—multiple emergency response projects were launched while the City experienced a 30% workforce reduction. Maggie's transparency, empathy, and strategic lens made an enormous difference. She created an environment where staff felt supported and motivated despite the uncertainty.

Across the Los Angeles County service community, Maggie is known as an innovative force and a catalyst for positive change. During my time working with her, I saw firsthand how her ability to think ahead and craft creative solutions inspired confidence and perseverance, even in the most challenging circumstances. For example, when the City of Santa Monica faced the end of rent moratoria and dwindling rental assistance funds after the pandemic, Maggie anticipated the crisis and led a thoughtful, multi-pronged strategy: stretching existing funds, refining partnerships with housing programs, and building new collaborations within the service provider network. What could have been a discouraging moment became one of collective problem-solving and tangible progress.

On a personal note, Maggie is a joy to work with. She is approachable, grounded, and inspiring. She brings excellence to everything she does and elevates those around her. I wholeheartedly recommend her for the position of Director of Human Concerns.

Sincerely,

*Aliya Buttar*

Aliya Buttar  
Staff Analyst  
Los Angeles County, Department of Public Health



Setareh Yavari  
Contracts & Compliance Chief  
Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

October 17, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I'm writing to strongly recommend Ms. Margaret Willis for the position of Director of Human Concerns. For 13 years, I supervised Margaret in the City of Santa Monica, where she played a central role in advancing the City's work on homelessness, aging, and disability services. She served as Administrator of Homelessness, Prevention and Intervention Services (HPI), the section responsible for the City's work on homelessness, senior services, and disability access and support. Her leadership, dedication, and ability to navigate complex systems made her an essential part of our department's success.

Margaret led several key strategic initiatives that shaped the direction of our work and strengthened service delivery across the city. These included the Homeless Continuum of Care Analysis and Strategic Plan, Behavioral Health Strategic Plan, and the Senior and Disability Action Plan. She was also a core contributor to the Community Needs Assessment, which guided how we structured and allocated grant funding for services to vulnerable populations. These efforts directly informed the City's budget decisions, helped secure additional funding, and laid the groundwork for new services.

In the area of housing, Margaret brought creative and bold thinking to both permanent supportive housing and temporary shelter strategies, always mindful of the interplay between housing, health, mobility, and social supports. Further, she collaborated with the Dept. of Transportation to design mobility plans for seniors and persons with disabilities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Margaret's leadership as a member of the Emergency Operations Center team was indispensable. She supported the department's emergency response efforts to stand up a food pantry model, coordinate distribution of food, medicine, and essential goods – particularly for our most vulnerable populations (homeless individuals, seniors, people with disabilities), and led a team to make wellness calls to every known senior in the city. She did this while balancing logistical constraints, funding uncertainties, staff burnout, and evolving public health mandates. Her calm under pressure and capacity to pivot when needed were remarkable.

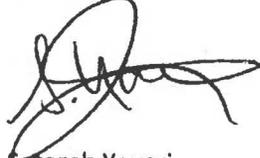
Margaret regularly presented to Santa Monica's City Council and staffed key commissions, helping shape policy discussions on homelessness, veterans affairs, behavioral health, and housing. She's skilled at translating complex policy and data into accessible, compelling narratives for elected officials, community members, and the media. Margaret understood the tensions and competing priorities that come with public service and consistently approached her work with integrity, transparency, and respect.

In addition to her policy and public-facing roles, Margaret worked across departments and sectors, including the City Attorney's Office, Police and Fire Departments, local hospitals, nonprofit providers, the County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, and state and federal partners. Her ability to align multiple agencies and organizations toward shared goals helped reduce fragmentation and improve coordination across systems. Margaret is skilled at navigating organizational complexity, building partnerships, and creating internal structures that support effective service delivery.

Margaret also played a key role in strengthening interdepartmental and cross-sector collaboration. She worked closely with the City Attorney's Office, public safety departments, local hospitals, nonprofit providers, the County Board of Supervisors, and regional and federal partners to improve coordination and align efforts. She has a strong ability to navigate organizational complexity, bring partners to the table, and build internal structures that support more effective and accountable service delivery.

Margaret brings not only the leadership experience this role calls for, including the ability to develop and coordinate programs that address complex human needs, but also the kind of steady, principled leadership that builds trust, promotes accountability, and centers the needs of the community. Based on the depth of experience I witnessed during our years working together, I'm confident she would be an exceptional asset to the County of Maui. I hope you'll give her strong consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Yavari', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Setareh Yavari