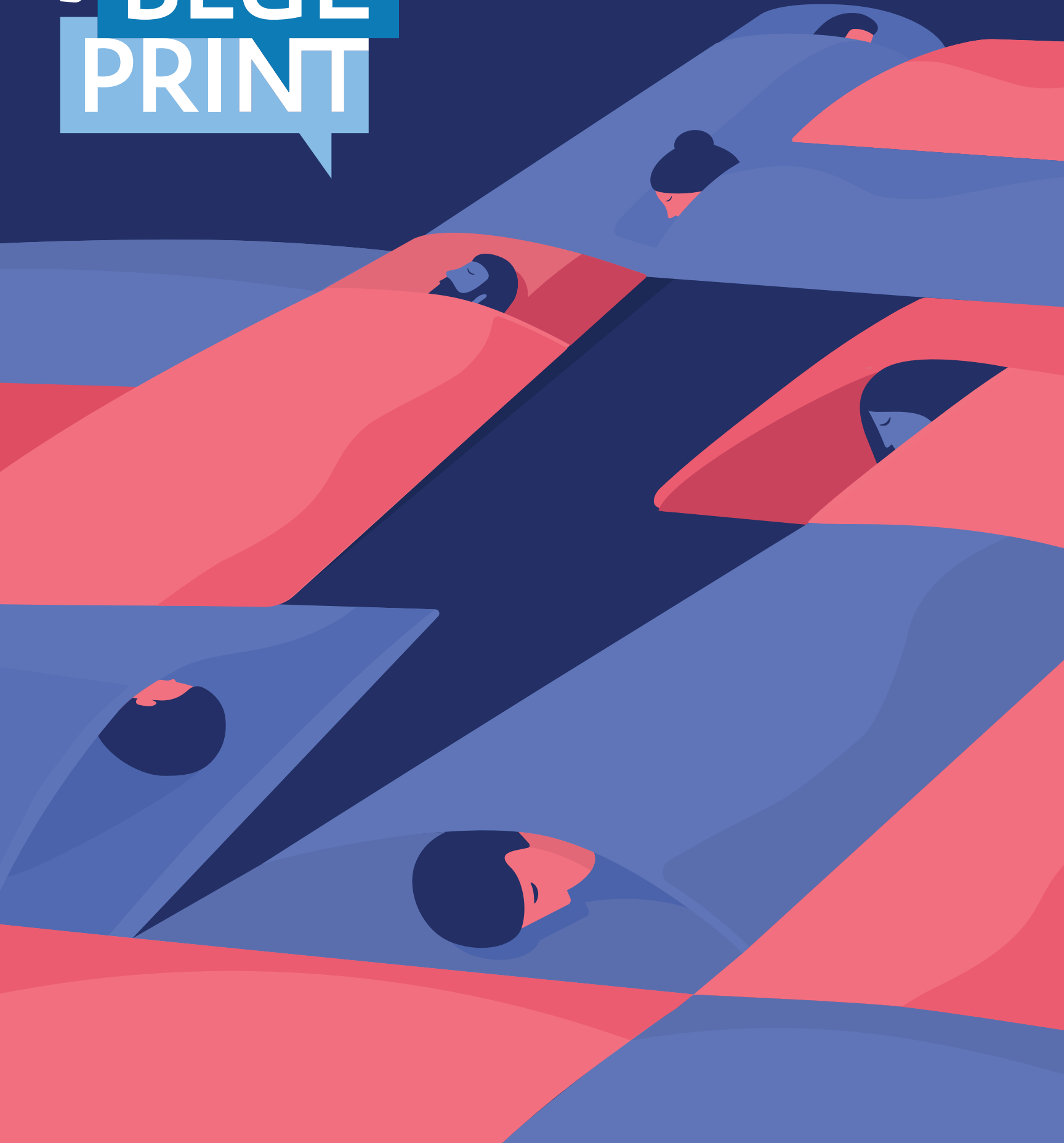


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ISSUE 19 / SPRING 2024
DESIGNS FOR A NEW CALIFORNIA
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PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND UCLA EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

THE SHAME OF LOS ANGELES

HOUSING THIS CITY'S HOMELESS

EDITOR'S NOTE

BLUEPRINT

A magazine of research, policy, Los Angeles and California

HOW DOES ONE BEGIN TO COMPREHEND THE CRISIS OF HOMELESSNESS in modern America, especially in Los Angeles? It is a crisis of poverty and inequality, of predation and ignorance. It is a health crisis and a human crisis, a blight, a threat and a tragedy. It is at once invisible and painfully present, the unhoused person camped out of sight, the encampment beneath the freeway overpass.

No one who lives or works in Los Angeles is unaware of this crisis, and yet it grows, year after year. Today, the number of people without homes in the city of Los Angeles is larger than the population of a midsize city. The number of *unhoused* people in Los Angeles County is greater than the number of *all* people who live in Palo Alto, where that city's richest resident has enough money to pay the rent for every homeless person in Los Angeles County for more than 60 years.

Numbers are important in considering the implications of this crisis. They help policymakers and others understand its dimensions and narrow the range of its solutions — this many people without housing cannot simply be moved, for instance.

But important, too, are the intimate particulars of this crisis. How does a young boy or girl without a home secure an education? What does a person who lacks an address do to receive government assistance or treatment for a flu? One person may be homeless because she lost a job. Another person may become homeless because of addiction. Still another may become addicted because of homelessness. The causes and experiences of those without homes must inform the policies intended to help them.

One solution — rental assistance, say — may be all that one person needs, while the same solution might fall far short of what another requires to regain stability.

The search for meaningful progress on these questions is undermined by preconceptions and prejudices. Those who think of a homeless person

as a hobo or a bum miss the reality of life on Los Angeles streets. This city's vast population of unhoused people includes thousands of women and children, young men and people who work. The causes of their circumstances include addiction, yes, but also unemployment and the high cost of housing. Many people have jobs but cannot afford the deposit needed to secure an apartment, so they live in cars or shelters.

To her credit, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass has taken the brave — some might say foolish — step of placing her reputation and legacy on the line with this issue. She has vowed not just to make token humanitarian gestures but also to significantly affect the lives of those who live without reliable housing.

Hers is a call to moral clarity, a reminder that this condition is a stain on the society that tolerates or adjusts to it. But if the call is moral, the challenge is practical. What, if anything, will actually alleviate this crisis?

Easing it must start with clear thinking, with the eradication of false or antiquated ideas. And it must depend on flexibility, the sharp recognition that a single solution will not make this problem go away.

What will? That's the question. With this issue, *Blueprint* looks at those who are asking it and fashioning answers that may eventually produce significant, lasting results; that may reduce suffering, protect public safety, save lives and deliver peace to troubled souls.



JIM NEWTON
Editor-in-chief, *Blueprint*

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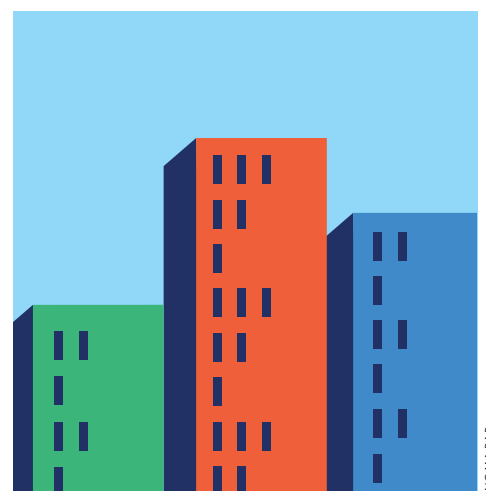
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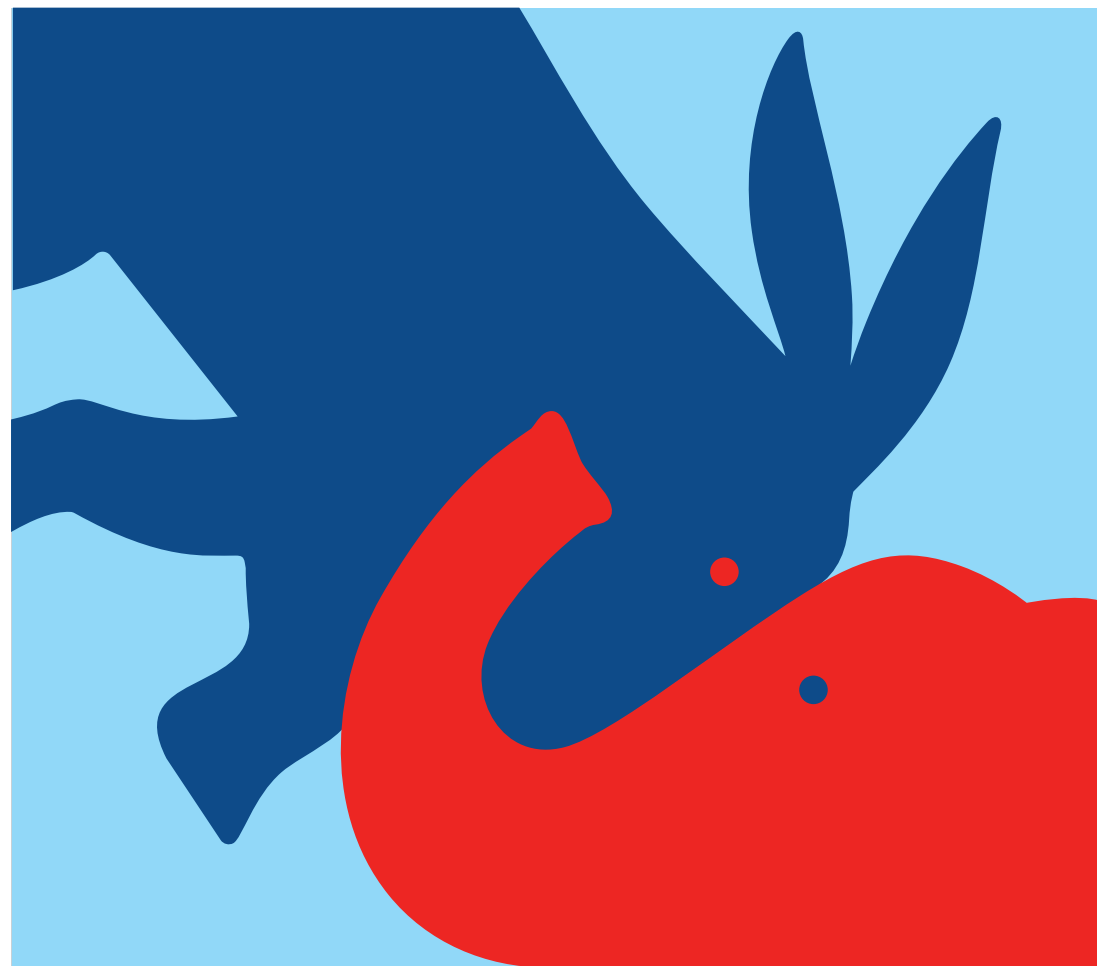
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COVER ILLUSTRATION BY NOMA BAR

LOS ANGELES



NOMA BAR

CALIFORNIA'S GOP

It can't win — and everyone loses

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY OF CALIFORNIA GAVE THIS state the initiative, referendum and recall. Its governors secured tax increases and gun control and expanded abortion rights. One Republican governor looked forward to welcoming 10,000 new immigrants every Monday; another championed efforts to combat climate change. That same party now has a new role in the life of the nation's biggest state: It has become a foil for Democrats.

That's not good news for California. It's not even good news for Democrats, whose one-party rule grows ever more calcified in the absence of meaningful debate. But it is where we are.

Two races in this election cycle are highlighting that reality. In the campaigns for district attorney of Los Angeles and to replace Dianne Feinstein in the United States Senate, conservative candidates are in runoffs, and they are helping to pave the path to victory for Democrats.

At the state level, U.S. Rep. Adam Schiff created the contest he wanted. In the primary, he artfully advertised for Republican Steve Garvey, who has declined to state whom he is supporting for president and who responds to almost all questions by insisting he will bring "common sense" and "compassion" to Washington. It cost Schiff millions to get Garvey this far, but the return on that investment is that Schiff now faces a hapless competitor.

In Los Angeles, meanwhile, incumbent District Attorney George Gascón did not engineer his runoff as Schiff did his, but he, too, got the one he wanted. For Gascón, the real political threat was posed by Democratic candidates to his right. They threatened to isolate him on the left and sweep the broad center of a liberal area, leaving Gascón with a narrow band of progressives and an approval rating — somewhere around 20% — that would give Joe Biden a heart attack.

Instead, Gascón got the opponent he most hoped for: former federal prosecutor Nathan Hochman, whose sizable war chest and hysterical characterizations of Los Angeles as a city and county at the edge of chaos were enough to draw him close to 20% of the vote.

"THE REPUBLICAN PARTY HAS SLIPPED AWAY FROM THAT SUCCESSFUL HISTORY AND POSITIONED ITSELF INCREASINGLY OUT OF STEP WITH MOST CALIFORNIANS."

Hochman, who ran two years ago as a Republican for attorney general, now faces the same problem that Garvey does. His electorate has enough Republicans to elbow him into a runoff, but not nearly enough to secure him a victory unless he draws Democrats to his fold.

He has a better lane than Garvey. Hochman is an experienced prosecutor with a message, and he will

temper some of his dystopian rhetoric now that he no longer has to worry about competition from the law-and-order right. But he still faces the fact that he's a recently converted Republican in a part of the world that doesn't have much use for Republicans.

This is fine for Democrats, of course, but it's not great for California. One-party rule narrows debate and alternatives. Whatever one thinks of Garvey, it's discouraging that the idea California Republicans once espoused now can be easily ignored by ruling Democrats.

It wasn't always so. This is the state that gave us Earl Warren, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. They were Republicans who connected with California priorities. They saw the value of environmental protection — Nixon created the EPA — and admired the contributions of immigrants. Reagan raised taxes, supported gun control and expanded abortion rights.

Warren built roads and universities and was willing to increase taxes to invest in the state's future. He liked to say that his job required him to provide for 10,000 new Californians every week. He was elected three times — once, in 1946, as the nominee of both the Republican and Democratic parties.

Tuned to the state's electorate, Republicans dominated for generations. Not until 1962, when Pat Brown beat Nixon, had California ever re-elected a Democratic governor.

But the Republican Party has slipped away from that successful history and positioned itself increasingly out of step with most Californians. This is a state that prizes its environment — a state office building in Sacramento bears the slogan "Bring me men to match my mountains." It is a state that values individual autonomy and hence abortion rights. And it has a long history and relationship with Latin America.

The GOP, under the captive ownership of Donald Trump, has moved away from those positions, and it has moved away from California.

No wonder Trump himself loathes this state. Complaining in the wake of his 2016 victory against Hillary Clinton — has there ever been a sorer winner than Trump? — he alleged that "millions and millions of people" voted illegally in California, denying him a victory here. That's a lie, of course.

Trump has since criticized the state for its efforts to safeguard undocumented immigrants and to combat climate change, among other things. Caught in the familiar tug between support for those policies and support for their party's de facto leaders, state Republicans have mostly tried to bite their tongues, à la Garvey.

That makes them seem cowardly. Indeed, it is evidence of actual cowardice. And trends of declining support for the party have accelerated. Today, California has nearly twice as many registered Democrats as Republicans.

The GOP could find its way back. It could

welcome immigrants, support abortion rights and join the effort to combat climate change (California's last Republican governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, was a leader on climate policies). That would be good for the party, of course, and good for the state, too. Until then, it will put up candidates like Steve Garvey. And lose.

— Jim Newton

STREETLIGHT WEATHER

What L.A.'s lighting says about its history

STROLL LORRAINE, PLYMOUTH OR LUCERNE streets in the neighborhood of Windsor Square. Take a look at the lampposts dotting the parkways. You'll find a curious emblem on their cast-iron, hunter green bases: miniature shields proudly emblazoned with the letters "W/S," like heraldic coats of arms.

"IN A CITY KNOWN FOR ITS HORIZONTALITY, STREETLIGHTS WORK AS GUIDEPOSTS — PROVIDING IDENTITIES TO ROADS THAT CONTINUE FOR MILES."

The lamps you are looking at were custom-designed for the community more than 100 years ago. In fact, they're identical to the images proudly depicted in early 20th century newspaper advertisements touting the neighborhood as a "residential masterpiece," replete

with strict building restrictions, underground utilities and "improvements the most modern, thorough and permanent the skill of man can construct." The design of these ads suggests that the lamps were more than mere amenities. They were emblems of something larger: synecdoches for the good life.

In most American cities, the arrival of electric lighting followed a familiar pattern. It began with news in the papers that a rival city had introduced electric lights — described in grand, celestial terms, like "electric moons" or "artificial suns" or "new urban stars." Fearing a loss of status or face, the not-yet-electrified city had to have them too.

When the modern lights arrived, city leaders installed them first on busy, commercial streets, where they became symbols of civic progress and public safety and invitations to stay out and shop. Elaborate lighting ceremonies, attended by thousands, elicited moments of quiet awe, followed by cheers of ecstatic delirium. Electric light represented the conquest of nature's last frontier: the lawless, impenetrable night.

Los Angeles wasn't the first city to get street lighting; nor was it the last. It doesn't have the most streetlights; nor does it have the brightest. However, L.A. boasts more than 400 different models (more variety than anywhere else in the country) and its own city department (the Los Angeles Bureau of Street Lighting, established in 1925) devoted to keeping them on. Here, more than in any other city, the old designs recall a flavor of civic ambition that is particular to the West.

Take the Broadway Rose, installed in 1919. This ornate post features filigreed torches and ribbons of flowers growing up its shaft. It was commissioned right after San Francisco unveiled its own lamps along Market Street; determined to not be upstaged, Los Angeles even nabbed the same lighting designer. "This is one of the most elaborate jobs of ornamental electroliers



↑ "Urban Light" by artist Chris Burden at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

MICHAEL J. SALTER

[streetlights] ever made on the coast,” gushed the *Los Angeles Times*, “and is a 100 percent home product.”

Or notice the custom-designed lanterns installed along Wilshire Boulevard in 1928, stretching from MacArthur Park to Fairfax Avenue. The edges of the light boxes are ornamented by bare-breasted female figures, like the caryatids supporting temple pillars. When the lights switched on, boosters claimed, Wilshire Boulevard became the brightest street on the West Coast.

But perhaps the best way to appreciate the personality of Angeleno streetlamps is through the smaller residential models ordered by various developers to broadcast the wealth and status of future neighborhoods and their upwardly mobile inhabitants. Like the Lalux 11, a concrete, off-the-shelf model produced by a mysterious L.A.-based manufacturer that no longer exists, the round pedestal, urn-shaped capital and fluted shaft conjure the columns of classical antiquity, but not ones you’ve read about in books. The flutes along the shaft collect at the pedestal like thick dollops of paint, as if the concrete is melting in the sun. They’re pastiches of progressivism and fantasy: neoclassicism on acid.

In a city known for its horizontality, streetlights work as guideposts — providing identities to roads that continue for miles. They also define boundaries on a granular level, more intimate than neighborhoods or streets. These days, we don’t give them much thought — they usually grab our attention when they aren’t working, or when they’re peeking in our windows, uninvited. But if you happen to spot a rusty cast-iron lamppost, there’s a good chance that it will be the oldest object in your field of vision. Older than the road markings. Older than the signs. Older than the buildings. It isn’t an exaggeration, therefore, to say that they anchor us to our history, reminding us of the now faint yet uniquely Southern Californian idea that you can dream up or build or become anything at all, just so long as you own the land.

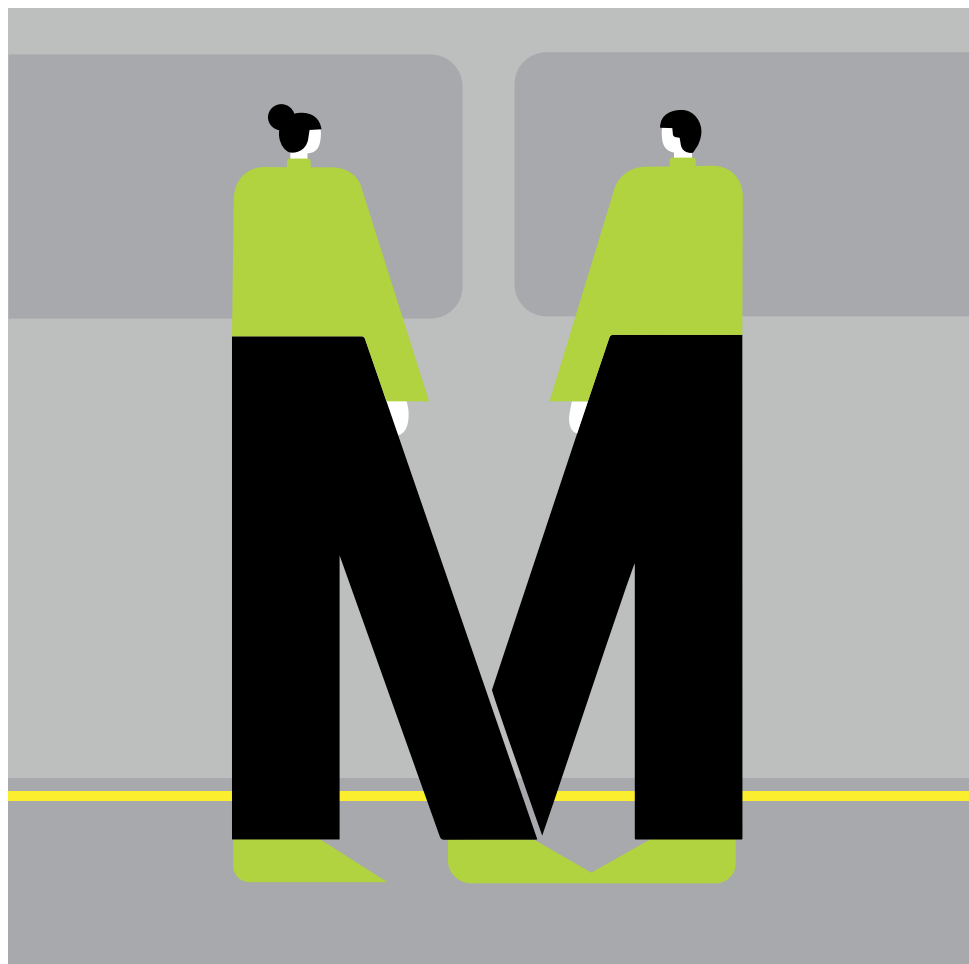
— **India Mandelkern**

AMBASSADORS OF HELP

Metro works to protect the unhoused

“CAN I HELP YOU WITH SOMETHING?” MARTIN

Arenas calls out to a woman wandering through Union Station, her face shifting from confusion to frustration. “Where can I tell my daughter to pick me up?” she asks. Arenas points out two spots on either side of the downtown L.A. transit hub, and the now-relieved woman hurries off.



NOMA BAR

As an L.A. Metro transit ambassador, Arenas, 28, and his partner, Maria Leal, 27, spend a good chunk of their shift greeting passengers, offering guidance and reporting any unusual activity. With their bright green polo shirts or gray jackets labeled “Metro Ambassador, Support Connect Report,” they’re easily identifiable as they toss a friendly “hello” to commuters, check on a howling homeless man or report spilled coffee on a rail car.

During a routine pass through the Westlake/MacArthur Park station, Arenas and Leal spot a semiconscious unhoused man on the floor, gripping a lighter in his right hand. Recognizing signs of a drug overdose, Arenas tries to get a response from the man, who can’t quite sit up but is too restless to lie down. Arenas kneels, speaking in English, then switching to Spanish, as the man falls in and out of consciousness. Leal phones both 911 and their supervisor, while Arenas unclips a Narcan kit from his belt, oblivious of commuters passing by. After the supervisor arrives, Arenas administers Narcan, which is used to reverse an opioid overdose. Minutes later, the man regains consciousness and struggles to his feet, pausing to scoop up his lighter and scraps of aluminum foil from the ground. Paramedics and police appear on the scene, but the man, still unsteady, refuses medical treatment and boards a subway car as the doors begin to close. The entire episode is over in less than 15 minutes.

Just another day for L.A. Metro ambassadors. Transit agencies nationwide are adopting

programs like this as they experiment with ways to address public safety beyond traditional policing. Metro has seen steady ridership increases and a mostly downward trend in serious crimes since March 2023, when 325 unarmed, uniformed ambassadors were deployed — although it is unclear if there is a direct connection. However, in a recent Metro survey, 63% of respondents said seeing an ambassador made them feel safer.

“Safety is not just security or safety from crime, but it’s also the feeling of safety,” said Jennifer Vides, Metro’s chief customer experience officer. “It’s not enough to have a system that is safe. For a customer, it’s important for them to also feel safe.”

Like many transit agencies in the early to mid-2000s, L.A. Metro was concerned about

“SAFETY IS NOT JUST SECURITY OR SAFETY FROM CRIME, BUT IT’S ALSO THE FEELING OF SAFETY.”

declining ridership. Surveys indicated that commuters worried about safety and cleanliness. In 2017, Metro’s governing board voted to increase spending on security to address an increase in homeless people on its transit lines. The following year, Metro partnered with L.A.’s Department of Health Services to work with PATH, a homeless services agency, in assisting the unhoused.

Today Metro has six homeless outreach partners with 24 multidisciplinary teams who cover the entire bus and rail system, seven days a week. “We’ve got people who are outreach workers, peer-support specialists, mental health specialists, substance-use specialists, social workers and some medical personnel,” said Craig Joyce, Metro’s deputy executive officer for homeless initiatives.

But the primary goal, he said, is finding appropriate housing for people sheltering in the transit system. During the first half of this fiscal year, Metro’s outreach team has housed 805 individuals. What makes Metro unusual, Joyce said, is that the agency is “funding our outreach efforts through transportation dollars — operational dollars.”

After George Floyd’s death in 2020 at the hands of Minnesota police and the nationwide protests over excessive policing in communities of color, Metro’s board decided to take things a step farther. Staff was directed to work with community leaders “to re-envision transit safety and community-based approaches to policing.” A framework for the ambassador program was developed in 2021, and the following year, the board authorized up to \$122 million for multiyear partnership contracts with Strive Well-Being and RMI International, which hire the ambassadors.

A proposal to make the pilot program a permanent part of Metro is now under consideration.

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, a distinguished professor of urban planning at UCLA, where she also is the interim dean of the Luskin School of Public Affairs, has studied these types of partnerships and has seen an increase in their number nationwide in recent years. She calls it “a step in the right direction.”

Metro’s partnerships are key to its multilayered approach to safety, which includes homeless outreach and crisis intervention teams, as well as local law enforcement, contract security and Metro Transit security.

Ambassadors must complete an 80-hour pre-deployment program that includes situational awareness, emergency preparedness, CPR and conflict de-escalation training, said Karen Parks, senior director of Metro’s ambassador program, the largest in the country.

Many have life experiences similar to those whom they assist. Arenas said that he was unhoused for more than two years, and Leal said her grandmother was homeless for a brief period. Knowledge of what it’s like to be unhoused, they said, motivates them to help others.

Since October 2022, Parks said, “We have had over 760,000 engagements” with commuters and the homeless. In addition, she said, ambassadors have saved 121 lives, mostly related to drug overdoses, since last spring when Metro added training in the use of Narcan.

It was Narcan that Arenas administered to the man on the floor at the Westlake/MacArthur Park

transit station. After the incident, Arenas and Leal were called back to their base office.

They would have a chance to wind down, file their report and maybe take a lunch break.

Lead supervisor Jennifer Sory and Josh Cortez, program manager for Strive, wanted to be sure that Arenas and Leal were mentally prepared to return to their jobs.

If not, they could leave work early.

“I don’t think I want to go home,” Leal said, gathering her water bottle, backpack and jacket.

“I’m ready,” Arenas said, nodding in agreement. “We’re ready to go back to work.”

— **Lisa Fung**

“A LIGHTER LOOK” — ON ALIENS

Rick Meyer’s regularly appearing column takes a lighter look at politics and public affairs around the world. This month: “ALIENS”



UNSPUSH/JULIA BORCES

TWO SPACE ALIENS SIT DOWN TO DINNER.

“What’s that green stuff?”

“Avocado. Its color enhances my complexion.”

“I’m going to try some. ... Waiter!”

“You know, we’re a punchline.”

“Aliens are?”

“Yup. As in, ‘Seen any little green men lately?’”

“Here on Earth, with as many homeless as they have, it’s the Earthlings who ought to be the punchline.”

“We don’t have any homeless on Malinois.”

“That’s because we care. We make sure everybody has a warm, safe place to live.”

“If we lived here, aliens like you and me would be homeless.”

“Anybody who looks like you and eats green stuff to make you greener would be homeless for sure.”

“Worse, the Earthlings wouldn’t care if we were homeless. They don’t care enough about their homeless people.”

“What do they care about?”

“Having sex in space.”

“What?!”

“That’s right! Having sex in space.”

“You’re kidding!”

“I saw an article in an Earthling newspaper, called the *New York Times*. I brought it with me. Here, I’ll read it to you:

Astronauts have confirmed over the past few decades that in space, the flesh is willing. But truth be told, we don’t even know if you can actually do the fun part of making space kids.

While the moon and Mars provide some gravity, a vast majority of data on space physiology comes from orbital space stations, where astronauts hang in constant free fall. Weightlessness is ideal for physics problems, but not for intercourse; a nudge toward you will send you flying backward with equal and opposite momentum. Without the familiar frame of reference provided by Earth’s gravity, concepts like “top” and “bottom” are without physical meaning.

All of this will make the orientationless mambo awkward. The space popularizers James and Alcestis Oberg wrote in 1986 that those who attempt the act “may thrash around helplessly like beached flounders until they meet up with a wall they can smash into” ...

“What do they know? Who wrote that *New York Times* story?”

“It’s what the *New York Times* calls a guest essay. It was written by Zach Weinersmith, a cartoonist who creates web comics, and his wife, Kelly, a college professor.”

“A college professor? That figures!”

“Here’s what else they wrote.”

You’ll want something that keeps people together. The engineer and futurist Thomas Hopenheimer called for an “unchastity belt.” Another concept, pitched by Samuel Coniglio, a former vice president of the Space Tourism Society, is the “snuggle tunnel.” There’s also Vanna Bonta’s 2suit, which would keep a weightless couple connected via Velcro straps. [She was a writer, actress and inventor whose suit was designed specifically for sex in space.]

But what happens after the unchastity belt is unbuckled, the snuggle tunnel sheepishly exited? If the goal is a self-sustaining settlement, it’s important for the encounter to be productive, leading to children, conceived and born on site.

Is this possible? Science can’t answer that yet. ... We still don’t know what the effects would be for women planning to give birth, or on developing babies, children and adolescents.

“Do Earthlings care about anything besides sex and reproducing?”

“Money.”

“Do they spend any to help the homeless?”

“Not nearly as much as they spend on themselves. Pass the avocado.”

— **Richard E. Meyer**

WITH HELP AND RESOLVE, A NEW LIFE



DOMINIQUE CARTER

WRITTEN BY
MOLLY SELVIN
PHOTOS BY
IRIS SCHNEIDER



“I WAS VERY EMBARRASSED AND ASHAMED OF MYSELF.”

BY THE TIME DOMINIQUE CARTER FOUND THE COURAGE TO FLEE, HER young daughter was living with a relative.

For the first couple of months, in early 2017, Carter crashed on a cousin’s couch. When that string ran out, she was luckier than many: She had a car where she slept and stored her belongings.

But that car quickly became a reproach, reminding her of how much she’d lost.

“I already considered myself at rock bottom,” Carter said. “I’d lost my stability. I was very embarrassed and ashamed of myself.”

The car, a 16-year-old sedan that she bought from a friend, triggered so many bad memories that she said she often walked to avoid driving it.

“I didn’t want to turn to that car.”

Carter, now 36, was also lucky to have found refuge at Jenesse Center after a few months on the streets. The nonprofit provides shelter, job training and counseling for victims of domestic violence, most of them from South Los Angeles.

Once there, she quickly sold the car.

“I wanted everything associated with that part of my life out of my life.”

CARTER’S ROAD BACK WAS A LONG ONE. AND HER STORY, THOUGH

specifically hers, is reflected in countless lives around Los Angeles — relationships soured, jobs lost, abuse suffered. Time after time, those stories end on the streets of the city and county, adding to this region’s deep, difficult struggle to house those in need. Carter’s experience points to many needs, amplified across thousands of lives and anchored around the desperate value of a safe place to live.

“You cannot imagine being angry the way she was,” recalled Charmine Davis, who directs Jenesse’s family wellness program and worked with Carter when she first came to the shelter.

“Trauma is trauma, but this was chronic trauma,” she added. “You’re hyper-vigilant and angry at the situation. You feel that you’re the one at fault.”

Life is better now. Carter works for another Los Angeles nonprofit that helps homeless individuals and families, many of whom are victims of domestic violence. Her job lets her give back, and she now shares an apartment in West L.A. with her middle-school-age daughter.

At least one in five women who become homeless in California are escaping violence by an intimate partner, according to a recent study from UC San Francisco.

Too often, women have to choose between their physical safety and a roof over their heads, said Anita Hargrave, the study’s lead author — precisely the choice that Carter faced.

The conclusions of UCSF’s researchers about what would help keep others, particularly women fleeing a violent partner, from the streets underscore Carter’s own hard-won insights.

SITTING AT A CONFERENCE ROOM TABLE IN JENESSE’S ADMINISTRATIVE

offices, Dominique Carter spoke quietly but easily of her journey. Her hands were still, light pink manicured fingers folded in front of her. She smiled frequently, her long black hair falling around her shoulders.

A Baldwin Hills native and Hamilton High School graduate, Carter first became homeless in 2014 when her father kicked her out after an argument. She stayed at a series of motels that her mother helped pay for (her parents lived separately), and later shared an apartment with a friend.

The constant moving was “very difficult trying to navigate that with my daughter,” she said, “not having any stability, not working, with nothing going on.”

In 2016, she met a man and eventually moved in with him. They both worked at a Hollywood nightclub, she as a “bottle girl,” serving drinks.

Their relationship quickly soured.

“He was extremely controlling,” she said. “He called me constantly and was suspicious about me spending any time away from him.”

She remembers a trip to a CVS store. “I was shaking,” she said, worried that he would be angry if she was away for too long, even though he had sent her there to pick up some items.

The torment was psychological as well as verbal and financial, she said.

“That is the most degrading feeling,” she recalled. “Those things have long-term effects that change you forever.”

She grew afraid for her daughter’s safety as well as her own.

“I knew I had to get out of it, but my options were limited. I kept trying to make it work.”

Carter learned of the Jenesse Center through a small brochure she found listing shelters and legal aid for domestic violence victims.

“I still have that brochure,” she said.

She lived in Jenesse’s transitional housing for just over a year and her daughter eventually joined her there. The two of them now share their own apartment, which Jenesse helps subsidize.

The center, which serves up to 1,200 women a year, meets clients “where they are,” said Charmine Davis. Some just need a quiet place to recover their equilibrium. Others need legal help, vocational training, drug or alcohol treatment or help writing a résumé and finding a job.

“Our services are open-ended. Dominique is out of the shelter, but she can call us at any time,” said Yasmin Tarver, Jenesse’s director of family wellness.

“JOBS REALLY HELP PEOPLE WITH BROKEN SPIRITS.”

Carter’s determination to regain control of her life so impressed Davis and Tarver that last year they asked her to join a fledgling group, the Purple Monarchs.

The six Monarchs serve as role models for new clients and spokeswomen for the center. Invitation to join the group also signifies that “they’ve made it beyond abuse and shelter care,” Tarver said, “that they can work and care for their children, and maybe love again.”

BY CONNECTING WITH JENESSE, CARTER HAD ADVANTAGES NOT

available to most women, UCSF’s Hargrave said. The organization provided her with safety and privacy as well as services tailored to women in her situation and not always available in large congregate shelters.

“The general public can have the idea that we have a robust domestic violence shelter system,” Hargrave said. But only 5% of the women her team surveyed were able to stay in shelters like Jenesse’s.

Most slept unsheltered in cars or encampments, vulnerable to further trauma and violence, she noted.

Over 90% of the women interviewed said that housing vouchers to help subsidize rent would have kept them from homelessness in the first place.

Flexible funding — allowing them to more easily use government assistance to pay for healthcare, food or childcare — also would make a difference.

But housing is key.

“Jobs really help people with broken spirits,” Carter said, but the lack of affordable housing makes it difficult for many to work.

“It’s not easy to get a job coming off the street,” she added. “Showering, putting on makeup, keeping clean clothes — it’s hard to do a job interview if you haven’t had eight hours of sleep and have kids waiting in the car.”

Carter is proud that she pulled herself out of homelessness and away from a man she feared. But she sees herself as a work in progress.

“I still struggle,” she said, quietly, looking away for a moment.

With time and therapy, she has realized that she sometimes mirrors the behavior of her abuser.

“It’s not who I am,” she said, “but I have that stain on me. I’m working on it.”

Nonetheless, Carter relishes her hard-won stability.

While homeless, she lived out of plastic bins that held her possessions, carrying those bins from one friend’s apartment to another, from motel to motel, and ultimately, storing them in the trunk of her car.

Carter finally got to unpack when she and her daughter moved into their own apartment.

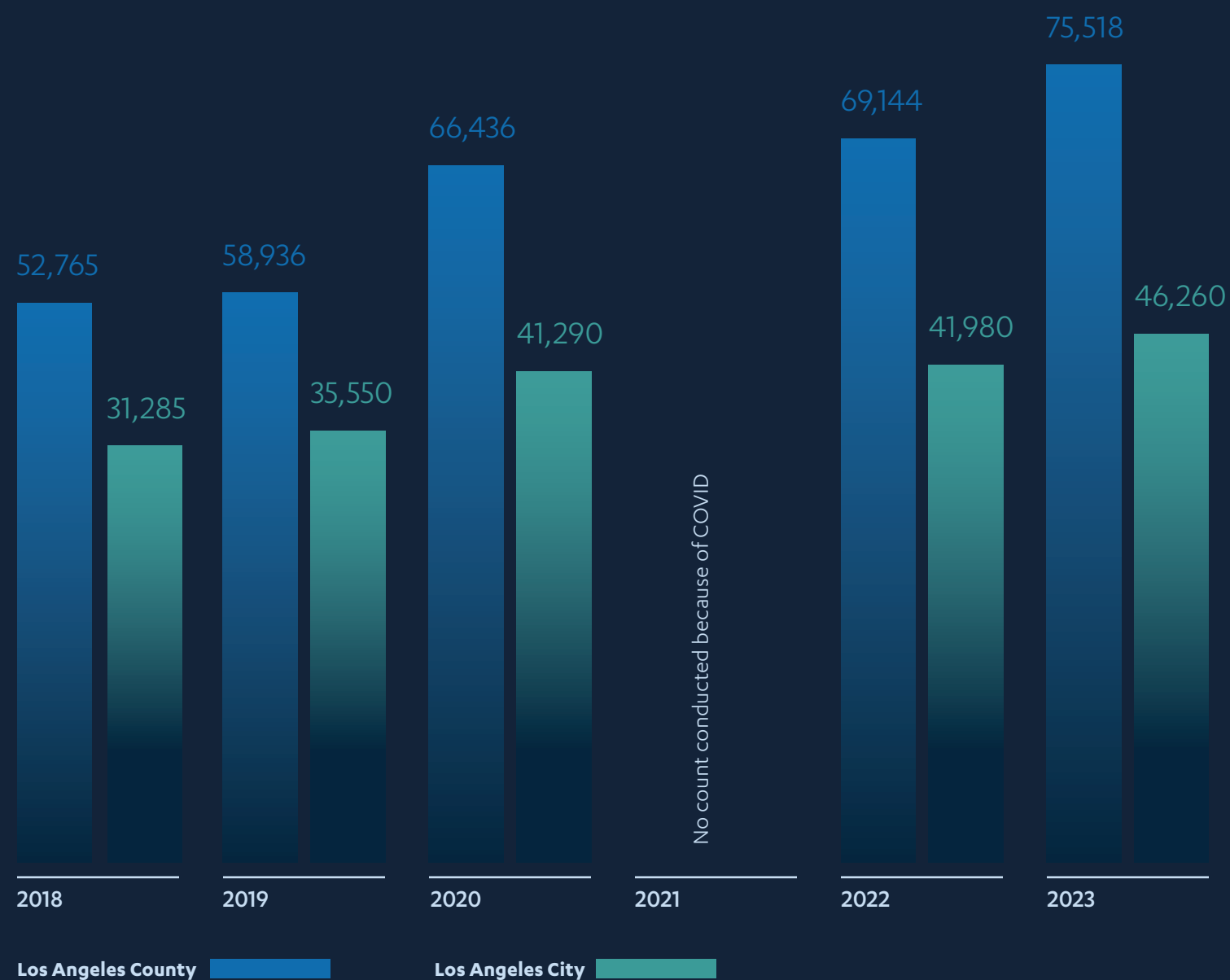
“I was so happy to get rid of those bins.” ▶

THE HOMELESS ARE US

MORE ANGELENOS THAN EVER STRUGGLE FOR A PLACE TO LIVE — WHY, WHERE AND WHO

L.A.'S GROWING UNHOUSED POPULATION

The number of people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles has skyrocketed in recent years, confounding efforts to respond.



Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, annual homeless count

“It is no coincidence that African Americans line Los Angeles’ streets or that they too often suffer from mental and physical disease. Inequalities in labor, housing, criminal justice and health stem from reinforcing discriminatory practices and systems. From this perspective it is clear: Ending homelessness begins with racial justice.”

— The Making of a Crisis: A History of Homelessness in Los Angeles, 2021

WHERE ARE THOSE WITHOUT HOUSING?

Those without a reliable place to sleep are scattered across Los Angeles County but are concentrated in the city of Los Angeles, especially downtown and south of downtown. Here, a map showing where the unhoused reside.

2023 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count

SPA 1 Antelope Valley

2022 4,598 2023 4,686 +88

SPA 2¹ San Fernando Valley

2022 9,604 2023 10,433 +839

SPA 3² San Gabriel Valley

2022 4,661 2023 5,009 +348

SPA 4 Metro

2022 17,820 2023 18,531 +711

SPA 5 West

2022 4,604 2023 6,669 +2,065*

SPA 6 South

2022 14,598 2023 12,955 -1,603*

SPA 7 East

2022 4,781 2023 6,511 +1,730*

SPA 8³ Harbor

2022 4,445 2023 6,476 +2,031*

* Statistically significant change

¹ SPA 2 excludes data from Glendale Continuum of Care

² SPA 3 excludes data from Pasadena CoCs

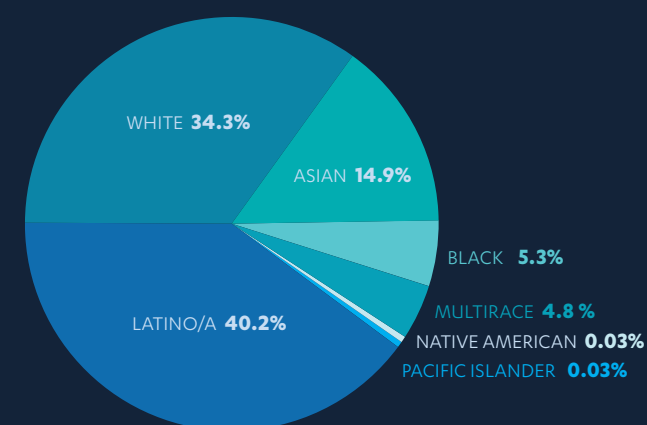
³ SPA 8 excludes data from Long Beach CoC

Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

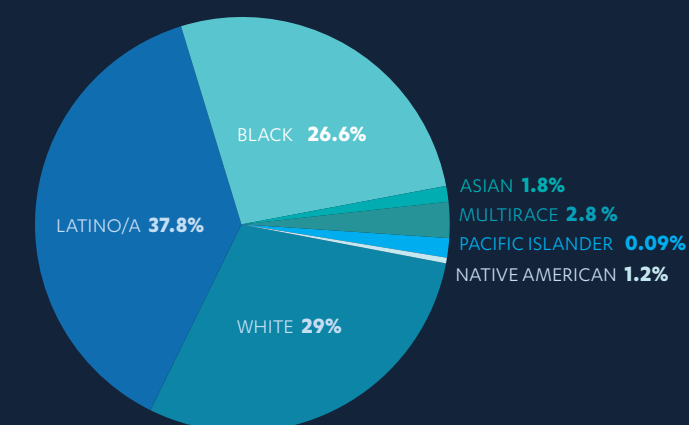
WHO ARE THE UNHOUSED?

Across California, Black, Native American and Pacific Islander populations are over-represented among the state’s unhoused people, while Asians, Whites and Latino/as are under-represented.

Racial percent of CA population



Racial percent of CA homeless population



Source: California Budget and Policy Center. Numbers reflect percent of unhoused people assisted by homeless service providers, FY 2021-2022.

THE MAN ON THE TRAIN

HUNCHED IN A SEAT IN THE CORNER OF AN

L.A. Metro light rail car heading downtown on a recent weekend, an unhoused man was deep in conversation with someone visible only to him. Dressed in a dark, tattered hoodie with grimy cargo shorts barely hanging on his skeletal frame, the 40-something man rummaged through his backpack, arms quivering and hands shaking, as he fished out a bag of Skittles.

Minutes earlier he had entered the train, maneuvering around another homeless man and his stroller, which was loaded with belongings and plastic bags hanging from the handles. Across the way, a rider with a baseball cap pulled low over his eyes stared out the window, bursting into fits of

laughter, followed by loud, incoherent rants at no one in particular. A few seats away, a man sat with his head buried in his lap, while two others leaned on windows sleeping.

A pair of well-dressed 30-something white men boarded the train, each with two young kids in tow. As they looked for a place to sit, they scanned the other passengers, then quickly moved on to the next car. The scene repeated as new riders boarded, surveyed other passengers, then moved elsewhere. The quiet of the rail car was broken by the clicking sound of a lighter: The man whose head was buried in his lap was lighting up a substance, and a faint smell wafted through the car.

When riders fear their fellow passengers

WRITTEN BY
LISA FUNG



Scenes like this have become common in transit environments across the country, forcing agencies to grapple with ways to deal with an influx of homeless passengers while ensuring that all riders remain comfortable and feel safe.

"Homelessness is such a visible phenomenon in our cities — and it became even more visible in transit environments during the pandemic," said Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, a distinguished professor of urban planning and interim dean of the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. "It became more visible on buses, because people who are unhoused were using the bus as a shelter."

While there has been much discussion about and research into homelessness, less has been written about the public spaces where many unhoused people spend their time — especially on buses and trains. To address that gap and to look for solutions, Loukaitou-Sideris decided to examine how transit agencies nationwide deal with the issue of homelessness.

"We really wanted to see how the transit industry understands the challenge of unhoused people on their system," she said, "and how they respond to this challenge, what data they have or don't have."

Loukaitou-Sideris and her team surveyed 142 workers at 115 transit operators in the United States and Canada to understand how the problems of homelessness have changed in recent years, how the COVID-19 pandemic affected them and how their responses have evolved.

"We found from this quite extensive survey that homelessness on transit is a very omnipresent issue," she said. "It is not one or two agencies that said, 'Oh yes, we have a problem.' Almost everybody acknowledged it as an issue that has become worse."

But, she said, most agencies indicated they lack funding, training, support from local government and other resources to address the issue. What they did know was that their housed riders were highly critical of the unhoused riders — particularly their hygiene and aggressive behavior. Those impressions had a negative impact on ridership when most agencies were struggling to come back after the pandemic.

MORE THAN 653,000 PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES — or about 20 of every 10,000 people — lack permanent housing, according to the 2023

Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. California and New York have the largest number of unhoused people, the report says, with more than 181,000 and 103,000, respectively.

It is hard to track the precise number of people sheltering in transit systems. More than half of the agencies surveyed estimated that at least 100 unhoused people spend time on their systems daily, while 16% of the agencies put the number at 500 or more. Agencies were able to provide only estimates, Loukaitou-Sideris said, because most do not gather data about the homeless population on their systems. Only 6% — including Los Angeles Metro — regularly try to track the unhoused people sheltering in their system.

L.A. Metro uses the Homeless Management Information System, or HMIS, which allows its outreach teams to identify people and enter their names, shared by numerous agencies throughout the city and county that work with the homeless.

"From there, they can be tracked, regardless of which program they go into — if they're referred to interim housing or a permanent housing solution," said Craig Joyce, L.A. Metro's deputy

executive officer for homeless outreach. "It's essentially like a warm handoff to a solution."

HOMELESSNESS IS NOT A CRIME. AND YET, while few agencies surveyed have formal policies on homelessness, many respond in punitive ways.

Some agencies target homelessness by enforcing anti-loitering or anti-panhandling laws, using police sweeps of encampments or conducting fare-enforcement blitzes. Others target the unhoused indirectly by using "hostile architecture" — benches with high metal armrests, spikes or metal studs on ledges that prevent people from sleeping on them — or by removing seating areas altogether. Many transit agencies regularly "clear" cars of unhoused passengers by requiring riders to exit at the end of the line.

These actions, Loukaitou-Sideris and her team found, often are combined with outreach measures designed to assist in the housing and health needs of homeless individuals. Studies have shown that outreach can be more effective than punitive measures, which tend to remove or displace people only temporarily rather than address the structural issues causing homelessness.

"Even if you do a sweep, which could cost about \$300,000, it is not effective," Loukaitou-Sideris said. "You have the immediate area happy, but this person will go somewhere else. This person has to go somewhere, unless he, or she, or they, die. I don't think that is what society wants."

Loukaitou-Sideris and her team were unable to speak directly with homeless people, in part because of constraints during the pandemic, so the two studies they produced look at the issue primarily from the perspective of transit agencies and not the unhoused.

Nationwide, agencies have watched as the number of people seeking shelter on their transit systems has grown, while their budgets to deal with accompanying issues have not increased. Many have turned to external partnerships to address the needs of the homeless. "We saw an increasing trend toward more partnerships," Loukaitou-Sideris said, "not only with policing authorities, which was the most common partnership, but also with municipal governments, health departments, clinicians and social workers."

These partnerships are beneficial to the transit agencies, not only for financial reasons but because some of the partners are better equipped and trained to work with unhoused individuals.

"Bus drivers should know how to deal with an unstable person, and they get some training for that," Loukaitou-Sideris said. "But the bus driver's primary job is to drive safe in the vehicle. That's why we say it's so important to have these partnerships."

IN A SECOND, SEPARATE REPORT, Loukaitou-Sideris and her team identified strategies or programs that agencies are using to overcome the challenges related to homelessness on their systems. These case studies fell into four categories: mobile outreach by teams of clinicians,

"WE FOUND FROM THIS QUITE EXTENSIVE SURVEY THAT HOMELESSNESS ON TRANSIT IS A VERY OMNIPRESENT ISSUE."

ANASTASIA LOUKAITOU-SIDERIS

transit staff and law enforcement officers; discounted fares for unhoused riders; transportation to shelters; and service and resource hubs.

Several agencies, like L.A. Metro, have adopted mobile outreach programs, which have teams that move through the system offering services and referrals to homeless people along the train lines. In Denver, a mental health professional or social worker from a partner organization rides with law enforcement staffers to de-escalate confrontations and connect people with shelter services and counseling.

Another strategy seeks to address the lack of mobility of unhoused riders as well as low-income passengers by providing discounted or free fares. While these programs do not reduce homelessness, they allow riders to travel without fear of being caught without payment.

"We should think about unhoused people not only as using transit as shelter, but some of them work, and some of them may have mobility needs," Loukaitou-Sideris said. "So, being able to move without having to pay, that's also a service."

New York City's Metropolitan Transportation Authority and Madison Metro Transit in Wisconsin also focus on mobility by offering free transportation to and from homeless shelters. By partnering with local nonprofits, the agencies assist unhoused people who otherwise would not be able to afford the fare to reach a shelter or reserve a bed. These programs, the researchers found, helped build relationships and trust with individuals who may then become more willing to accept other services.

Finally, Loukaitou-Sideris and her team looked at Philadelphia's Hub of Hope, which began in 2011 as a small, walk-in outreach center open during the winter. It since has grown to an 11,000-square-foot

facility open year-round. The hub represents a partnership among the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), the nonprofit homeless services agency Project HOME and the city of Philadelphia.

Located directly on the SEPTA line in former headquarters of the transit police, the fixed-location hub provides a variety of services to people experiencing homelessness, including showers and laundry; coffee, tea and snacks; case management; primary medical care; and, through partnerships with other agencies, transportation to shelters and grab-and-go meals.

The researchers note some challenges with each of these strategies, such as lack of funding, lack of available housing in the service areas, inadequate staffing, inability to track people experiencing homelessness, and difficulty spreading information about the programs to people who need the services.

Loukaitou-Sideris acknowledged that there also may be opposition from the general public. Hub for Hope, for example, has helped about 100,000 people a year, leading to a decline in the number visibly experiencing homelessness at transit stations. But many commuters and businesses believe, nonetheless, that the hub is attracting more homeless people to the area.

"You have that always when you have a shelter. ... The surrounding neighborhood is up in arms," she said. "When making it easy for the unhoused riders to ride the buses, we have almost a revolution from the housed riders who don't want to be sitting next to someone who is unhoused."

Last August, a contingent of Southern California officials, led by L.A. County Supervisor Janice Hahn and Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson, visited Philadelphia to learn more about Hub of Hope. L.A. Metro's Joyce was part of the group.

"We were interested in understanding what the Hub of Hope actually was, how it operates, the kinds of viable resources it provided, what kind of difference it was making," Joyce said. The group wanted "a good understanding of whether or not that kind of resource and approach would make sense for us to deploy and implement here."

Such information sharing is what Loukaitou-Sideris hopes her team's research can help facilitate.

"We're finding a lot of agencies saying, 'We know it's a huge problem. We perceive it as a challenge. We don't know what to do about it,'" she said. "We felt that these lessons learned were important for other agencies, so it is available for free to agencies that are interested in learning about how others are dealing with homelessness."

While there are still many hurdles, Loukaitou-Sideris said she is optimistic that agencies will be able to share information and come up with solutions.

"You cannot resolve the problem overnight. It's more of a progressive thing," she said. "If instead of seeing the numbers going up and up and up, we start seeing a trend going down, down, down, then it's a step in the right direction." ▶



ISTOCK / LASER987

IN SICKNESS

Homeless Healthcare Collaborative confronts the ravages of life without housing

WRITTEN BY
BENJAMIN ROYER

LOS ANGELES' HOMELESS CRISIS NEEDS A holistic approach.

Some policymakers and community leaders throw around solutions that can tail wide like wild pitches at Dodger Stadium. Others stick Band-Aids piecemeal on wounds that only continue to flow.

But on the streets of L.A. and Southern California at large, one group emphasizes emergency care at a complete, human, face-to-face level — and, most importantly, preaches individual autonomy. While stigmas about giving and receiving medical help appear within the homeless population, as well as inside medical centers, UCLA Health Homeless Healthcare Collaborative (HHC) strives to meet people where they are — not where they're forced to be.

"It is incredibly gratifying to know that I am really seeing someone and seeing them as a whole person," said Catherine Weaver, medical director of the HHC. "I am able to understand their motives, able to work with them to find something that works well for them."

In the short time since it was founded, the HHC's research shows there has been a noticeable decrease in emergency room visits among the homeless population it serves with its mobile clinics. HHC launched in January 2022, and during its first year it recorded a 32% reduction in such cases.

After the HHC received a \$25.3 million CalAIM grant in March 2023, the impact of its four on-the-street medical mobile units increased. Encounters with unhoused people to help them more than doubled to 18,314. Outreach encounters — going beyond medical care to include social services, hygiene kits or providing referrals — made up 74.3% of all interactions.

MUCH OF THE HHC'S WORK TRIES TO EASE previous stigma and trauma within the unhoused community across UCLA Health's geographical span — Santa Monica to Ventura, Santa Clarita and Pasadena. The HHC attempts to create positive interactions with new and repeat patients.

And even as it provides services, it is learning about the population it serves, gathering data and anecdotal insights into the health challenges faced by those who live outdoors, where they face problems as diverse as COVID-19 and exposure and where regular medical care often is unavailable.

Both the research and service delivery are complicated by another cultural dimension of treating the homeless. Many of those who are unhoused are suspicious of authority, including

medical authorities, allowing their health issues to fester rather than seeking prompt treatment.

"There's a fair amount of medical trauma in this community, which can lead to people being a little mistrusting of medical professionals, and understandably so," said Brian Zunner-Keating, a registered nurse and director of the HHC. "That's one of the big ones. We have to work to build trust and say, 'Hey, I don't know what you faced in the past from medical professionals. But this is the approach we take, and we really want to put you first, and we're going to respect your dignity. We're going to respect your autonomy.'"

In addition to building trust, HHC has increased administering labs and dispensing medications. It is now reaching even more people.

Another aspect of its mobile clinics' daily work is COVID-19 testing. The HHC has seen a consistent decline in positive cases as of February.

THE UCLA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND UCLA School of Medicine are conducting retrospective research to examine the further impact of the HHC. At the same time, the HHC is researching patient care and point-of-care assessments with

"I AM SEEING SOMEONE AND SEEING THEM AS A WHOLE PERSON."

CATHERINE WEAVER

surveys to improve results and communication with patients into 2024 and beyond.

"We need a lot of data," Zunner-Keating said, "and since we just marked a two-year anniversary, we're just getting to that point where we have enough data to start delving into some more research."

One goal is to increase specialty care services. "One thing that still remains incredibly inaccessible to many folks is specialty care," Zunner-Keating said.

Including specialists — such as podiatrists, cardiologists, OB-GYNs and dermatologists — in the HHC fold could continue to decrease emergency room visits by the homeless.

An increase in specialized doctors could be on the way soon. Meanwhile, the HHC wants to bridge the gap by focusing on women's healthcare and prenatal care. Weaver sees the addition of OB-GYNs to mobile units as a pressing need.

"There have been plenty of pregnant women who have not had access to appropriate prenatal care, have increased risks to their pregnancy, and there are various reasons for it," Weaver said. "Whether it be they've had bad experiences with the health system in the past, whether their insurance has been challenging for them to work. ... It's a huge gap."

AS WELL AS ON THE STREETS, THE HHC HELPS the homeless in soup kitchens, recreation centers and the Crete Academy, an elementary school dedicated to unhoused students or students experiencing housing insecurity in South Los Angeles.

The HHC visits the academy monthly so its medical and social professionals can talk with families regardless of their housing situations. It also partners with missions and shelters across L.A., including Hope the Mission, Los Angeles Mission and the People Concern.

The HHC joins with other street medicine teams to help homeless people.

"We're spearheading an effort to develop a shared communication platform," Zunner-Keating said. "It will allow us to — through the existing healthcare information exchange networks — be able to see each other's medical charts, to understand who's caring for which patients, if there is overlap in certain areas, and how we can coordinate care as best as possible."

More than 46,000 people are homeless in L.A., according to the 2023 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, and more than 75,000 are homeless in Los Angeles County.

"We still need more resources dedicated to helping the unhoused population," Zunner-Keating said. "We worked really closely with a lot of those housing service providers, and they do amazing work."

"But they're also stretched very thin when you consider the scope and the breadth of the problem at hand." ▸



↑ Catherine Weaver, MD, administrative medical director of the UCLA Homeless Healthcare Collaborative meets a patient at a West Los Angeles encampment.

CHRIS FLYNN / UCLA HEALTH SCIENCES



COURTESY OF ZEV YAROSLAVSKY



COURTESY OF ZEV YAROSLAVSKY

Z

A legend of L.A. politics on history and homelessness

WRITTEN BY
JEAN MERL

E

↑ (Above) Yaroslavsky, a devoted supporter of the arts, here gets a chance to conduct the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl.

ON THE EVE OF A JEWISH HOLIDAY LAST FALL, Zev Yaroslavsky was standing in the front yard of his Los Angeles home when a neighbor he hadn't seen for a while walked by on his way to the synagogue. The man stopped to greet Yaroslavsky and posed a question that gladdened the former longtime elected official.

"Is it my imagination, or has the homeless situation gotten better around here?" Yaroslavsky recalled the man asking.

"It's not your imagination," Yaroslavsky responded, adding details about at least two area homeless encampments that were cleared when their inhabitants had been housed and offered services under Mayor Karen Bass' Inside Safe program.

"It took time, but they housed them," Yaroslavsky, 75, said in a far-ranging interview as he prepared to retire this spring from his second career, teaching at UCLA's Luskin School of Public Policy. "They didn't just sweep them to another street. They housed them. It's not easy, but you can do it."

Yaroslavsky knows his subject. He served nearly four decades as an elected official: on the Los Angeles City Council from 1975 to 1994, when he was elected to the county Board of Supervisors. Term limits required him to retire from that post in 2014. Until then, he had wrestled with — and helped shape responses to — nearly every major issue in the region: healthcare, land development, open space preservation, police reform, public transportation, cultural development. And homelessness.

Soon after leaving the Board of Supervisors, Yaroslavsky was invited to return to UCLA, where he had earned bachelor's and master's degrees before leaving a doctoral program to pursue a calling to social activism and politics. He eschewed a common path for retiring politicians — a corporate position or a lobbying or consulting gig — in favor of joining his alma mater, a public university where he could continue his life of service.

"I wanted to bring a real-world perspective to students," he said. "And I wanted to learn from them."

YAROSLAVSKY'S DECADE AT THE LUSKIN

School has placed him squarely at the intersection of public policy and academia. He has taught classes on public policy and directed the Los Angeles Initiative, which conducts the Quality of Life Index, an annual survey of county residents' satisfaction levels in several categories, including housing costs and homelessness.

He has helped steer bright young students into careers in public service, including Assemblyman Isaac Bryan (D-Los Angeles). In the spring of 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 lockdowns, he turned his class into a crash course in crisis management by inviting various public officials to talk — via Zoom — about how they were responding to the pandemic.

Although academics and politicians often

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↑ Yaroslavsky leads a cleanup crew in the Fairfax area in 1982.

don't speak the same language, Yaroslavsky said it is important that they listen to and learn from one another.

"I do think there is a functional role between academia and government," he said, noting that think tanks and researchers provide data and reports for policymakers to use in their attempts to find solutions to pressing problems. "It's important," he adds, "for academics to understand the

“There is a functional role between academia and government.”

caused them to be homeless, including addiction and mental health problems. It was based on a successful program in New York City, and it pioneered what is now the standard thinking about ways to combat homelessness — first, provide a home, then address underlying problems to keep people from falling back into life on the streets. The process can be costly and time-consuming, and its success depends in part on removing such stumbling blocks as housing costs, racial discrimination and poor education. But advocates of this approach say the social and financial costs of not solving what has become a crisis are much higher.

For years, Yaroslavsky said, he had behaved like most other politicians. Stay away from homelessness, was the standard political advice, because it’s intractable and costly and you will be branded a failure if your efforts fall short. And it was easier back then to ignore homelessness because it was largely confined to Skid Row and not the crisis that has spread throughout many communities and spilled into pricy, middle-class neighborhoods today.

He said this began to change in 2002, when his daughter, then in graduate school and living in the Bay Area, urged him to pay attention to the issue. He hired a deputy to work on homelessness in 2005. She told him about a pioneering “housing first” program in New York City. On a visit there to attend his son’s law school graduation in 2007, Yaroslavsky toured the program, Common Ground, based in the converted Times Square Hotel, and met with its founder. He pushed for something similar in Los Angeles.

Project 50 worked well for a time. Clients stayed housed and accepted support services, and budget officials found the costs were more than made up by the savings in emergency room visits, arrests and other consequences of life on the streets. A county analysis showed the program cost \$2.2 million but saved \$2.4 million. As the pilot program was nearing its end in 2009, Yaroslavsky proposed extending and expanding it to 500, then to 5,000, taking it countywide. But he couldn’t get a second from any of the other four supervisors. Yaroslavsky put smaller projects based on the Project 50 model into his own district, but the countywide version died.

Since then, homelessness has exploded into a region-wide crisis that no longer can be ignored, Yaroslavsky said, lamenting that the failure to expand Project 50 in 2009 “basically cost us almost a decade” in solving the problem.

In 2016, voters in the city of Los Angeles approved Proposition HHH, a \$1.2 billion bond measure for permanent supportive housing, and the following year, county voters approved Measure H, which enacted a ¼-cent increase on the sales tax for 10 years to alleviate homelessness. Bass won the mayor’s office in November 2022 after a campaign that centered around combating homelessness. Her first official act was to declare a state of emergency because of homelessness. County supervisors followed suit a month later.

pressure politicians are under from constituents and for politicians to know what the facts are.”

Paying attention to the research helps policymakers find solutions and avoid mistakes. “We can’t live without it,” he said.

IN HIS ROLE AS AN ACADEMIC, YAROSLAVSKY

was one of the authors of a comprehensive study of homelessness in the region, published in 2021 by the Luskin Center for History and Policy. *The Making of a Crisis: A History of Homelessness in Los Angeles* detailed some 120 years of ebbs and flows in the problem, including causes and recommendations.

Earlier, during his time as a county supervisor, Yaroslavsky led an effort to take a comprehensive approach to homelessness, a problem he compares to a Rubik’s Cube — a complicated puzzle that can’t be solved quickly or easily.

In 2007, he spearheaded Project 50, a two-year county pilot project that focused on Skid Row people who were deemed the most vulnerable. The project got them into housing and offered them services to help with the issues that had

Yaroslavsky, in his 2023 memoir, *Zev’s Los Angeles: From Boyle Heights to the Halls of Power*, called homelessness “the moral challenge of our time” and outlined ways to meet it. His experiences naturally have informed his views on Bass’ attempts. He gives her high marks while acknowledging there is still a long way to go. Other circumstances, ranging from income disparity to the lack of an elected executive in the power-diffused county, also pose considerable obstacles, he added.

A Los Angeles Times analysis of Bass’ program late last year found significant progress in her goal to find shelter for those living on the streets and clear the encampments that had sprung up along public rights of way. But the campaign to find or build permanent affordable housing remained a tough challenge. Bass called improving the system of support services, including substance addiction treatment, a “top, top issue” as the program headed into its second year.

Yaroslavsky praised Bass for her comprehensive approach and willingness to put herself in charge of the program and accept responsibility for it.

“I’m a cheerleader for her,” Yaroslavsky said. “I think she’s doing the right thing.”

But he’s realistic, too. “I’ve said from the start that [homelessness] was not created overnight and it’s not going to be solved overnight,”

Yaroslavsky added. “But she’s making progress, and she has created a sense of possibility and is publicly committed to solving the problem.”

Bass also is well suited to the task because of her collaborative manner and her background as a physician’s assistant and community activist before being elected to the state Assembly and then Congress, Yaroslavsky said. He also touted her commitment to Los Angeles.

“She has made it clear she is not interested” in running for another office and probably has eight years to work on the issue, said Yaroslavsky, who expects Bass will serve a second term.

But one of the toughest obstacles to overcoming the problem is an acute shortage of affordable housing.

Increasingly, people are at risk of falling into homelessness, not because they are drug or alcohol abusers or mentally ill, but because they can no longer afford their rent on the wages they earn, Yaroslavsky said. Remedying that will take government intervention, including but not limited to housing subsidies, so that “the people who provide the backbone of the labor market here can afford to live here and not be forced out onto the street” where they eventually develop other problems.

“There’s a structural inequity in our housing economy that creates this homelessness problem,” Yaroslavsky said, “and we’ve got to deal with it.”

↓ After term limits forced Yaroslavsky to retire from the board of supervisors, he came to UCLA, where he is an alumnus. Here, he speaks at an event in 2023.





WHAT DO THE UNHOUSED NEED?

A novel research project thought to ask

WRITTEN BY
LAUREN MUNRO

TONIGHT IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY, AN ESTIMATED 75,000 people will not have a place to sleep. Some will find shelter, but more than 70% will not. They will find protection beneath tarps and freeways. They may congregate in encampments or alcoves, in cars or alleys; some will spend the cold night alone and afraid.

Together, they represent a midsize city of unhoused humans, and they are at risk of violence and food insecurity, illness and predation. They are guilty only of being poor, and they are suffering for that crime.

What might change their lot? What services would bring them warmth and security, return them to well-being?

To better understand the health and needs of this vast unsheltered population, Randall Kuhn, a demographer and sociologist at UCLA's Fielding School of Public Health, tried something new: He tried asking.

In 2022, Kuhn co-launched the Periodic Assessment of Trajectories of Housing, Homelessness, and Health (PATHS) with a

colleague, Benjamin Henwood, from USC's Suzanne Dwora-Peck School of Social Work. PATHS works by quantitatively measuring the experiences and well-being of people experiencing homelessness through a monthly digital survey. Kuhn is involved because he believes that, for effective social policy, longitudinal research is vital — only it can adequately grasp the enormity of the challenge and gauge what works best, over time, to address it.

His work may give policymakers and others a fuller picture of who lacks housing, what the needs of those unhoused people are and what policies and programs may bring lasting change. Homelessness is a profoundly human crisis, but it may be data that charts the way out of it.

WHILE EARNING HIS PH.D. FROM THE University of Pennsylvania, Kuhn met Dennis Culhane, who introduced him to measuring the trajectory of someone's experience of homelessness through quantitative means. Culhane's research has focused on using administrative databases of homeless shelter entries and exits to look for patterns of vulnerable populations in long-term homelessness.

That entry-and-exit data was useful but limited. As Kuhn and others recognized, just over a quarter of people experiencing homelessness are those in shelter, and Kuhn highlighted that shelter-based data often fail to capture the experiences of the most vulnerable populations. So he connected

with Henwood to launch PATHS. At its core, PATHS is a questionnaire.

Kuhn and Henwood determined that at any given moment, 80% to 90% of people experiencing homelessness have access to a cellphone. That meant a communication opportunity, and the researchers created an SMS outreach system for enrolling and staying in contact with participants. Those experiencing homelessness were asked to participate in a monthly digital survey and offered a \$10 gift card for each month they responded.

The survey is pushed out to participants on the third Monday of each month. It has a median completion time of 17 minutes. The questions on the survey are updated regularly as new issues emerge in the unhoused population, or as new studies suggest new lines of inquiry. Upon completion of a survey, participants can register to receive an electronic gift card from a range of vendors to best suit their needs.

PATHS invested time in designing a survey that wouldn't feel like a burden to its participants. Many people in the homeless population have trauma or cognitive impairments that may make completing a voluntary survey difficult.

As a result, questions are deliberately designed to be simple and clear.

To take just one example, a recent survey sought information regarding the response of unhoused people to the cleanups of encampments that are at the center of L.A.'s attempts to combat homelessness.

Although the county has made efforts toward "friendly sweeps," or sweeps led by outreach workers rather than law enforcement, more than 53% of respondents were informed of their imminent sweep by a police officer.

Only 13% of respondents were offered shelter during a sweep, and just 5% said they had received housing that lasted more than a month. "Sweeps are there to just move people along and give them tickets, not to house them," Kuhn said. "This level of police involvement is not going to be conducive to getting people into housing."

IF THERE IS A THEME TO THE DATA COLLECTED BY PATHS THUS FAR, IT IS THAT TO BE UNHOUSED IS TO BE VULNERABLE — THAT MANY PEOPLE ARE AT RISK AND THAT EFFORTS TO HELP THEM CAN ONLY DO SO MUCH.

more than half of those who were doubled up fell back into homelessness. Twenty-four percent of respondents were given shelter at some point, but only 14% were able to stay sheltered during this period. “It’s really a revolving door. As long as shelters feel insecure, dangerous, unclean and not really a path to permanent housing, people are going to circulate back onto the streets,” Kuhn said. Nearly half of all respondents were unsheltered during the entire six months, evidence that great numbers of unhoused people remain outside of city efforts.

A hopeful result from this study lies in hotel-based transitional housing programs. Respondents who lived in hotel-based programs saw increased levels of certain healthcare access measures similar to those in permanent housing. Kuhn cautioned that it was too early to gauge the success of hotel programs because sample sizes are still small, but he hopes to have fuller results in the coming months.

PATHS will continue to obtain data from respondents regarding sweeps, camping laws, and the impacts on healthcare and housing. It’s seeking government data on the location and timing of sweeps and camping enforcement zones.

THIS WORK REQUIRES MANY HANDS. IT brings together professors, researchers, students and volunteers, driven by a desire to confront some of society’s most vexing social problems and, in some cases, to remedy inequities.

Norma Guzman Hernandez, a first-year master’s in public health student at UCLA, said that part of the reason she became involved was because she was frustrated that unhoused Latino/as who were in the country illegally were unable to apply for government assistance programs.

She witnessed the effects of that rule when she participated as a surveyor in the L.A. Homeless Count, and she considered it both discriminatory and unhelpful. “I felt something in me to continue to do this work,” Guzman Hernandez said.

One result is that she sees it as part of her job to build trust between PATHS and its participants. “We have to reassure them,” she said, “that PATHS is here to help.”

That determination is evident in the work being conducted on the ground. The team of Bruins and Trojans, or “Brojans” as they sometimes call themselves, is currently conducting a PATHS study of street medicine and its impact on health outcomes.

Street medicine consists of offering medical and social services to the unhoused directly where they live while alleviating healthcare barriers. This healthcare model aims to bypass obstacles such as insurance, creating appointments or leaving one’s personal belongings unattended. The study will feature survey results about healthcare models and the effectiveness of street medicine among L.A.’s unhoused population.

“The idea of giving people healthcare on the streets sounds nice,” Kuhn said, “but it takes a lot to get them connected — to go from providing wound care on the street to getting them connected to healthcare systems.”

Irene Del Mastro, a member of the team and Ph.D. candidate in sociology at UCLA, said she and other participants “meet people where they are — both literally and figuratively.” Before joining PATHS, Del Mastro shadowed street medicine providers for more than a year. She has drawn from the experience to design questions for the survey seeking data to help assess the efficacy of these medical efforts.

Del Mastro recognized a few structural obstacles that hinder street medicine from operating at its full potential, the first being displacement. Arrests and sweeps make it difficult for street medicine providers to relocate their patients. If a patient’s phone or medication is gone after a



sweep, “the patient is unfindable,” Del Mastro said. Additionally if the providers don’t have the support of their district’s homeless council, they won’t go there. “They need support in order to be able to offer their services,” Del Mastro said. She was referring not only to welcoming but also to financial support, logistical support and emergency shelter for patients in extreme circumstances.

Del Mastro also recognized a limitation specific to PATHS: its population sample. Not only is the team working with a population that is difficult to reach, but their results also may be skewed because their respondents are healthy enough to participate in a survey. “We’re missing,” she said, “the sickest population.”

If there is a theme to the data collected by PATHS thus far, it is that to be unhoused is to be vulnerable — that many people are at risk and that efforts to help them can only do so much.

The high price of housing means that many people are just a paycheck away from being unhoused. And once they are without housing, they become vulnerable to a host of health and human threats.

Street medicine is “healing a lot of people,” Del Mastro said, “preventing them from dying sometimes. But these individuals are still living on the streets.”

Only by understanding what they need and getting them inside, once and for all, can we help unhoused people regain a sense of safety and return to contributing to the society that has so often shunned them. That’s the goal of PATHS. ▶

“AS LONG AS SHELTERS FEEL INSECURE, DANGEROUS, UNCLEAN AND NOT REALLY A PATH TO PERMANENT HOUSING, PEOPLE ARE GOING TO CIRCULATE BACK ONTO THE STREETS.”

RANDALL KUHN



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BLUEPRINT
SPECIAL
REPORT
A Closer Look

You've probably never heard of time-limited subsidies

Here's how they make a difference

WRITTEN BY
JON REGARDIE
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ASK MOST ANGELENOS TO NAME the leading tools in combating the homelessness crisis, and two things probably will be mentioned: permanent supportive housing, which places someone experiencing homelessness in an apartment and provides support services such as counseling or drug treatment (and commonly runs more than \$600,000 a unit); and Inside Safe, Mayor Karen Bass' signature initiative to move people from encampments into hotels and motels, from which they may graduate to ... permanent supportive housing.

Both are mainstays of the city's aggressive attempts to reduce the number of people forced to live on its streets — a campaign Mayor Bass has made the centerpiece of her administration — and both have received widespread attention.

More frequently overlooked, despite its important place in the overall response, is a strategy called time-limited subsidies (TLS). Long known as rapid rehousing, this involves getting a person who is experiencing homelessness into a market-rate apartment, and having government funding cover a portion of the rent for up to two years. According to a new report from the California Policy Lab (CPL) at UCLA, this represented

64% of the long-term housing beds in Los Angeles County in 2019.

So TLS is prevalent. But does it work? That is precisely the question that Brian Blackwell and Robert Santillano addressed last November with their 63-page paper: "Do time-limited subsidy programs reduce homelessness for single adults?"

The authors looked at 3,766 people enrolled in TLS programs in Los Angeles County over a two-year period. They found that, during that time and four ensuing years, just 29.2% of those who received the assistance needed additional homeless support services. For those not enrolled in TLS programs, the figure was 38.4%.

That means TLS reduced future homelessness by 25% when compared with people not receiving benefits.

In a field crowded with grim conclusions, that's an encouraging finding, as well as a reminder that the work to address homelessness is often guided by good intentions but rarely shaped by hard data.

"That's why we wanted to study it. There wasn't a lot out there to let us know if the strategy was working," Santillano said on a Thursday morning in February.

THE RESEARCHERS CAME TO the report from markedly different backgrounds. Blackwell is a Brisbane, Australia, native who originally intended to work in information technology but was swayed by world events to look at social structures and operations of power. He joined the CPL and leads its data science research, including for the organization's landmark Homeless Prevention Unit pilot program with Los Angeles County (see *Blueprint*, Spring 2020).

Santillano is a California native who earned a Ph.D. in agricultural and resource economics from the University of California, Berkeley. He worked as an economist before becoming a senior researcher at the CPL, where he has focused on matters including homelessness, job training and social safety net programs.

He was drawn to looking at TLS, he said, in part because it offers an alternative to permanent supportive housing.

"You've seen this growth in time-limited subsidies because it's easier to scale," Santillano said. "It's based on an open rental market, the



idea that you can just give people more subsidies to engage with that market. It's easier to expand than identifying buildings to house people."

The new study is a welcome addition to the literature and analysis of homelessness. It confronts assumptions that often guide policymakers in this field, sometimes in error: that people experiencing homelessness are

"RENTS ARE SO HIGH, IT'S HARD TO GET PEOPLE TO HAVE ENOUGH EARNING POTENTIAL TO TAKE IT OVER IN FULL."
VA LECIA ADAMS
KELLUM

uniform in their needs; that addiction, rather than economic distress, lies at the root of nearly all housing deprivation; that many if not most of those who lack housing prefer it that way.

Santillano noted that the subsidies "weren't really part of the conversation" until about 15 years ago. A couple factors have made them increasingly important: The first is the growing unhoused population, now more than 75,500 people in L.A. County, according to the 2023 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count (new figures will be released in the coming months).

Tied to that is a stagnant housing market where rents have soared while supply has barely budged.

"The biggest issue we're facing locally around being able to assist folks in re-entering the housing market is the rental market itself," said Nathaniel VerGow, deputy chief programs officer with the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), which regularly works with the CPL. He noted regional



Benefit of the TLS Program

3,766

PEOPLE ENROLLED IN TLS PROGRAMS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY OVER A TWO-YEAR PERIOD

29.2% ENROLLED

38.4% NOT ENROLLED

Needed additional homeless support services

TLS reduced future homelessness by 25% when compared with people not receiving benefits.

rental vacancy of approximately 3.5%, which he termed “not a healthy rate.”

Although many people experiencing homelessness are moved into hotels, motels or temporary shelters, time-limited subsidies are part of the same pool of long-term solutions as permanent supportive housing. But as Janey Rountree, executive director of the CPL, said during a November webinar for the new study, “There are not enough permanent supportive housing units to meet the demand in Los Angeles.”

Time-limited subsidies, she added, “are filling the gap in some cases or serving people who don’t need supportive services.”

In theory, the process is direct and speedy; as Rountree indicated, someone moves into a vacant unit, rather than waiting for a new building to come online. VerGow said once this happens, TLS funds typically come from city or county government (which allows greater flexibility in use than federal money).

“Subsidies can generally last up to two years and are generally staggered,” said VerGow, meaning the amount of monthly assistance “tapers down” over that time as the homeless person’s financial situation is stabilized, whether through

employment or by identifying other long-term public benefits.

The subsidies have emerged as a significant tool for Bass during her first year in office. Last December, during a roundtable discussion about homelessness, Deputy Mayor for Housing Jenna Hornstock said 4,200 people had received time-limited subsidies.

The ultimate goal is for homeless people to find work and pay the market-rate rent on their own. During the roundtable, Va Lecia Adams Kellum, whom Bass installed as the CEO of LAHSA, described both the potential and the ongoing challenges.

The subsidies, she stated, are “a significant way that we house people in this town, because it’s what we have readily available, and we can help with that cash assistance. What’s harder is those rents are so high, it’s hard to get people to have enough earning potential to take them over in full, so that’s why often we still add a shadow subsidy after the tenant takes over.”

There is no set amount of money allocated. The CPL report identified an average assistance amount of \$5,815 during the study period, but this accounts for only direct cash outlays and not administrative costs. Santillano stressed that

more work needs to happen.

“I’m trying to temper broad statements about return on investment,” he said. “It’s a place where we really want to understand the data better.”

What is clear is that the market of who benefits has expanded. Initially, said Santillano, the funds were intended to help people who suffered some kind of “short-term financial shock.” The broader pool is reflected by the change in moniker from “rapid rehousing” to “time-limited subsidies.” This now includes people deemed to be facing even greater challenges.

Perhaps surprisingly, these individuals have experienced some of the most significant benefits.

THE STUDY WAS EXTENSIVE.

Santillano said the team spent more than two years exploring the outcomes for people who received TLS benefits from July 2016 to June 2018, and then how they fared in the following four years. The size of L.A.’s homeless population, while staggering, provided ample data points.

Given historic discrimination in the housing market, Santillano said a goal was to examine outcomes across racial groups. This resulted in a key finding: Black, White and Latino/a participants all enjoyed what the report termed “a statistically significant cumulative decrease” in the rate of homelessness over the four years after they received benefits. The outcome was greatest for Latino/a enrollees, with a homeless services utilization decrease of 30.6% (the drop was 19.1% for Black participants).

Also revealing were the advances regardless of level of need. That ties back to the expansion of who receives subsidies—it is no longer just those facing sudden financial challenges. The report examined outcomes for

“THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING UNITS TO MEET THE DEMAND IN LOS ANGELES.”
JANEY ROUNTREE



↑ Apartment housing in Los Angeles, CA.

what it labeled low-, medium- and high-risk individuals; each group saw an approximately 25% reduction in future homelessness compared with similar adults, the study found.

VerGow said this finding rings true, given what he has seen in LAHSA’s work. “It didn’t surprise me,” he said.

Despite the benefits, there remain points of concern. The report finds that only 62% of those enrolled in a TLS program were able to move into a market-rate unit and receive a subsidy. While that hints at an opportunity for improvement, Santillano and VerGow both said that the figure is similar across other programs.

“It’s not a problem that’s unique to time-limited subsidies,” said Santillano. “This is a broader problem that happens whenever government supports the rent of individuals in the private market.”

As Bass, LAHSA and a battalion of public- and private-sector entities work to address homelessness, myriad challenges remain. That starts with the county’s severe affordable housing shortage. Bass also has warned that the expiration of COVID-era eviction protections could result in more people on the streets.

That amps up the pressure. Santillano sees takeaways from the report, starting with the data showing that TLS works. Yet he recognizes this means only so much when tens of thousands of people in the county live without permanent shelter.

“I take it as very positive and good news that there is an intervention that can move the needle,” he said. “It really makes me think about the next steps to move the needle even more.” ▾

“My People”

MAYOR KAREN BASS AND HER URGENT MISSION TO HOUSE THE HOMELESS



← Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, here in her City Hall office.

PHOTOS BY
IRIS
SCHNEIDER

TWO IMPRESSIONS LINGER FROM THESE conversations with Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass. One was her openness. There is a refreshing curiosity about Bass, a break from mayors who came to office professing to know the solutions to the city's problems, only to learn that they did not. By contrast, Bass readily acknowledged that she is learning as she goes about the pressing, urgent work of housing this city's vast population of homeless people.

The other was a small moment. In describing the struggles to get government agencies and housing developers not to require proof of a homeless person's poverty, Bass remarked that "they can't accept my people because they have to prove income." Note the "my people."

It's hard to imagine Richard Riordan or even Tom Bradley thinking of the poorest residents of this city as "my people." They were serious, important and in many ways generous leaders, but they led from above. Not Bass. Her small comment revealed much about how she sees her service and how it springs from her conscience.

Just over a year into her tenure, Bass has yet to produce dramatic reductions in the number of unhoused people in this city. Her Inside Safe program has helped liberate thousands of people from encampments, but it has not created a reliable path from there to permanent housing. The temporary solution, placing those people in motels, is shockingly expensive, as Bass herself acknowledged.

As time goes on, the pressure on Bass to produce tangible results grows more intense; so, too, does her determination.

Blueprint editor Jim Newton interviewed Bass on two occasions for this Table Talk, in December 2023 and March 2024. This transcript draws from those interviews, splicing together the two conversations, both of which took place in Bass' City Hall office.



← Mayor Karen Bass.

BLUEPRINT: How do you measure your progress on this issue? Is it how many people remain homeless? Or how many people have you gotten off the street? How do you define success or failure?

KAREN BASS: I think probably the greatest success was disproving the myth that people don't want to leave the streets. What that tells me is that there's a way out of this, that this is solvable.

The greatest challenge is the scale. ... The greatest thing I learned [last] year are the pieces that need to happen to put this together.

Getting thousands of people off the street is the greatest success. Figuring out what the pathway forward should be, what the pieces should be ... is the greatest challenge.

BP: Are there pieces that are harder than you expected?

KB: Yes! Getting people out of interim and into permanent [housing]. And all of the barriers, even when there's housing available.

It's been like peeling an onion. And you cry when you peel an onion.

Every peel, I find a barrier, and then I have to go chase down that barrier. But it's not hard to knock the barriers down. And some of the barriers are because, "Well, this is the way we've always done it."

And some of the barriers are, for instance, "You have to prove your income [to get a benefit]." And, "You need a government-issued ID."

"But I'm in a tent. What's my address? Don't you think I'm poor enough?"

So every time I peel back, then I go off in pursuit of that barrier, and we've been able to move the barriers. But every time we move a barrier, we find out that somebody else has that same barrier.

For example, the barrier on income and IDs. We peeled that back. We got HUD [the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development] to waive it ... to agree to presumptive eligibility.

Then we found out that the developers might have the same barrier. They have to income-prove. The men and women who are building the housing, they can't accept my people because they have to prove income. So then we're in pursuit of that barrier.

But those are solvable.

BP: There's new inputs into this pipeline all the time, whether it's evictions or or Texas Gov. Greg Greg Abbott sending immigrants from the border or any number of things. Given that, are you worried that the numbers may not yet be coming down?

KB: I am. That's another peel of the onion.

I repurposed the Mayor's Fund to focus on [evictions]. Eric [Garcetti, Bass' predecessor as

“WE HAVE NO PROGRAM TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS. WE’RE TRYING TO INVENT ONE.”

mayor] used it for COVID, brilliantly. ... We are regranting that money to smaller, community-based, grassroots organizations to focus on the ZIP codes where the eviction rates are the highest. ... There's a lot of evictions on pretty high-income ZIP codes. We're not focusing our efforts there. Just because they're evicted does not mean they're going to be homeless. ... Those people will be OK.

But if you go to the lowest income ZIP codes with high numbers of evictions and knock on doors and go to schools and all that, they won't be OK. And we have recruited an army of pro bono attorneys to represent people. And at the same time, we've also tried to pay attention to the landlords, especially small landlords. So when you hear about rental assistance, that goes to the landlord, not to the tenant.

We have no program to prevent homelessness. We're trying to invent one. ... Can we develop a model that prevents homelessness by intervening in people facing eviction and solve that problem? We have over 300 volunteer lawyers that are helping.

Just to be perfectly clear: We have no idea if this is going to work.

BP: In one sense, this is a national problem. Every city has some version of this. In another sense, it's a very local problem. Some cities have done much better than others. Houston, for instance, appears to have had great success, San Francisco much more mixed. Is this properly thought of as a national problem or a local problem, or is it the worst of both?

KB: It is a national problem. The difference is the scale. If you look at the states on the West Coast, the numbers are the highest.

New York was ahead of the game. The city policy has a right to housing. And they invested years ago in a system of interim housing. We never did that. In effect, our policy has been: Stay on the street until permanent housing is built.

If you look back on [last] year, probably the biggest change has been the beginning of a system of long-term interim housing. When I started, I thought interim was going to be three to six months. I now accept that interim is probably a year and a half because we are building, but how on earth is it OK to say, "Stay on the street until your number comes up?"

BP: It's inhumane. It's immoral, really.

KB: De facto, that was our policy. And that was the policy of the county.

BP: Are you satisfied with your relationship with the county?

KB: Yeah, I think it's a good relationship. Am I satisfied with all that's going on? No. But the county isn't either.

BP: Do you believe that there is a shared sense of not just policy but urgency when it comes to the county, state and federal governments on this issue?

KB: I absolutely believe that, and also that everything needs to be framed by the same goal, which is ending homelessness, not managing it.

The system was not set up, in my opinion, to end homelessness. I do not believe that anybody would have predicted that homelessness would have metastasized to where it is today. ... If you are

managing homelessness, your contracts and everything you do are not set up with the outcome in mind that people get off the streets permanently.

BP: Is there a reluctance to end homelessness — there are nonprofits and others for whom it is their business — or is this more a conceptual problem?

KB: I will admit to being a little biased on this, as the former executive director of a nonprofit. I do not fault the agencies for this at all. They are not the ones that determine the outcomes. That is the higher authority of the federal, state, county and city [governments] that make certain requirements of them, and that they are abiding by.

All of the public agencies need to set a goal of ending homelessness and need to back it up with the resources that are required. ...

What I learned by appointing myself to the LAHSA board [the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority is a joint city-county agency formed in 1993 to provide services to unhoused people in this region] is that LAHSA awards about 60% of the resources that are needed. It is the expectation of the community program to raise the other 40%.

And you know, Jim, that different agencies have different abilities, resources, access. That's structural inequity right there.

That's why I say that the government agencies need to set a goal, but they need to back it up with the resources. Why set these organizations up so that they have to go hustle for 40%? If you are in a more affluent area, you're going to have better access to donors, better access to other resources, and you're going to have fewer numbers [of unhoused people].

BP: So you have smaller need and greater resources. And the reverse is true, of course, in poorer neighborhoods, where you have more unhoused people and less access to resources.

KB: Exactly. Where I think we have been deficient is in my old community, the health community. The social service community has, in my opinion, been lacking. Anybody that's been on the street needs healthcare. Anybody who's been on the street to the point where their lives have collapsed needs very strong social service support. If you are an agency that is not able to raise millions of dollars, then the support that you provide to your clients is different.

That's why I believe there need to be uniform standards. The outcome needs to be to end homelessness. And the city, county, state, federal government and private sector, for that matter — whether we're talking about the philanthropic private sector or the straight, for-profit private sector — everybody needs to weigh in. It is not fair to leave such a massive humanitarian crisis to community-based programs.

BP: How much time do you have to show results? You're asking a lot of these agencies and of people paying for them. Is there a point where you have to start showing numbers coming down for people to stay with you?

KB: There are a couple of ways to look at it. My measurement that I used in my first year was the reduction of street homelessness. I also had a multifaceted approach to ending homelessness that involved robust interim housing ... as well as expediting the building of housing. Those, especially the building, are going to take a while to show results, because even though we're building faster than ever — or, I should say, we're permitting faster than ever — it still takes a long time to build. ...

My measurement last year was to reduce street homelessness, which we did. ...

BP: When you say “reduce street homelessness,” what's the measure of that?

KB Encampments.

What I didn't commit to [in the first year] was reducing the number of people who are unhoused in the city. I didn't for a variety of reasons. One was that I anticipate homelessness even increasing because of the COVID protections [eviction moratorium] that went away.

BP: Do you feel progress in the area of interim housing, in moving away from the de facto policy, as you called it, of forcing people to live on the street until there is a permanent place for them to live?

KB: Yes. That's no longer acceptable. ... It is unacceptable to have Angelenos on the street. Period. That has to be our viewpoint.

If that is not our viewpoint, then we have conceded. That's when you are managing the problem, and you are not committed to ending the problem.

BP: I must say, even personally, you adjust yourself to it. You become accustomed to it, and you stop being outraged by it. And it's outrageous.

KB: It's absolutely outrageous. And you and I have been around long enough to know that this is not always the way it was, but an entire generation has grown up and seen this their entire life.

BP: Are you learning more about this all the time? Are you discovering new wrinkles to the system that stand in the way of, as you say, peeling the onion?

KB: Yes, I am constantly learning and constantly finding new barriers. ... The way this has worked before is that outreach workers would go to the tents. They would talk to you and ask, “Jim, do you want housing?” Yes, you do. “Well, I tell you what, give me your name. And let's see, where's your tent located? I'll be back when I have a spot for you.” If your tent is in the same location six months from now, maybe I have a place for you. But if you move, I have to go looking for you.

So literally, spots would be vacant while they looked for where your tent is.

Maybe it made sense when there were a handful of people who were unhoused. One thing that's really clear: In the midst of a humanitarian crisis, it's insanity. ...

But what I'm doing is extremely expensive. And by the way, it is way too expensive. It's several thousand dollars a month, per person, to stay in a motel, \$3,000 or more a month to stay in a motel.

BP: Which would pay for the rent in a nice apartment.

KB: Exactly right.

But here's the thing that Angelenos have to consider: As far as I'm concerned, that's way too much money. We have to come up with a better model of long-term, interim housing, but in the meantime, it is more expensive to leave people on the street — police calls, fire calls, quality of life, petty crimes around encampments. So Angelenos have to say, yes, this is a crazy amount of money, but give them time to come up with a cheaper model of interim housing.

I would rather spend money keeping people in motels than go back to the old policy of “You stay on the street until we can figure out how to do better.”

BP: Are there new models?

KB: There's one ... called New Beginnings. It's an improvement on a tiny home. A lot of people describe a tiny home as a tool shed. But these are large enough to have individual bathrooms and a kitchenette. They house two people, sometimes three. ...

That's the model I want to look at. I want to move away from the tiny homes because, again, I'm looking for housing that people could stay in for a year to a year and a half.

BP: Flashing forward a few years. Should we expect a system of shelters that then moves to a New Beginnings-type arrangement — people might spend a year, a year and a half there, and then move to some sort of permanent, affordable housing?

KB: Right. On the shelter side, though, I'm sure there will always be a need for congregate



↑ From left, Los Angeles City Councilman Paul Krekorian, L.A. Family Housing CEO Stephanie Klasky-Gamer, Mayor Karen Bass, and actor Danny Trejo walk together during the annual homeless count in the North Hollywood section of Los Angeles Jan. 24, 2023.

shelters, but that will not be an emphasis. Where congregate shelters really come into play is the emergency situation — a weather event.

But here's the thing: We are going to have to prepare for summer weather. We've only worried about cold weather, but it gets extremely hot now because of climate change.

BP: And in some ways heat is more inescapable than cold weather.

KB: Exactly. And so we're going to need to plan for weather. And we're looking at having emergency shelters year-round.

BP: Was deinstitutionalization [the policy of releasing mentally ill patients held without their consent, endorsed by then-Gov. Ronald Reagan and civil libertarians for a combination of budgetary and human rights reasons] a mistake?

KB. One hundred percent. First of all, deinstitutionalization would have been a great policy if we had followed through. It wasn't supposed to be releasing people on the streets. It was supposed to have been followed by a model of community-based care, whether it was clinics or housing. That never happened.

But it troubles me when people just focus on that because it misses policies such as welfare reform. When I was back at Community Coalition, we were fighting welfare reform because we knew that women and children were going to become homeless. Before the mid-1990s, there were not women and children unhoused.

BP: I remember you saying it, and other people

saying it at the time: “This isn't welfare reform. This is the abolition of welfare.”

KB: And then there was the debate over the idea of “devolution.” Remember devolution? Devolution was just about dismantling the safety net, but it was packaged as, “The locals know better. We don't need entitlements. We'll go to block grants. And we'll give the power over to the states to decide what to do with the money.”

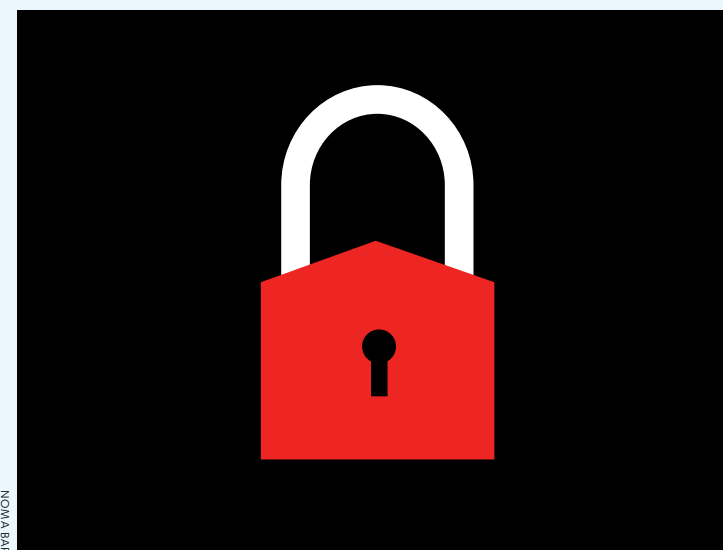
You can imagine [what would happen] in Southern states that today won't provide healthcare, won't accept food stamp money because they don't want to feed the children they insist on being born.

So we devolved services to the state, the state devolved it to the counties. The city was never fully in that business. ...

At the end of the day, we decimated the social safety net. And the problem is when people look at homelessness today, because our culture is so ahistorical, they don't connect the dots with policies that took place over two decades.

And this is the result of those policies. ▸

CLOSING NOTE: OF URGENCY AND ACTION



THERE ARE NO EASY SOLUTIONS. THE PROBLEM OF LOS ANGELES' thousands of unhoused people lends itself to no fast fixes. Indeed, if this issue of *Blueprint* makes anything clear, it is that the problem of homelessness is, in fact, many different problems. It will require care, investment, time and determination to solve them all.

But that is not any reason to give up. Slow progress — even setbacks — are to be expected. They must not deter policymakers who rightly recognize the moral urgency of this undertaking.

Alongside reason for caution, there is evidence to reinforce hope. Take, for instance, the work of UCLA's Homeless Healthcare Collaborative, which combines research with service delivery, treating the manifold health problems that those without housing confront while also building a better database for those needs.

Similarly, a joint project combining researchers at UCLA and USC has produced PATHS, a research tool as simple as it is novel: It is amassing information about what those who are unhoused need by actually asking them. In the process, it is giving policymakers new insights into how they might assist those who are suffering most. Sweeps, for instance, don't help

much, while temporary hotel placements do — at least from the perspective of the people on the streets.

Our Special Report offers another ray of optimism. This investigation by Jon Regardie looks closely at time-limited subsidies, a program that moves those without housing into market-rate apartments. The idea sounds simple — and it is — but policymakers have long been left to wonder whether it works. As Regardie reports, it does. Not in every instance, of course, but about 25% better than other efforts, a finding that Brian Blackwell and Robert Santillano documented in a report for the California Policy Lab.

Time-limited subsidies won't solve the problem for every person experiencing homelessness. Some of those without housing need only a boost — a deposit to secure an apartment, or a month's rent. Others require sustained support. In the meantime, additional priorities need to be protected as well. Public transit, for example, must treat unhoused people with compassion, but also with an eye toward ensuring the safety and comfort of others who use trains and buses. Again, researchers, in this case led by Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris of UCLA's Luskin School of Public Affairs, are helping to identify solutions.

None of this is easy — or quick. Zev Yaroslavsky, a legendary figure in Los Angeles politics and co-author of a history of homelessness in the Los Angeles region, makes clear that policymakers face deep, ancient questions as they take on this issue. All the more reason that Yaroslavsky commends Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass for doing so.

Bass' resolve will be tested in the coming months and years. She has promised profound progress in addressing homelessness, a challenge her predecessors have largely avoided. She declared a state of homeless emergency on her first day in office, and everything else she has done, whether searching for a new LAPD chief or laying plans for the 2028 Summer Olympics, has been affected by this priority. Her fortunes will rise or fall based on her ability to find solutions to homelessness.

We hope the work highlighted in this issue will help to guide her efforts and those of other policymakers in Los Angeles, Sacramento and Washington. There is wisdom here, and it will take every bit of intelligence and resolve that leaders can muster if tens of thousands of people are to be brought inside and back into a life of serenity and contribution.

— **Jim Newton**



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DO YOU HAVE
SOMETHING TO SAY?

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