

MOTION

On Friday, May 16, U.S. District Judge David O. Carter issued a preliminary injunction requiring the city and the county to urgently find alternative housing or shelter for 6,000-7,000 unhoused people living near freeway overpasses, underpasses and ramps. It is a major push to force urgency into a homelessness response that has been far too slow and far too ineffective.

The court order holds much promise for quick results, but the city and county must not respond by focusing nearly exclusively on encampments near freeways, and suddenly start to drain resources from already anemic efforts to address encampments in residential areas. We must not close our eyes or turn our backs on the thousands of people living on sidewalks in residential neighborhoods, or ignore the concerns of and impacts to those who live nearby.

Even as the City responds to the court directive regarding homelessness near freeways, it must demonstrate that it is willing and able to address the issue of encampments in residential neighborhoods. It should do so by marshaling resources on a pilot program demonstrating quick action on large encampments in residential areas. One area in dire need of such a pilot program is the neighborhood near Rose and Penmar Avenues in Venice.

In a matter of mere weeks, the encampment, on the south side of Penmar Golf Course, across the street from residences, has grown from zero to more than 80 tents. The location, on the north side of a busy street with fast-moving traffic, is unsafe. Moreover, the scores of new tents and accumulated belongings completely occupy nearly one half-mile of a walking and jogging path that was once popular and heavily used by families that live nearby.

The Rose and Penmar encampment is a perfect example of the city's failed policies. Many unhoused residents report they have been dispersed from other areas, including Venice Beach and Lincoln Boulevard, showing how the city's encampment policies push people from neighborhood to neighborhood with few housing resources provided. The encampment, which has effectively taken exclusive use of a path that was once a public resource, shows the failure of city policies to protect the public right-of-way.

While the sheer size of this encampment is larger than most and appeared more quickly than most, it is one of hundreds of examples in Los Angeles neighborhoods, where unhoused people are dying, where public resources are being blocked, and where neighborhoods are being impacted. It is unfair to everyone involved - unhoused and housed alike.

It does not have to be that way. The Encampment to Home pilot project in South Los Angeles demonstrated that intense and focused outreach, dedicated resources, and multi-agency collaboration can eliminate an encampment and restore public space by housing and sheltering people, and not simply pushing them elsewhere.

Under Encampment to Home, coordinated outreach teams were able to focus intensively on engaging unsheltered residents, and workers were able to expedite the housing navigation process. Biweekly coordination meetings between the partner agencies allowed for a nimble streamlining of services. And with committed housing resources, participants were that much more motivated to engage.

Importantly, the approach prioritized intensive supportive services, limiting the need to utilize local law enforcement as a primary strategy for reducing encampments.

By every measure, the Encampment to Home project was a success. The project teams were able to identify, assess, and provide housing resources and services to unhoused residents from street encampments. Of the 106 residents housed by the program, 68 moved into two new apartment buildings at El Segundo Boulevard and the 110 Freeway. A year after completion of the project, nearly 93% of those who moved into a permanent unit remain successfully housed.


A similar approach could work at the Rose-Penmar location, using a combination of housing vouchers, shared housing, Project Roomkey placements, and even – temporarily – safe camping locations that could be established in parking lots or on vacant land with hygiene services, food, and social services.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Los Angeles Homeless Coordinator and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority coordinate with the Los Angeles Department of Mental Health, the Los Angeles Department of Health Services, social service providers and philanthropy to develop and implement a Rapid Results Encampment to Home pilot program for the Rose-Penmar area.

I FURTHER MOVE that the program utilize a wide array of tools - long-term housing with services, crisis housing, shared housing, bridge housing, Project Roomkey, and "safe camping" areas with services - to provide an alternative to unsafe and unsanitary sidewalk encampments that restrict access to the public right of way in the Rose-Penmar neighborhood.

I FURTHER MOVE that the City Administrative Office identify funds, including HHAPP funds, federal or state COVID-19 emergency funds, or reprogrammed dollars from less effective programs, to fund the program.

PRESENTED BY:


MIKE BONIN
Councilmember, 11th District

SECONDED BY:

MARQUEECE HARRIS-DAWSON (verbal)
Councilmember, 8th District