



OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

HALL OF JUSTICE

ALEX VILLANUEVA, SHERIFF



July 14, 2021

Brian K. Williams, Executive Director
County of Los Angeles
Sheriff Civilian Oversight Commission
350 South Figueroa Street, Suite 288
Los Angeles, California 90071

Dear Mr. Williams:

**RESPONSE TO THE CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT COMMISSION'S LETTER
DATED JUNE 30, 2021**

In response to the Civilian Oversight Commission's letter dated June 16, 2021, which requests answers to six questions pertaining to actions taken by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) in response to homeless encampments in Venice Beach, the Department has provided the following responses to each question:

- 1. Does the LASD have any policies, procedures, protocol, or a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that governs coordinating response efforts, specifically with your actions with respect to homeless encampments, in jurisdictions of municipal enforcement agencies? If so, what are they and did the LASD follow them?*

Whenever the LASD addresses homeless encampments in any jurisdiction, the LASD Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) is deployed, which strictly adheres to the five-step homeless encampment resolution protocol documented in the Los Angeles County Homeless Encampment Protocol. The only deviation from the formal process, is the approval of the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office is not sought in outside jurisdictions. (Please see attachments labeled LASD HOST overview June 2021 and the Los Angeles County Homeless Encampment Protocol).

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2. What collaborative and networking steps did the LASD take with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority (LAHSA), or other governmental or community-based organizations who were addressing the homeless crisis prior to assigning personnel to the Venice Beach homeless encampment area? If not prior to the deployment of LASD personnel to the site, is there currently such coordination?

Prior to the LASD Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) deploying in Venice, numerous collaborative and networking steps were taken. Lieutenant Geoffrey Deedrick, LASD HOST, participated in conference calls with Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) executives including Assistant Chief Beatrice Girmala, Deputy Chief Vito Palazzolo, Deputy Chief Blake Chow, Commander Donald Graham (LAPD Homeless Coordinator), Commander Billy Brockway, and Pacific Division Captain Steven Embrich.

Lieutenant Deedrick also had multiple discussions with the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority prior to the HOST Teams deployment in Venice. He also met with Chief Joe Losorelli, Chief Park Ranger of the city of Los Angeles Park Ranger Division and Dexter O'Connell, A Bridge Home Deputy for Councilmember Bonin, prior to HOST's deployment.

3. Describe the stakeholder engagement methods that the LASD is employing at the Venice beach site.

LASD HOST engaged with the Salvation Army-Bell Shelter, the Department of Veteran Affairs, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, the Union Rescue Mission, The Mens Groomer Foundation, West Coast Care (Family Reunification), and the Beacon Lighthouse Mission.

Lieutenant Deedrick sought to engage with Dexter O'Connell prior to participating in any formal planning meetings with service providers regarding the Ocean Front Walk (OFW) in Venice, however he was not receptive towards collaborating with the LASD.

4. How was the Venice beach site chosen? Will there be similar efforts in the downtown Skid Row area?

The Sheriff's Office received multiple calls to intervene with the homeless crisis in Venice. The residents of Venice felt a sense of abandonment by the city and an absence of law and order.

The LASD will be partnering and collaborating with all Los Angeles County law enforcement agencies to assist with outreach efforts across the entire County, including, eventually, the Skid Row area. As we assess and triage our response to this crisis, we will also be collaborating with state and federal agencies with resources and shared expertise.

5. Does the LASD maintain statistical reports with outcomes of interactions with the public on the LASD Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) operation? If so, please provide and publicly post on the LASD website a copy of the most recent available report.

During the LASD HOST assessment phase, they interviewed over 250 people on the Ocean Front Walk. Two people were placed in inpatient mental health programs, three people were placed in patient substance abuse treatment programs, twenty people were placed in a shelter at the Salvation Army-Bell Shelter, Beacon Light House Shelter, and others. Six people were reunified with family and friends (Ron Hooks at West Coast Care) and an additional 19 people connected with West Coast Care and began action plans to transition out of homelessness. LASD HOST deputies also escorted 42 people from the OFW to the outreach tents, which were manned by outreach workers from St. Josephs.

6. What is the LASD strategic plan and prioritization for addressing similar encampment concerns that exist within LASD unincorporated Los Angeles and Sheriff's contract cities?

The LASD has a long history of outreach throughout Los Angeles County. The HOST has successfully conducted outreach in numerous unincorporated areas. As part of the HOST outreach, homeless locations are identified, homeless counts are completed, and areas are prioritized. We are currently conducting an assessment of homeless encampments in residential areas, tourist destinations, and high fire danger areas along the foothills.

The Audit and Accountability Bureau (AAB) has the responsibility to monitor and document the Department's response related to this request. Should you have any questions regarding the Department's response, please contact Captain Rodney K. Moore at (323) 307-8302.

Sincerely,



ALEX VILLANUEVA
SHERIFF

Law enforcement personnel are often the first point of contact with those experiencing homelessness. For that reason, LASD HOST was created to exemplify the Counties efforts to combat homelessness and preserve public safety. Currently, the HOST Team is funded for one lieutenant, one sergeant, and four deputies for the entire county.

From its inception, the mission of HOST was to positively impact the homeless crisis in the County, while enhancing public safety and preserving the rights and dignity of persons experiencing homelessness. In February of 2011, the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department developed what was called the Los Angeles County Homeless Encampment Protocol. This protocol was created to address the growing number of those experiencing homelessness throughout the County and the increase in encampments. The protocol strictly adheres to constitutional principles, judicial decisions, and emphasizes ones civil rights with dignity. Through the protocol, a collaborative response to address the concerns of the community and the needs of those experiencing homelessness is developed. This protocol for encampment resolution has 5 steps: Identification, Assessment, Outreach, Posting, Clean up. During the protocol process, HOST vigorously documents every step with photographs, videos, in depth interviews, and associated material.

The LASD mission, regarding issues relating to homelessness was dramatically impacted in 2015/2016, when the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department was tasked with ensuring there was no loss of life in the 5 main waterways of Los Angeles County, during the predicted catastrophic El Nino Rain storms. Approximately 875 people experiencing homelessness were found living in the waterways during that project. Prior to the first El Nino Storm event, everyone found in the riverbed was out of the waterways. This mission was accomplished without ever using force and many people were helped due to the effort. The El Nino Humanitarian Mission was tremendously successful and the lessons learned from that endeavor became the foundation for what is today's LASD HOST Team.

A vital component of HOSTS success was the integration of a dedicated LAHSA homeless outreach team to work as one. This Co-response model was ahead of its time. By having the same HOST deputies work with the same outreach workers, outreach was consistent and trust was developed with those experiencing homelessness, not rushed. Also, by proactively contacting those experiencing homelessness in the community, versus responding due to a negative call for service, we saw a dramatic improvement in the quality of each contact. Throughout the County, the HOST proactive outreach model has proven to dramatically benefit the community along with those in need, with a significant decrease in crime and increased placement success rate.

LASD HOST was/is a member of the Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative from its genesis. HOST was at the table, learning from our County and Community partners the unique needs vulnerable populations had and the best strategies to improve quality connections. Through the Homeless Initiative, LASD HOST became a proud member of the County's E6 outreach strategy.

Through E6, HOST routinely deploys with our valued partners from the Department of Mental Health, Department of Health Services, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

As a member of the E6 Outreach Team, HOST has built unprecedented partnerships and collaborations with many service providers, community based organizations, other County Departments, and with cities throughout Los Angeles County. HOST has served as a vessel to connect cities with the many County services available to combat homelessness. With HOST serving as the collaborative bridge, successful relationships have formed to benefit the homeless population and increase public safety. HOST has also played an integral role in collaborative training with our E6 partners to enhance safety and security.

In 2017, LASD HOST, in collaboration with the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, created a specially designed training class for First Responders. The First Responder Homeless Training, which was the first of its kind on the Sheriff's Department was transformational and is in constant demand. The training has a strong foundation in harm reduction, trauma informed care, and de-escalation/crisis management techniques.

The First Responder Homeless Training consists of 8 modules of instruction, which are supported by a scenario based video where discussion follows:

- Understanding the Homeless Population –Who can be homeless – (**Anyone**, Veterans, Elderly, LGBT, Physically disabled, substance abuse, mental illness)
- Best Practices when interacting with those experiencing homelessness and Homeless Delivery Systems
 - Housing First, Harm Reduction, Trauma Informed Care, Motivational Interviewing, Alternatives to Incarceration, Cultural Humility
 - CES, HMIS, E6
- De-escalation/Crisis Management – Techniques for a positive interaction, conflict reduction, recognize the windows of opportunity. **“R.O.A.R”**
- Stages of Homelessness – Three Stages of Homelessness(Transitional, episodic, chronic), Understand the approach needs to be that of Trauma Informed Care
- Approach and Contact – Best practices and available resources for interacting with those who suffer from a mental illness and are homeless
- Enforcement and Collaboration – What is the best approach, Be the collaborative bridge, Familiarize yourself with available resources
- Leveraging Available Resources – Recognize that homelessness is a serious problem, No quick fix, Officers responsibility regarding property rights (4th amendment) of those who are experiencing homelessness, **Los Angeles County Homeless Encampment Protocol**
- Legal Considerations and Potential Liabilities – Always be guided by the civil rights of others and the law, Homelessness is not a crime, Service providers are the best solution and we provide a unique connection with the “Guardian” approach. Provide safe/secure environment for enriching connections.

To date, LASD HOST has trained over 3,000 LASD Department members, 73 police officers from independent police departments, 1,200 civilians from municipal city staffs, private industry, community groups, and utilities.

Through our contacts with thousands of our homeless neighbors, HOST has earned a reputation for being compassionate, accountable, innovative and bold. HOST has transcended the role of traditional law enforcement. For years, HOST has accomplished its mission with 0 uses of force and adheres to strict constitutional principles.

HOST also has two specially designated deputies through the Department of Mental Health, who conduct outreach services in areas that are considered dangerous, yet heavily populated by homeless individuals. The deputies not only conduct outreach services but provide referrals, link clients to services, and will consult with mental health to coordinate services for homeless individuals who appeared to be in need of mental health services (crisis evaluation, mental health appointments, etc.). Their goal is to:

- Provide community based mental health outreach services
- Decrease hospitalization
- Promote mental health services and education
- Connect those experiencing homelessness to mental health and other social services
- Reduce incarceration
- Avoid the use of force
- Provide mental health interventions

Their objective, as well as other members of HOST, is to reduce the number of individuals with a mental disorder living in homeless encampments, reduce incarceration, and provide mental health services outpatient or in-patient psychiatric hospitalization by providing immediate field based mental health services in collaboration with HOST.

HOST is called upon during times of inclement weather and public health outbreaks, to leverage the relationships built with those experiencing homelessness throughout the community. Those relationships foster the exchange of crucial information to a vulnerable population in times of predicted crisis. HOST has deployed throughout the County with our outreach partners:

- Daily, from day one of the COVID 19 pandemic to educate those experiencing homelessness regarding the virus, to check on their welfare, and to support the Department of Public Health's vaccination program.
- In the waterways when predicted significant rain is predicted
- In the High Fire Zones when red flag conditions are declared or significant heat is projected
- In significant encampments during suspected hepatitis and typhus outbreaks

- To support the Shower Pilot Program and Hygiene Station placement

When LASD HOST receives a request/directive to assist other jurisdictions:

- We conduct a visual assessment of the location
- Identify appropriate stakeholders
- Review open source information if applicable
- We conduct collaborative meetings with the respective agency
 - Assess all aspects of situation, are others involved?
- Assess which service providers serve the area
- Ascertain what the current level of service is
- What housing options are available
- Implement the HOST model -
 - Begin rapport building
 - Use innovation to connect (haircuts, barber, shower pilot, pet assistance)
 - Constantly assess rapport building to increase collaborative success
 - Leverage relationships to facilitate service connection (VA, DMH, etc)
 - Family Re Unification
 - Community/stakeholder involvement
 - Local business involvement
 - All legal, moral, ethical options available
- Based on the area and situation, the conclusion is defined:
 - Does it require the full Los Angeles County Homeless Encampment Protocol?
 - Identification
 - Assessment
 - Outreach
 - Posting
 - Clean up
 - Often times it is a full clean up
 - Might be spot clean up, where no one is displaced
 - All humane/legal options are considered

**Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office & Sheriff Department, and Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority
Protocol* for Reporting & Responding to Homeless Encampments or Concentrated Homeless Activities**

Steps	Tasks	Responsible Party/Entity/Comments
<p>1. Complete the Homeless Encampment Identification (Report) Form</p>	<p>Complete Section I of the Homeless Encampment Identification (HEI) form upon identification of a homeless encampment and/or a high concentration of homeless in a given area. Email the completed form to Michael Castillo of the Chief Executive Office (CEO) Homeless & Housing Unit (HHU) at mcastillo@ceo.lacounty.gov.</p>	<p>Sheriff Department Designee and/or LAHSA ERT</p>
<p>2. Submit Form to the CEO's Office / Board Office Approval</p>	<p>The CEO's office will review the form to ensure all applicable information is included. Barring any need for additional information, the CEO's HHU will submit the form to the respective Board Office to obtain the approval for addressing the site via the Protocol. Once a response is received from the Board Office, CEO will inform the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) and the Sheriff Department (LASD) of the status and next steps.</p>	<p>CEO</p> <p>The Homeless encampment Protocol will only apply if five (5) or more persons are identified at a given site.</p>
<p>3. Conduct Outreach</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> LAHSA will dispatch an Emergency Response Team (ERT) to the site to conduct a more in-depth assessment and resubmit the HEI form (with Sec. II completed) to the CEO's HHU within 72 hours of receipt of the Board's approval. LAHSA will be accompanied by an LASD Deputy familiar with LAHSA's ERT assessment process <u>whenever unlawful activity is identified</u> in the initial report. LASD will determine if it is safe for LAHSA to begin their assessment/outreach. LAHSA will complete a Coordinated Entry System (CES) assessment for all dwellers present, when possible, and connect clients to the appropriate CES Outreach Coordinator. Based on the CES findings, the appropriate County Department(s), e.g., Mental Health, Public Health, Public Social Services, Community & Senior Services, etc, may be contacted by the CEO HHU or the CES Outreach Coordinator and asked to conduct benefits/program eligibility assessment of homeless persons at the encampment. When necessary, the aforementioned Departments will conduct ongoing visits with LAHSA. <p>NOTE: LAHSA may request a Sheriff escort to an encampment or homeless activity location at any time during the course of their outreach efforts.</p>	<p>LAHSA & Sheriff</p> <p>Based on the geographic location of each site the CES Outreach Coordinator will compile a list of identified agencies with potential housing opportunities and local community based organizations.</p>
<p>4. Next Steps</p>	<p>Based on LAHSA's reported findings and recommendations, the CEO HHU, with engagement from the CES Outreach Coordinator will determine future action(s) needed to address the issue. Actions include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A timeline will be issued for ongoing outreach/engagement. LASD will conduct ongoing visits to active sites to address any unlawful activity that involves a victim or a potential safety hazard to the community at large and to discuss trespassing laws and applicable ordinances with homeless inhabiting a site. 	<p>CEO, Sheriff, & LAHSA</p> <p>CEO staff will be responsible for contacting the complainant to: 1) answer any questions he/she may have; 2) keep them informed of the action being</p>

Steps	Tasks	Responsible Party/Entity/Comments
	<p>3. If the owner of an encampment property is unknown, LASD will assist with identifying the property owner(s) to advise them of the situation, including their rights and responsibilities. LASD will also assist with identification of jurisdiction in relation to site clean-up and maintenance, e.g., DPW, State of CA, Army Corp of Engineers, etc.</p> <p>4. Two weeks prior to the expiration of a given timeline (#1 above), LASD, with the assistance of the appropriate agency, will post ordinance/trespassing signage, if applicable, and inform the inhabitants that it is unlawful for them to be on the site.</p> <p>5. Two weeks prior to the expiration of a given timeline, the Encampment Team (CEO, LAHSA, and LASD) will identify the appropriate action for “closing down” an encampment (see #5 below):</p> <p>A. If there are no longer inhabitants on the site a clean-up will be conducted by the appropriate agency and steps will be taken to ensure that the encampment is not recreated, e.g., ongoing LAHSA and LASD observation of the location, erecting or repair of fencing/walls (paid for by the property owner*), outreach and ongoing contact with the local community,</p> <p>B. If there are still homeless on site a collaborative engagement effort will be conducted on the date the timeline expires with participation from LAHSA, the CES Outreach Coordinator, LASD, CEO HHU, appropriate County departments, and community based organizations. The goal of the event is to provide a final opportunity to connect homeless to services and housing prior to the closing of the encampment.</p>	<p>planned/taken; 3) advise them of the timeline for addressing the issue; and, 4) provide them with periodic updates regarding the issue and our progress.</p> <p>Prior to a collaborative event, LAHSA is responsible for continued outreach/engagement and identifying housing opportunities that can be offered to the homeless persons still on site.</p>
<p>5. Resolution & Closure</p>	<p>The CEO HHU will convene monthly scheduled meetings with the Encampment Team to discuss the status of all encampments, e.g., “a reduction in the number of homeless at the site, but continued engagement is required;” “no further homeless activity has been observed at the site and the encampment no longer exists;” etc.</p>	<p>CEO</p>

Note: the Protocol only applies to unincorporated areas of LA County, County parks, and cities where the Sheriff Department is the contracted law enforcement agency.

CEO HHU is responsible for providing ongoing updates to respective Board offices and informing Board offices of the final disposition of encampments in their district.

*Owner of private property to decide if they want to erect a fence/wall or repair existing fence/wall.