

# INADEQUATE EL NIÑO PLANNING FOR COUNTY HOMELESS POPULATION: An Interim Report (IR) by the 2015-2016 Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The enormous and growing number of people without homes in Los Angeles County is tragic.<sup>1</sup> Our county must better address the reality that more than seventy (70) percent of them, about 29,000 people, will be unsheltered during what is expected to be a historic rainy season. The members of the 2015-2016 Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury (CGJ) are alarmed by this fact. We have learned, as a result of recent inquiries to the 22 largest cities in the county,<sup>2</sup> that not enough is being accomplished to alleviate the suffering that is certain to increase among those who lack reliable shelter as a massive El Niño weather pattern approaches.<sup>3</sup>

We urge at a minimum that funds be expended for the immediate stockpiling of supplies and equipment sufficient to provide at least minimal sheltering for homeless people who cannot be accommodated in shelters so that they might survive the rainstorms to come. A plan to efficiently distribute these supplies must be put in place.

The CGJ is pleased that there is an effort to clear riverbanks and dry washes of human encampments as the winter approaches,<sup>4</sup> but we are very concerned that the 2,772 shelter and surge capacity beds<sup>5</sup> planned by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) is just a fraction of the number necessary to shelter homeless people in severe weather. Moreover, the information we received also indicates that current planning by individual cities will not adequately supplement the LAHSA shelters.<sup>6</sup>

The CGJ believes this situation is unconscionable and grossly inadequate.

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<sup>1</sup> The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority reported 44,359 homeless people in Los Angeles County in its January 2015 count. [http://www.lahsa.org/homelesscount\\_results](http://www.lahsa.org/homelesscount_results)

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix: Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury Homeless Survey

<sup>3</sup> This El Niño is predicted to be perhaps the strongest on record. <http://www.latimes.com/local/weather/la-me-ln-el-nino-coming-20151113-story.html> The sea-surface water temperature in the Eastern Pacific Ocean reached its highest average point at this time of year since 1950. <http://www.wunderground.com/news/strong-el-nino-december-2015> Above-average precipitation is forecast during the 90-day period beginning in January 2016. [http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/long\\_range/lead01/off01\\_prpcp.gif](http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/long_range/lead01/off01_prpcp.gif)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/local/countygovernment/la-me-tujungang-cleanup-20151115-story.html>

<sup>5</sup> [http://documents.lahsa.org/Programs/funding/2015/2015\\_WSP\\_RFP\\_Funding\\_Recommendations.pdf](http://documents.lahsa.org/Programs/funding/2015/2015_WSP_RFP_Funding_Recommendations.pdf)  
[http://file.lacounty.gov/bc/q4\\_2015/cms1\\_235457.pdf](http://file.lacounty.gov/bc/q4_2015/cms1_235457.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> See Exhibit B, *infra*.

## II. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury therefore makes the following recommendations.

IR1.1. The County of Los Angeles and each of its 88 cities should immediately locate buildings that could be used to shelter the approximately 29,000 homeless people who will not be accommodated by the plans known to the CGJ from the expected torrential rains.

IR1.2. The County of Los Angeles and each of its 88 cities should determine what additional supplies and equipment need to be relocated to the buildings identified above to provide for the basic human needs of the people housed in those buildings during the El Niño event. These buildings should be identified and located according to need across the County. Shelters additionally should provide space for personal items and be staffed and controlled by Department of Health employees and patrolled by police.

IR1.3. The County and its 88 cities should immediately take steps to reasonably modify ordinances and regulations that would impede the sheltering of people in public structures and facilities during the El Niño event, by relaxing restrictions in health, fire, and other safety standards applicable to non-catastrophic times.

IR1.4. The County and its 88 cities should immediately take steps to waive ordinances and regulations that for whatever reason similarly block private entities from providing temporary shelter to people without homes.

IR1.5. The County of Los Angeles and each of its 88 cities at a minimum should purchase and provide tents, tarps, and ponchos to people who cannot be accommodated in shelters because they have pets or for whom there is no room in existing emergency shelters. Every step should be taken to assure that unsheltered people remain dry and avoid hypothermia.

IR1.6. The County and its 88 cities should make plans or they should partner with non-governmental entities to distribute these supplies.

IR1.7. Public Service Announcements should be made throughout Los Angeles County about the location of public-building shelters available to unsheltered people, including public transportation when needed.

### III. BACKGROUND

The CGJ is aware that approximately 44,000 people are homeless in our county and that on any given night seventy (70) percent of them are not sheltered.<sup>7</sup> Thus every day more than 29,000 people sleep on our streets and in parks. The County and its largest cities have developed plans for the coming winter that include providing emergency shelter for just a fraction of that number.<sup>8</sup>

### IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The CGJ gathered information from cities within the county with populations exceeding 85,000. The questionnaire sent to city managers and to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)<sup>9</sup> asked recipients to provide a current estimate of homeless people in their jurisdictions and to detail plans to shelter those individuals in extreme weather. The questionnaire is attached in the Appendix.

### V. DATA

The Grand Jury examined the data it collected and *focused on the information pertaining to cities of 100,000 or more in population.* These sixteen (16) cities, listed in Exhibit B, are located in all areas of Los Angeles County. The data present a clear picture of what preparations have been made to provide shelter to the County's homeless population during severe winter storms.

The data clearly shows that the number of beds planned will benefit just a fraction of the homeless population. Approximately 25,000 unsheltered homeless people in large cities across the County will be left unsheltered. Preventable outcomes, such as great suffering and possible loss of life in an already unhealthy segment of our population, will likely occur.

Exhibit A, which follows, is a chart showing the relationship between the total estimated numbers of unsheltered homeless people in those cities compared to the projected number of winter storm shelter beds provided by Los Angeles County and those sixteen (16) cities.

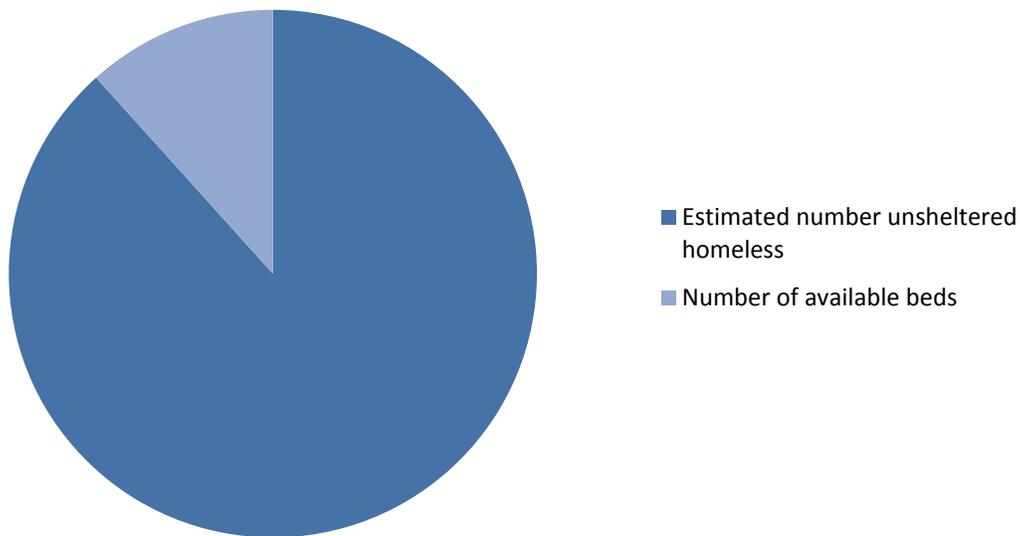
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<sup>7</sup> [http://lahsa.org/homelesscount\\_results](http://lahsa.org/homelesscount_results)

<sup>8</sup> See data in Exhibit B. This report specifically does not address shelter beds that are not funded directly by Los Angeles County or its 88 cities.

<sup>9</sup> LAHSA covers all of Los Angeles County and assists county departments and independent cities coordinate the local response to the ever-increasing number of individuals without homes in the county.

### Exhibit A



*This pie chart shows that only 13.2% of the unsheltered homeless people in LA County's 16 largest cities will have shelter beds provided by LA County or the cities themselves.*

Exhibit B lists the County's sixteen (16) largest cities and shows the number of homeless people, including those unsheltered, indicated by those cities. It also lists the number of winter shelter beds planned to be available.

## EXHIBIT B

COUNTY CITIES WITH POPULATION >100,000	ESTIMATED NUMBER HOMELESS	ESTIMATED NUMBER UNSHelterED HOMELESS	NUMBER OF AVAILABLE BEDS
BURBANK	168	168	0
DOWNEY	180	165	0
EL MONTE	238	122	136
GLENDALE	208	128	80
INGLEWOOD*	150	50	100
LANCASTER*	2,818	2,612	104
LOS ANGELES	25,686	17,687	2,239
LONG BEACH*	2,345	1,513	144
NORWALK	235	118	117
PALMDALE	416	416	0
PASADENA	632	488	144
POMONA*	912	588	125
SANTA CLARITA*	298	238	60
SOUTH GATE	189	189	0
TORRANCE	28	28	0
WEST COVINA	72	72	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34,575</b>	<b>24,582</b>	<b>3,249</b>

*This chart lists the 16 largest cities in Los Angeles County and the estimated number of homeless people and unsheltered homeless people in each (provided by the cities themselves). It lists the number of winter shelter beds planned for each jurisdiction. Every effort was made by the CGJ to obtain accurate information for this chart.*

\*The available bed number listed is included in LAHSA Winter Shelter grants for 2015-2016.

## VI. FINDINGS

There are more than 44,000 homeless people in Los Angeles County.

There is a severe lack of shelter beds and/or emergency beds available in Los Angeles County.

There is very little substantive planning, at least as reported to the CGJ, that has the purpose of keeping large numbers of people dry during severe rainstorms.

There are coordinated sweeps of river banks and dry washes, and, presumably, other areas known to present risk of flooding.

There is little or no effort to suspend ordinances and regulations to provide additional shelter by government or private entities.

Some private entities would provide emergency shelter if permitted to do so.

## **VII. REQUEST FOR RESPONSE**

California Penal Code Sections 933(c) and 933.05 require a written response to all recommendations contained in this report. Such recommendations shall be made no later than ninety (90) days after the Civil Grand Jury publishes its report (files it with the Clerk of the Court).

All responses to these interim recommendations of the 2015-2016 Civil Grand Jury must be submitted within ninety (90) days following the release of the report to the public, to:

Presiding Judge  
Los Angeles County Superior Court  
Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center  
210 West Temple Street  
Eleventh Floor-Room 11-506  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Responses are required from:

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors: IR1.1, IR1.2, IR1.3, IR1.4, IR1.5, IR1.6, and IR1.7.

The 88 cities of Los Angeles County: IR1.1, IR1.2, IR1.3, IR1.4, IR1.5, IR1.6, and IR1.7.

Agoura Hills	Lancaster
Alhambra	Lawndale
Arcadia	Lomita
Artesia	Long Beach
Avalon	Los Angeles
Azusa	Lynwood
Baldwin Park	Malibu
Bell	Manhattan Beach

Bell Gardens	Maywood
Bellflower	Monrovia
Beverly Hills	Montebello
Bradbury	Monterey Park
Burbank	Norwalk
Calabasas	Palmdale
Carson	Palos Verdes Estates
Cerritos	Paramount
Claremont	Pasadena
Commerce	Pico Rivera
Compton	Pomona
Covina	Rancho Palos Verdes
Cudahy	Redondo Beach
Culver City	Rolling Hills
Diamond Bar	Rolling Hills Estates
Downey	Rosemead
Duarte	San Dimas
El Monte	San Fernando
El Segundo	San Gabriel
Gardena	San Marino
Glendale	Santa Clarita
Glendora	Santa Fe Springs
Hawaiian Gardens	Santa Monica
Hawthorne	Sierra Madre
Hermosa Beach	Signal Hill
Hidden Hills	South El Monte
Huntington Park	South Gate
Industry	South Pasadena
Inglewood	Temple City
Irwindale	Torrance
La Cañada Flintridge	Vernon
La Habra Heights	Walnut
La Mirada	West Covina
La Puente	West Hollywood
La Verne	Westlake Village
Lakewood	Whittier

## **VIII. ACRONYMS**

**CGJ** Civil Grand Jury

**IR** Interim Report

**LAHSA** Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

## **IX. COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Heather H. Preimesberger, Co-Chairperson

Cynthia T. Vance, Co-Chairperson

Edna E. McDonald

Stephen Press

Molly Milligan

Patricia T. Turner

Sandy A. Orton

Bob P. Villacarlos

## APPENDIX

### Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury Homeless Survey

#### TOPIC: Shelters for Extreme Weather Events and/or Heavy Rain Events

As you may be aware, the function of the Civil Grand Jury is to investigate selected aspects of the operations of county and city government. We therefore ask a few questions related to your city's policy and plans concerning caring for the homeless during periods of extreme weather events such as unusually cold weather and heavy rain, which is often accompanied by flooding, mudflows, and landslides. We ask these questions now because of the impending likelihood of heavy rainstorms during the strong El Niño weather season forecast to soon impact Southern California.

Please provide the name, phone number and email contact of person with primary responsibility for dealing with the homeless people in your city and please provide by November 18, 2015 the following questions.

1. How significant, using numbers, is the homeless problem in your city?
2. Has the number of homeless people in your city increased or decreased during the last 5 years? Is there a consistency in the homeless population in your city, or have you observed a change in the makeup of the homeless population in terms of the number of single adults, couples, and children in families?
3. Does the city have an Emergency Preparedness Plan that includes providing services to homeless people during extreme temperature events (very low or high temperatures), and/or severe rainstorms? If so, could you provide us with a copy of this plan?
4. Does the city currently provide shelters for the homeless during times of extreme temperature events and rainstorms? If so, how many shelters does the city provide, where are they located, and during what hours are they open? Are cots or other sleeping facilities provided? Is food provided, and if so by whom? Are toilet and washing facilities, including showers, provided at the shelters?
5. After the need for short-term shelters has passed, does the city provide any service, either directly or indirectly, to aid the homeless as they leave the shelter to find transitional or permanent housing?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us to better understand your city's preparation and response to the need for homeless people to have shelter during extreme temperature events and rainstorms?