

San Diego bans homeless encampments, erects caged parking lot "solution"

Kevin Martinez
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A recent measure enacted by the San Diego City Council bans tent encampments in all public spaces in the Southern California city with the supposed exception if shelter beds for the homeless are unavailable.

Additionally, the law bans all tent encampments in parks, canyons and areas next to schools, transit stations and even homeless shelters, regardless of shelter capacity. Enforcement of the law was held off until 30 days after the first so-called “safe sleeping” lot was opened close to downtown.

The law was backed by Democratic Mayor Todd Gloria and introduced by City Councilman Stephen Whitburn, also a Democrat.

Dubbed the “Unsafe Camping Ordinance,” the measure was signed into law following a 5-4 decision in favor by the City Council on June 27. Homeless advocates have rightly pointed out that the new law does nothing to help the homeless find shelter and if anything, will just push the unhoused population into the city’s outer suburbs.

Supporters of the measure, like Mayor Gloria, cynically argued that because there was shelter and services being offered by the city this justified a ban on camping that was “posing a health and safety risk to the public.”

Gloria argued that with the meager resources being provided by the city towards homelessness services it was, “right and appropriate for us to set the expectation that people experiencing homelessness must avail themselves of the services we are providing.” Throughout the city, especially downtown and areas frequented by tourists, signs have been posted which declare no camping and provide a phone number which one can call for resources.

The city has sought to increase shelter capacity by

opening a so-called “safe sleep parking lot” in the city’s Golden Hill neighborhood which can shelter approximately 150 people per night. The city also plans to open another shelter called “O Lot” which will be located near the Naval Medical Center in Balboa Park. That lot, however, will not open until the Fall, and will only be able to shelter 400 people.

In effect the city is creating two open-air cages which, at most, will only provide shelter to several hundred heavily vetted and monitored individuals while thousands more will have to languish on the streets. The resources being put out are a drop in the bucket to the housing crisis in San Diego.

Homeless advocates also point out that the shelters themselves are rife with crime and violence, which is why many homeless prefer to sleep on the streets regardless of the limited beds being offered to a select few.

The myth of adequate shelter being offered by the city allows officials to escape responsibility for those who cannot find shelter. Mayor Gloria recently opened a shelter in a former Travelodge motel in the Barrio Logan neighborhood, which transferred a total of just 42 families, with 51 children, from a previous shelter called the Golden Hall Bridge Shelter.

The Mayor said in a photo op, that this maneuver, basically shuffling around the homeless from one area of the city to the next, was an “important part” of the city’s plans for the homeless. Gloria admitted that single adults at Golden Hall were still there for the time being until they will have to move out to other shelters in the fall.

The weekend before the ban was set to begin, San Diego police began increasing their arrests and sweeps of homeless encampments near the downtown and commercial areas. Police used the city’s encroachment

law, which bans blocking a sidewalk, to clear multiple blocks of homeless encampments near the edge of downtown.

Robert Brown, who has been homeless since 2020, watched the police clear the camps telling *The Voice of San Diego*, “Street by street, they just wiped these places out,” adding, “I’ve seen lots of crying and screaming. The cops come out of nowhere and then people have nowhere to go now.” Brown said he watched many sick and old people be evicted, with nowhere to go.

Greg, who has spent years on the streets in San Diego, told the WSWS, “They’re hiding the problem just like they’re hiding the spread and more lethal evolution of COVID.

“The only thing the new ordinance will accomplish is criminalizing the poor and working class while at the same time, more and more workers and poor are becoming impoverished. Just as deliberately as they’re allowing the spread of infection.

“They have some sort of ‘safe’ area for encampment but I suspect what they are creating is a tent-ghetto. With the limiting of services such as food and hygiene at St. Vincent’s De Paul I suspect the plan will be to eventually force homeless people to some sort of ‘facility’ outside or nearer to the edge of downtown.”

It was recently reported that far more people are asking for shelter than is available, with an average of just 23 shelter beds available on any given day for the city’s estimated homeless population of 3,285 according to the San Diego Housing Commission’s January point-in-time census.

Furthermore, according to commission data, in the first five months of the year, only 32 percent referrals by officials and outreach workers resulted in a shelter placement, or less than a third. On average 231 referrals went unfulfilled every week.

None of the official responses to the homeless crisis, be it from the Democrats or Republicans, get to the root of the problem: namely, the city’s lack of affordable housing for the working class and the most poor and vulnerable layers of society.

A recent report from online real estate company Zillow described how San Diego was now the third highest city to rent in the United States, behind only San Jose and New York City but surpassing for the first time, San Francisco. The average monthly rent is now

\$3,175.

The cost of living is also exorbitant, with Payscale reporting that San Diego’s living costs are 44 percent higher than the national average and housing being 136 percent higher. The minimum wage is only \$16 an hour and for many is not enough to live in San Diego with some having to work multiple jobs to make ends meet.

Many workers are forced to cross the international border every day and live in Mexico where rent and living expenses are a fraction of that of the US. A report by the University of San Diego found that in 2020, around 35,000 workers and 7,000 students living in Tijuana crossed into San Diego for work and school, while 2,800 San Diegans crossed into Tijuana for work.

These figures, of course, mirror national trends which have seen workers’ living standards fall dramatically amid rising inflation. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced countless families and individuals into destitution and homelessness over the last three years and counting.

Meanwhile, no expenses are spared by the government and the Biden Administration to funnel hundreds of millions of dollars every month into the massively unpopular US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. So far Congress has approved \$113 billion in spending on the war, including \$70 billion directly on weapons. The Department of Housing and Urban Development, estimates it would cost \$20 billion to end homelessness in the United States.



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