Los Angeles's homeless "decline" report: A political scam

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The *Los Angeles Times* has uncritically touted a report claiming a 4 percent decline in homelessness in Los Angeles County in 2025, heralding it as proof that the city's decades-long housing disaster is finally improving.

This headline is designed to cover up the brutal reality faced by tens of thousands of unhoused workers and families and shield the criminal negligence of politicians who preside over one of the richest cities in the world—a city that houses 56 billionaires amid a growing sea of tents and human misery.

According to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority's (LAHSA) latest annual report, the county saw a 4 percent overall drop in homelessness, marking the "second consecutive year of decline." The *Times* dutifully amplifies this propaganda line, highlighting a supposed 10 percent decrease in people living on the streets.

These figures rest on a flimsy foundation: a narrow, point-in-time count conducted over just a few days in February that measures only what is visible on the streets, while ignoring the government policies displacing and erasing the homeless from public view.

Behind this "decline" is a brutal crackdown ordered by the state and city governments—an operation of sweeps, tent removals, and relocation of unhoused people to overcrowded, inadequate shelters or simply out of sight. California Governor Gavin Newsom's July 25, 2024 executive order targeting so-called "dangerous" homeless encampments initiated a campaign to clear tens of thousands from their makeshift homes across Los Angeles County.

The policy is backed by over $24 billion redirected to this purpose, including converting hotels into temporary shelters under programs like "Inside Safe" and "Pathway Home," which the report praises despite these initiatives having permanently housed a mere 1,449 people countywide.

The ostensible reduction in "unsheltered homelessness" is a displacement campaign designed to conceal the true scale of the problem from public view and craft a false narrative of progress. More than 60,000 people entered homelessness in 2024 alone, a figure that dwarfs the paltry number permanently housed by state and city programs.

It is an exercise in damage control designed to pacify growing public anger and justify the grotesque spending priorities of a ruling class that prioritizes billionaires over the working poor.

This cynical operation is not limited to Newsom. The entire ruling class apparatus—from the Los Angeles City Council and Mayor Karen Bass to the city's homelessness authority and the corporate media—has lined up behind this effort to whitewash the crisis.

Trump's "big beautiful" austerity bill will only deepen the crisis nationwide. Slashing social programs and housing funds, it will drive millions more into homelessness and create conditions of social catastrophe. Almost simultaneously, Newsom signed California's 2025–26 budget, an assault on workers and immigrant families that will have devastating consequences.

Rather than addressing the root causes of homelessness—the skyrocketing cost of housing, wage stagnation, widespread poverty and inadequate mental health services—these officials have doubled down on punitive tactics aimed at removing visible homelessness.

Mayor Bass, echoing Newsom's stance, has not objected to City Council cuts to critical programs like "Inside Safe," prioritizing enforcement and encampment clearances over long-term housing solutions.

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles City Council voted unanimously in March to dismantle LAHSA, the agency responsible for producing the rosy report. Citing audits of mismanagement, the council redirected hundreds of millions of dollars to private contractors, advancing a privatization agenda that is neither new nor benign.

The move was about creating lucrative profit opportunities for private companies with little accountability or oversight. This will commodify homelessness itself, outsourcing the management of encampment sweeps, temporary housing and other measures to contractors motivated by profit, not public welfare.

Alongside this, Los Angeles County's interim housing

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authority, LACAHSA, has pursued “creative” financial strategies under interim CEO Ryan Johnson, including asset restructuring and real estate deals that further embed homelessness within the speculative housing market. Johnson’s abrupt resignation exposed the true aim of these efforts: to transform homelessness into a financialized commodity that benefits investors, not the vulnerable people it claims to help.

The credibility of LAHSA’s 2025 report is further undermined by serious methodological flaws. The annual point-in-time (PIT) count, the backbone of these statistics, was delayed due to wildfires and experienced lower volunteer turnout. The 2024 baseline upon which 2025’s “decline” is measured, suffered from widespread technical failures and undercounting.

Investigations by local outlets like LAist revealed that in the 2025 report more than 2,300 observations—mostly in Los Angeles proper—were excluded without clear explanation or reconciliation, calling into question the accuracy of the data.

LAist further revealed that in the days leading up to the report’s release, LAHSA quietly revised data to remove 437 sheltered individuals from the tally—lowering the city’s total homeless population to 43,699. The changes increased the city’s reported decline in homelessness from 2.5 to 3.4 percent.

Moreover, a RAND Corporation study found that while visible encampments might have declined, many unhoused people have moved to more concealed living situations, sleeping without tents or vehicles, making them harder to count and more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. These shifts do not indicate progress, but displacement—an intentional consequence of Newsom’s aggressive sweeps and the criminalization of homelessness.

Federal Judge David O. Carter, known for his oversight of homelessness-related litigation, blasted LAHSA’s early release of the data as “political gamesmanship,” further eroding public trust. Community groups, nonprofits, business owners, and even some elected officials voiced skepticism. Councilmember John Lee criticized the report’s data integrity, and nonprofits like LA CAN and the Inner City Law Center decried the manipulation of data to fit political agendas.

Nithya Raman, chair of the City Council’s Housing and Homelessness Committee and member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), exemplified the duplicity of the political establishment. She praised the “significant decrease” in unsheltered homelessness and expressed support for programs like Inside Safe. Raman cynically invoked gender-based violence, stating, “When you’re unsheltered, you’re the victim of assault, crime, sexual assault. Women are extraordinarily unsafe.”

This is a textbook example of the politics of the DSA, which routinely deploys #MeToo and identity-based rhetoric to mask the class character of social policy. While women on the streets do face horrific violence, the root cause is not a lack of gender discourse but the capitalist system, which treats housing as a commodity and human lives as disposable.

Raman uses such language not to challenge that system, but to provide a “progressive” cover for its operations. She and other DSA politicians attempt to repackage austerity and displacement in the language of safety, equity, and inclusion.

Significantly, at the end of June, Raman was one of four DSA-affiliated City Council members who voted to declare a “fiscal emergency” in Los Angeles—an act that serves as a green light for budget cuts, layoffs, and service reductions.

Raman and her DSA allies justified the June fiscal emergency by placing the burden on workers to protect billionaire wealth. This is no aberration: it typifies the DSA’s role as a left cover for the Democratic Party’s policies of austerity, using the language of feminism, racial justice, and equity to uphold capitalist rule.

Los Angeles is among the top 10 cities worldwide with the largest billionaire population, yet tens of thousands of people live without shelter, enduring daily violence, illness, and despair. The glaring contradiction between extreme wealth and destitution reflects a system based on private ownership of all means of production. This crisis can only worsen through PR stunts, privatization or brutal sweeps.

What is required is a fundamental transformation of society itself: the socialist reorganization of social resources. This includes affordable housing for all, the end of profit-driven displacement, the expansion of publicly funded mental health and social services, and the guarantee of decent living conditions. The capitalist politicians and billionaires who dominate Los Angeles will never willingly provide this, as their wealth depends on the exploitation of the working class.

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