

Los Angeles County CEO unveils sweeping assault on social programs and public health care

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6 August 2025

In a chilling briefing last week to the Board of Supervisors, Los Angeles County CEO Fesia Davenport laid out a sweeping plan to impose unprecedented austerity measures that would gut critical public services, dismantle vital social programs and even shut down parts of the region's already overburdened public hospital system.

Davenport, who oversees the largest county government in the United States, warned that the combination of deep federal funding cuts, spiraling legal and emergency costs and rising labor expenditures had created a “tidal wave” of financial pressures.

The planned cuts in Los Angeles County threaten devastating consequences for the working class. Already, the county has begun shuttering regional parks, closing probation offices, reducing beach cleaning, and slashing hours at pools and youth programs.

At the center of the crisis are deep Medicaid cuts that will impact 4 million county residents—children, seniors and low-income families—denying them care and overburdening emergency services. George Green of the Hospital Association warned that the scale of cuts could force clinics and even hospitals to shut down.

Davenport admitted that one of the four public hospitals—L.A. General, Harbor-UCLA, Olive View-UCLA or Rancho Los Amigos—may close. These institutions are vital lifelines for the uninsured and poor, and even the wealthy depend on their trauma care. Former Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky called the potential closure a “nuclear bomb” on the social safety net.

Meanwhile, financial burdens from a \$4 billion legal settlement over systemic abuse in the foster system,

with another \$2.5 billion in pending claims, have already led to youth program cuts. The Palisades and Eaton wildfires have cost \$800 million, expected to rise to \$2 billion including lost revenue. And newly signed labor contracts, instead of meeting workers' needs, are being used as pretext for austerity. Though touted as gains, the \$2 billion in agreements over three years serve as a financial scapegoat while the ruling class and political establishment push forward with dismantling essential services under the banner of fiscal necessity.

At the heart of the assault is the Trump administration's draconian “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” which slashes federal Medicaid spending and other essential social funds. Under this legislation, Los Angeles County stands to lose \$714 million in just three years and up to \$1.5 billion over five. These cuts, as Davenport acknowledged, will overwhelmingly hit the poor and working class.

But this is not a crisis caused by a lack of money. There are 902 billionaires in the US. Los Angeles County alone is home to 56 of them, with a combined wealth of \$243 billion. The problem is not economic, but political. The ruling class and its representatives—Democratic and Republican alike—have made a “public policy choice to screw us,” as Democratic Supervisor Holly Mitchell put it, although she tried to place the blame exclusively on Trump, in an attempt at damage control.

Davenport's briefing is the county-level component of a coordinated attack carried out by every level of government, each playing their role in offloading the burden of capitalism's crisis onto the backs of the working class.

At the federal level, the Trump administration's

budget slashes public services to fund corporate tax breaks, military spending, the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the war in Ukraine. According to the Commonwealth Fund, the proposed Medicaid cuts alone could reduce operating margins for public hospitals by an average of 56 percent, triggering mass layoffs and facility closures across the country.

At the state level, Democratic California Governor Gavin Newsom has introduced a budget that will inflict brutal austerity on social services, particularly targeting immigrants, the poor, and the homeless. Newsom's budget plan slashes funding for Medi-Cal, eliminates job training and education programs, and scales back critical housing initiatives, as California's billionaires see record profits.

And at the city level, the Los Angeles City Council—unanimously, including four members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)—declared a fiscal emergency in June, setting the stage for layoffs, hiring freezes and further attacks on city workers. The previous month, Democratic Mayor Karen Bass had announced a plan to eliminate 1,600 city jobs.

Davenport herself hinted at the county's own plans for mass layoffs in April, during a strike by 55,000 Los Angeles County workers. She warned that even modest wage increases could create a “structural deficit,” comparing the situation to Mayor Bass's 1,600 job cuts. This was a transparent threat: accept poverty wages or be thrown out onto the street.

In this onslaught, the trade union bureaucracies and their pseudo-left supporters have acted not as defenders of workers, but as accomplices to austerity.

In the April strike, the SEIU halted a powerful strike to isolate and smother the growing anger among county workers. Local 721 rushed to reach a tentative agreement that serves corporate interests, not workers. The deal—which has still not been presented in full to rank-and-file members—offers misleading front-loaded bonuses, paltry raises and vague promises, while allowing management to proceed with its cuts.

Workers have seen through the fraud. On the union's own Facebook page, one member, Grace, wrote, “Before we know it would be Thanksgiving time and still no contract. We paid monthly union dues for nothing.” Another member, Bill, responded, “That's exactly what they're going to do... wait right before Christmas and say these bonuses are going to be great...

Bull crap. I want a better raise. I don't want a bonus. I am voting no.”

The SEIU's silence about the budget cuts and hospital closures is damning. The union officials will not mobilize any serious opposition, because they are tied by a thousand threads to the Democratic Party and to the very county administration carrying out these attacks.

Nor can workers look to the DSA—or any other pseudo-left organization—whose members on the Los Angeles City Council voted unanimously to declare the fiscal emergency. These forces exist not to oppose austerity, but to give it a “progressive” face. They work to keep opposition within the confines of bourgeois politics, channeling discontent into appeals to the Democrats—the very party organizing the attacks.

The budget crisis in Los Angeles County is a political crime. The resources to meet human needs exist but are hoarded by billionaires and protected by the capitalist state. Democrats, Republicans, unions and pseudo-left groups all demand that workers pay for a crisis they did not create.

The working class must reject this blackmail and form independent rank-and-file committees to unite across sectors and prepare a general strike. This fight must be based on an internationalist socialist program: expropriating the billionaires, reallocating resources to meet social needs and building a workers' government to put an end to capitalism.



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