

Los Angeles moves to dismantle federal oversight of homelessness as crisis deepens

Marc Wells
10 February 2026

The Democratic administration of Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, through its legal representatives, has initiated an appeal seeking the removal of U.S. District Judge David O. Carter, who is overseeing enforcement of a court settlement governing the city's response to homelessness. The appeal challenges Judge Carter's continued role in supervising implementation of the agreement and disputes the scope of judicial authority in monitoring municipal compliance. The case has become a focal point of conflict between city officials and the federal judiciary amid mounting evidence that Los Angeles is failing to meet its own legally binding commitments.

The dispute arises from a settlement agreement reached after years of litigation documenting the city's failure to provide adequate shelter and housing for a rapidly growing unhoused population. Under the terms of the agreement, Los Angeles committed to creating tens of thousands of housing placements, meeting specific deadlines and producing regular, verifiable data demonstrating progress. Judge Carter was assigned to oversee compliance, review the city's reporting and ensure that the commitments were implemented as written.

City officials now argue that Carter has exceeded his authority. In court filings, city attorneys accuse the judge of committing a "litany of errors" in overseeing the settlement. They claim he has used his position as a judicial "bully pulpit" to demand changes in homelessness policy, improperly scrutinized budgetary decisions, and impinged on the authority of elected officials. The appeal also alleges that Carter has employed procedural tactics that the city characterizes as irregular, intrusive or outside normal judicial practice. On this basis, Los Angeles is asking the appellate court to remove him from the case.

If the city's appeal succeeds, the practical consequences would be significant. While the settlement agreement might formally remain in place, the removal of active judicial supervision would sharply weaken enforcement. Deadlines could be delayed, with benchmarks reinterpreted and failures obscured with little risk of consequence. In effect, the city

would regain broad discretion over how homelessness is "managed," allowing officials to claim progress publicly while scaling back obligations behind the scenes.

In court filings, the city's lawyers argue that Judge Carter has exceeded his authority by dictating policy and intruding into municipal governance. This portrayal is misleading. Judge Carter is not imposing a right-wing law-and-order agenda, nor is he acting as an adversary of the Democratic Party. He is enforcing a settlement that the city itself agreed to, one that imposes measurable requirements for housing placements and restricts the clearance of encampments without providing alternatives.

More fundamentally, the city's arguments adopt a conception of executive power indistinguishable from that advanced by Donald Trump, under which judicial enforcement of legal obligations is recast as unlawful interference. This doctrine, repeatedly invoked by the Trump administration to defy court rulings, is now being echoed by Democratic officials in Los Angeles. In challenging Judge Carter's oversight, the city asserts that elected authorities may enter into settlements under legal compulsion while remaining effectively immune from meaningful judicial enforcement once those commitments become inconvenient.

Such a stance represents a serious erosion of the constitutional principle of separation of powers. Judicial oversight exists precisely to ensure that legal obligations are not reduced to empty promises. The city's effort to remove the judge reflects an attempt to escape judicial enforcement that would force officials to fund, implement and meet the commitments they have long invoked rhetorically while leaving tens of thousands unhoused.

The political motivation behind this effort is clear. Housing tens of thousands of people at scale would require a decisive break with existing priorities. It would mean massive public investment in non-market housing, long-term operating subsidies and a direct confrontation with real estate developers, landlords and financial interests that profit from scarcity and rising rents. The capitalists in Los Angeles

have no intention of pursuing such a course.

City officials are seeking to restore “flexibility,” that is, the ability to slow implementation, obscure failure and redirect resources toward cheaper, more coercive measures. This is occurring amid deepening austerity. Funding for social services is under pressure, even as resources continue to flow toward policing, surveillance and enforcement.

The city’s legal maneuver must also be understood in the context of its longstanding approach to homelessness. For decades, Los Angeles (and California more broadly) has relied on a model based on privatization, fragmented nonprofit provision and law-and-order enforcement. Rather than building publicly-owned, permanently affordable housing, officials have outsourced homelessness policy to a sprawling network of contractors, consultants and service providers.

The result has been waste, scandal and failure. Facilities have been constructed at exorbitant cost, sometimes paying nearly double for the number of beds actually delivered. Oversight bodies have proliferated, but accountability has remained elusive. Billions of dollars have been spent without reversing the growth of homelessness.

Last month, Los Angeles County officials announced that they had effectively dismantled the joint city-county Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), transferring much of its authority and funding to a newly created Department of Homeless Services and Housing under direct county control. The restructuring has been presented as a reform aimed at efficiency and coordination. In reality, it marks a further step in the corporatization of homelessness policy, concentrating power within a centralized bureaucracy insulated from democratic accountability and oriented toward contract management and enforcement rather than guaranteeing housing as a social right.

At the same time, the city and county continue to rely on encampment sweeps and criminalization. Anti-camping ordinances, police enforcement and forced displacement are justified as necessary to maintain public order, but they do nothing to address the underlying causes of homelessness. They merely push people from one location to another, deepening instability and trauma.

Responsibility for this record lies squarely with the Democratic Party, which has dominated Los Angeles and California politics for decades. Democratic mayors and city councils have presided over the explosive growth of homelessness alongside the enrichment of a narrow elite. Los Angeles is home to enormous concentrations of wealth, including over 40 billionaires, yet officials insist that there are insufficient resources to guarantee housing as a basic right.

The presence of several Democratic Socialists of America members on the City Council has not altered this reality. Despite their “progressive” rhetoric, these figures vote for budgets that expand policing, accept austerity as unavoidable and promote the illusion that homelessness can be solved through private contractors and bureaucratic restructuring rather than systemic change, providing a left cover for the Democratic Party.

Nor is this dynamic unique to Los Angeles. In Democratic-run cities such as San Francisco, New York and Chicago, homelessness has reached catastrophic levels amid extreme inequality. In each case, the response has combined underfunded social programs with escalating repression. Across the country, Democrats posture as defenders of democracy against the far right while implementing policies that criminalize poverty and protect corporate interests.

The struggle over judicial oversight in Los Angeles ultimately obscures a more fundamental reality: immense wealth is being diverted away from social needs and toward repression at home and war abroad by both big business parties. Trillions of dollars are allocated to the military, police forces and corporate subsidies, while housing is treated as a commodity rather than a social right.

The city’s attempt to dismantle federal oversight of homelessness represents a retreat from even minimal accountability and an implicit acknowledgment that the crisis cannot be resolved without challenging capitalist priorities the political establishment is committed to defending. Homelessness will not be solved through court supervision, privatization, bureaucratic reshuffling or appeals to compassion from officials who serve wealth and property. It requires a socialist program based on public ownership of housing, democratic control of resources and the redirection of social wealth away from repression and war.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact