

news

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LAPD Skid Row Officers Banned from Unlawful Searches under Settlement with the ACLU/SC and National Lawyers Guild

LOS ANGELES, Calif. – The Los Angeles City Council has approved a settlement that bans LAPD officers patrolling Skid Row from conducting unconstitutional searches of homeless individuals, and requires that officers undergo crucial training regarding the constitutional requirements to search and detain people.

The settlement with the ACLU/SC, National Lawyers Guild attorney Carol Sobel and the law firm of Hadsell Stormer Keeny Richardson & Renick LLP resolves a lawsuit against the LAPD for its unconstitutional searches of the homeless, and for probation sweeps that effectively criminalized homeless individuals.

During the first year of the city's so-called "Safer Cities Initiative" on Skid Row, the LAPD gave out 12,000 citations, about twice the citywide average. Most of those infractions were for pedestrian violations. Residents and service providers complain police stop, detain, cite and arrest Skid Row residents for trivial violations like jaywalking or littering, making it more difficult for people to leave the streets behind.

"This settlement will ensure important checks on the LAPD's aggressive tactics on Skid Row. The constitution protects every Angeleno against unlawful stops and searches, from those living in Hollywood Hills to those sleeping on the streets of downtown," said Peter Bibring, an ACLU/SC staff attorney. "But abuses are bound to occur as long as the city tries to address homelessness on Skid Row as a law enforcement problem rather than a social problem. Especially at this time of year when many families are without homes, we hope that this agreement will help the city reframe its priorities and provide badly needed supportive housing and services that have successfully reduced homelessness in other cities."

Added Sobel: "This is an important step in protecting the rights of the poorest residents of our city. Now the work begins to see it is put into practice."

Two years ago, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa launched the Safer Cities Initiative, billing it as a multi-faceted, enlightened approach to deal with homelessness that would include supportive housing and transitional services. But no new housing or services have materialized.

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Instead, according to studies, the city has flooded the area with police officers creating a law enforcement concentration hundreds of times greater than in other parts of the city. Meanwhile, police have stepped up enforcement of minor violations often targeting the most vulnerable

Under the settlement, officers who are on the front lines of the LAPD's cleanup of downtown's Skid Row will be provided with scenario-based training on lawful stops, searches and detainment. However, the Safer Cities Initiative continues to be the subject of ongoing community opposition and litigation.

The one-hour mandatory training will focus on federal laws that prohibit officers from using minor infractions such as jaywalking or sleeping on the sidewalk as a pretext to search or detain individuals when there is no evidence that a crime has been committed.

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