



Written by [James Murphy](#) on June 25, 2021

L.A. Sheriff Urges County to Declare State of Emergency on Homeless Problem

On Wednesday, Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva sent a letter to the L.A. County Board of Supervisors in which he urged the county to declare a state of emergency regarding the homeless problem in the county.

Villanueva also held a [press conference](#) on Wednesday in which he called the homeless crisis in much of Los Angeles County a “national disgrace.”

“I strongly urge the Board of Supervisors (Board) to declare a local state of emergency on the homeless crisis,” the [letter](#) declared.



Homeless encampment in Venice Beach (AP Images)

Villanueva described the problem as Los Angeles County “experiencing an influx of transients from across the nation taking advantage of our services.”

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Venice Beach, once the second biggest tourist draw in Southern California — only Disneyland drew more visitors — has become nearly uninhabitable, with some 200 homeless persons having set up camp on the famous Venice Beach Boardwalk and an additional 2,000 homeless in the surrounding neighborhood. Only longtime homeless encampment Skid Row has a larger population of transients in the county.

“Venice Beach, Olvera Street and Hollywood are currently under siege. The homeless situation and lawlessness citizens are experiencing is keeping tourists from coming to Los Angeles County,” Villanueva wrote. “The economic hardships our local business owners and residents are facing is unacceptable. The homeless situation in Los Angeles County is at a crisis level.”

During his Wednesday press conference, Villanueva vented his exasperation.

“We’ve been inundated with calls, with concerns, with images from the news, from people picking up the phone, emailing, sending us letters, about what’s going on in Venice,” Villanueva told reporters. “And that is a microcosm of what’s going on throughout the entire county of Los Angeles.”

“Enough is enough, we need to kick this into high gear,” the sheriff said.

Thus far, the Board of Supervisors has yet to officially respond to Villanueva’s request.

But judging from L.A. City Councilman Mike Bonin’s reaction to Villanueva’s decision to send sheriff’s deputies into Venice Beach to remove some transients from Venice Beach’s boardwalk earlier this month, at least some L.A. politicians are unhappy with Villanueva’s concern about the homeless encampments.

“The only beds the sheriff has are jails, he hasn’t used them yet, but he’s certainly been threatening to use them,” Bonin said June 10 when asked where Villanueva and his deputies were taking homeless



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individuals. “He has provided a very nice, but very expensive taxi service over the last couple of days and has driven people to some of the housing resources that government agencies and the social service agencies already offer.”

Bonin, who along with City Council member Nithya Ramen is facing a recall effort largely over failing to deal with the homeless situation, has been at odds with Villanueva over the situation in Venice Beach since the sheriff decided to post officers there.

Bonin reacted to the sheriff’s press conference by issuing this statement:

“Sheriff Villanueva and I are very different. I believe in treating people humanely and with dignity, whether they are housed or unhoused. I believe everyone have a right to housing, food, and healthcare and I applaud those who provide it. And I believe (and evidence shows) that the best, most effective, least expensive way to end homelessness is with housing, not handcuffs.

But it seems that Villanueva is mainly concerned with do-nothing politicians in Los Angeles spouting the same old cliches year-after-year while the homeless problem in the county intensifies.

“Having participated in the homeless count, visiting areas affected by this crisis, participating in many community meetings, speaking with business leaders and residents, common sense is telling us the failed formula applied year after year to address the problem is NOT working,” Villanueva wrote.

The homeless problem, which was already grave in Los Angeles County and throughout California, got even worse (by some figures one hundred percent worse) during the COVID-19 pandemic. But the COVID-19 is not the only disease that Southern Californians are concerned about.

“Who would have thought in L.A. County, we’d be looking at cholera, typhus...bubonic plague? Third world diseases at our doorstep because we failed to regulate the public space. It has now reached a critical point that is jeopardizing the life and safety of all L.A. County residents.”

It’s long past time for public officials in Southern California to finally address the out-of-control homeless situation in the area. Promises of future housing won’t cut it anymore. Whether it’s the threat of disease, the crime, or just the foul stench of these encampments, the citizens of the area deserve relief — relief that won’t come from politicians talking endlessly about the problem.



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