

Dear Mayor Karen Bass,

As high school students in Los Angeles, we urge our city officials to end the criminalization of our unhoused neighbors. About 45,000 people are without housing, and nearly three-quarters are unsheltered and living on our streets, in the city of Los Angeles. Although only representing 1.1% of the overall US population, Los Angeles County is home to 7.1% of the nation's unhoused.

Criminalization of unhoused people is cruel. It punishes them for poverty and lacking housing. It results in incarceration and destruction of their property. It makes it harder for them to secure employment and housing. Channeling resources towards punitive measures is an economic burden for Los Angeles taxpayers, is ineffective at tackling the core issue of houselessness, and diverts from real solutions, especially permanent housing.

From 2016-2022, nearly 40% of combined Los Angeles Police Department arrests and citations targeted unhoused individuals, mainly for low-level crimes linked to living and survival conditions. Laws like sections 41.18 and 56.11 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC) directly target and criminalize unhoused people, making their survival even harder.

We need legislation that protects, rather than punishes, members of our community. We demand the repeal of LAMC sections 41.18 and 56.11. We also urge you to support passage of state and federal laws to protect our unhoused neighbors from punitive local laws and policies that effectively criminalize their houselessness. If there are state and federal laws against criminalization, then surrounding cities can't aggressively criminalize and force their unhoused people into Los Angeles.

It's not just about decriminalizing houselessness—it's about humanizing our approach to this crisis and ensuring human rights are maintained regardless of housing status. It is a moral and societal obligation for the City of Los Angeles to implement constructive and compassionate solutions that focus on keeping people in their homes, preserving existing affordable housing, and helping already unhoused people get into housing this is permanent, stable, affordable, and meets all the criteria of their human right to housing.

Please, stand with us in demanding justice and fairness for our unhoused neighbors. We have signed this petition to show our support for the repeal of LAMC sections 41.18 and 56.11 and the passing of state and federal laws prohibiting criminalization of unhouse people.

Sincerely,

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