

# SERVICES NOT SWEEPS

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Hon. Mark Ridley-Thomas  
Los Angeles City Council  
Chair, Homelessness and Poverty Committee  
200 N. Spring St., Room 420  
Los Angeles, California 90012

August 26, 2021

Dear Councilmember Ridley-Thomas:

As you know, Los Angeles is facing a surge of COVID-19 as a result of the highly transmissible Delta Variant. On your motion, the City Council has taken a critical step toward gaining control of the current surge by implementing a vaccine mandate for all City workers. Yet before the mandate goes into effect, the City appears poised to resume comprehensive CARE+ cleanups at homeless encampments throughout Los Angeles and to begin enforcement of the newly-amended Los Angeles Municipal Code Section 41.18. Resuming these activities now will undoubtedly bring unvaccinated city workers in contact with people experiencing homelessness, which could have devastating consequences for unhoused individuals, City employees, and the entire Los Angeles community.

Rates of COVID-19 among city employees that conduct comprehensive cleanups and enforce the municipal code have been high throughout the pandemic. As of last week, 2,977 LAPD employees had contracted COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> And as COVID-19 rates have gone up as a result of the Delta variant, the number of COVID cases among LAPD officers has also continued to rise, nearly doubling in the past week.<sup>2</sup> And while the City of Los Angeles has not routinely made public any information about rates of infection among other city employees like sanitation workers, LA SAN General Manager Enrique Saldivar has disclosed that 70 CARE team members contracted COVID-19 during the winter surge.<sup>3</sup>

Yet despite the incredibly high rates of infection, the rates of vaccination among the LAPD and other first responders remain far lower than others in LA County. Only about 50% of all LAPD staff are fully vaccinated, compared to more than 70% of the general population. Those rates have remained stagnant since June, even though LAPD officers have had unprecedented access to the vaccine.<sup>4</sup>

The high rates of infections among city workers and low rates of vaccinations places the City and all of its residents at risk. As you recognized in your motion to mandate vaccinations among City workers, unvaccinated city workers “risk transmission to the public that depends on City services.”<sup>5</sup> This includes, most significantly, people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles, who continue to face an elevated risk of COVID-19.

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<sup>1</sup> Los Angeles Daily News, Josh Cain, “COVID-19 cases jump among LAPD officers, outbreaks ongoing in LAFD Stations,” August 24, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Testimony of Enrique Saldivar to the Los Angeles City Council Energy, Climate Change, Environmental Justice, and River Committee, April 15, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Cain, *supra* note 1.

<sup>5</sup> Motion, City Council File No. 21-0846.

According to the Los Angeles Department of Public Health, rates of infection among people experiencing homelessness have continued to climb.<sup>6</sup> Last week, 209 people experiencing homelessness were diagnosed with COVID-19. The public health implications of this cannot be overstated. People experiencing homelessness tend to have much more severe cases, at much younger ages than the general population. They are also more likely to die than people who are housed. And unhoused residents, who face significant barriers to obtaining the vaccine, also appear to be far less likely to be vaccinated—fewer than 26,000 unhoused residents in Los Angeles County are fully vaccinated.<sup>7</sup>

Resuming comprehensive cleanups and the enforcement of LAMC 41.18 right now threaten to displace unhoused residents, which will disrupt vaccination efforts. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the United States Interagency on Homelessness have also reaffirmed recently that cities should not displace residents unless there are non-congregate housing options available. Outbreaks in congregate shelters continue to increase, almost on a daily basis. There are now outbreaks in A Bridge Home shelters throughout Los Angeles, including a significant outbreak at the Venice A Bridge Home shelter.<sup>8</sup> These outbreaks underscore the ongoing COVID-19 crisis in Los Angeles and the vulnerability of people experiencing homelessness.

When the decision was made to resume CARE+ cleanups, the impact of the Delta variant may have been unclear. There is no question now that the Delta Variant is exponentially more transmissible than other strains. Resuming comprehensive cleanups and enforcement of 41.18 will place unhoused residents and LAPD officers and sanitation workers in direct contact, which will threaten the lives of the City's most vulnerable residents and exacerbate the current COVID surge. We appreciate your leadership in moving to ensure that all City workers are vaccinated. We urge you to take similar steps to postpone the resumption of CARE+ comprehensive cleanups and implementation of LAMC Section 41.18 until the City can ensure that city employees and unhoused residents are vaccinated against COVID-19.

Sincerely,

The Services Not Sweeps Coalition

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<sup>6</sup> Los Angeles Department of Public Health, Summary Report of COVID-19 in People Experiencing Homelessness, 8/16/201-8/22/2021, available at [http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/docs/SummaryReport\\_People\\_Experiencing\\_Homelessness.pdf](http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/docs/SummaryReport_People_Experiencing_Homelessness.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Los Angeles Department of Health, "Press Release: COVID-19 Cases Among People Experiencing Homelessness Increased Over Past Month, August 18, 2021."

<sup>8</sup> As of August 25, 2021, there were outbreaks at 89 homeless shelters and other settings, including at least 16 A Bridge Home and Tiny Home facilities. That number continues to increase on a nearly daily basis—there were four more outbreaks reported yesterday than just the day before. See Los Angeles Department of Public Health, Homeless Services Settings, available at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/locations.htm#peh-settings>