

# Los Angeles Times

## L.A. allocates \$12.4 million to aid homeless people ahead of El Niño storms

By Gale Holland  
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Los Angeles leaders on Wednesday allocated \$12.4 million for emergency relief to get homeless people off the streets before the anticipated El Niño winter storms bear down on the city.

The vote to commit the funds, which include \$10 million in short-term rent subsidies for veterans and other homeless people, and \$1.7 million for emergency shelter beds, marks the first time in city history that elected leaders have dipped into the general fund for homeless aid, Mayor Eric Garcetti said at a news conference.

The funding also serves as a down payment on the \$100 million that leaders have pledged to address the upsurge in homeless street encampments, Garcetti added.

"We have a model that works and we're finally scaling it up," Garcetti told a group of homeless outreach workers, service providers and media representatives.

About 26,000 men, women and children are homeless in Los Angeles, 18,000 of them without shelter of any kind. Garcetti and the City Council had been criticized for dawdling as the potentially deadly storms loomed, and for dropping a pledge to declare a formal state of emergency. This was viewed as a novel strategy for seeking federal and state disaster funds and for gaining flexibility in attacking the burgeoning homelessness.

Garcetti, speaking at LAMP Community, a skid row homeless agency, said he is in "ongoing discussions" with the governor's office and Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson about sending emergency funds before the predicted rains turn into a disaster. The mayor also said he's considering steps that include distributing pallets to get people off the wet pavement and opening aircraft hangars to storm refugees.

But he warned that people could still die if the extreme weather predictions bear out.

"You have to convince somebody to get off the streets," Garcetti said.

Earlier in the day, a group of homeless service providers expressed concern about the city's commitment to tackling the problem.

Adam Murray, executive director of Inner City Law Center, said, "\$100 million is not going to solve homelessness in L.A. That's the minimum amount we need to make a dent. We're not hearing from City Council members, 'We're going to do it.'"

Murray and the other agency heads, speaking to The Times' editorial board, said the mayor had not discussed storm preparations with them, and said the region's efforts were characterized by fractured leadership and strategies.

"Something missing in L.A. is a prevention strategy," Murray said.

At the LAMP event, Garcetti said there was unprecedented coordination between the once-warring county and city, which

are slated to release complementary plans to end homelessness next month.

"We will have a unified approach emerging at the beginning of the year," Garcetti said.



A homeless man tidies up the spot where his belongings are gathered on South Hope Street in Los Angeles.

(Brian van der Brug / Los Angeles Times)

Councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson, who also spoke at the news conference, said that the emergency declaration fell victim to politicians "tripping over each other" in their fervor to get something done.

There's a willingness to create an ongoing stream of money to fight homelessness, but "nobody knows where the money would come from yet," Harris-Dawson said.

"The affordable housing gap is a \$1.7-billion problem," Harris-Dawson said.

The mayor's proposals to impose a new fee on developers and an Airbnb tax are a good start, he said, adding, "The most important thing is leadership to get something done."

Garcetti, who toured skid row with outreach workers before the conference, talked about homeless people he had

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met, including a Boyle Heights man who lived in a riverbed shelter with a working TV, and another man whose culinary studies were interrupted by mental illness but who continued to cook for his camp mates.

"There, people are not homeless, they just live in homes that are unacceptable," the mayor said.

Wednesday's action provides \$1.7

million to add 440 beds to the city's winter shelter program, bringing capacity to 1,300, and \$1 million to upgrade homeless tracking systems and to purchase tablets for outreach workers to input data electronically.

It also sets aside \$100,000 to convert existing homeless access centers to facilities with showers, storage units and parking lots for people to sleep overnight in their RVs and cars.

Gail Holland  
[gale.holland@latimes.com](mailto:gale.holland@latimes.com)



*Alice Myles, 60, steps out of her tent, pitched on the 42nd Street bridge over the 110 Freeway. About 26,000 men, women and children are homeless in L.A. (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles Times)*