

WSJ Print Edition

The Homeless Boom in Los Angeles

Tens of thousands of people have left Los Angeles since the pandemic, but one group isn't leaving: the homeless. A new city report finds that the number of people living on the streets keeps rising. Maybe there's a connection between population flight and vagrancy.

The city's overall homeless population rose 3.4% including those the city puts up in motels. The number sleeping outside in encampments or vehicles rose 7.9%. All told, the city counted 45,194 homeless in January, up from 35,550 in 2019 and 41,980 in 2022 when Mayor Karen Bass was elected.

Ms. Bass has squandered hundreds of millions of dollars on homeless programs that appear to have had no effect. Under her signature program, the city has spent \$82,420 a year for each homeless person it has sheltered in motels. Some 40% have returned to the streets, often because of drug addictions.

A third-party audit of L. A.'s homeless agency last year found the city wasn't tracking how much was being spent, the number of beds or other services being provided, or outcomes for putative beneficiaries. Federal Judge David Carter, who presided over a lawsuit against the city, expressed astonishment at the findings.

"Nobody is asking our providers what they did or what services they performed," he said. "We may have providers who committed fraud and we may never know." Ms. Bass would prefer voters not know.

In November she faces a mayoral runoff against City Councilwoman Nithya Raman, a Democratic Socialist of America member who opposes clearing encampments. Angelenos tired of feces and needles on the sidewalks can look forward to more of the same.

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