Who Decides What: Homelessness Rules From Washington to Santa Monica City Hall

Updated October 28, 2026. Every phone number was checked against an official page.

Ask who is responsible for homelessness in Santa Monica and you get a loop: the City says the County, the County says the State, the State says the cities. The loop is how nothing changes. This page breaks it. Four levels of government each hold a piece, and for every piece there is a body that can act and a way to reach it.

Print the one-sheet (PDF): the four levels, the Santa Monica org chart, and who can make each of the six initiatives happen.

How do the four levels fit together?

The State writes the laws on involuntary treatment and sets Medi-Cal rules; the County runs mental health, addiction treatment and most homelessness money; the City writes and enforces the camping and park rules and hires outreach; the federal government sets grant conditions and decided, in Grants Pass, that cities may enforce camping bans. Nobody can do the other level's job, which is why each initiative below names the level that holds the key.

Level		What it controls	What i canno do
Federal	HUD's Continuum of Care grants (about $3.9 billion a year nationally) and their conditions; the VA's veteran programs; SSI, SSDI and Medicaid; the Supreme Court's 2024 Grants Pass ruling that cities may enforce camping bans.	Does not write or enforce local camping rules. Does not run outreach in Santa Monica.	Through Congress and the LA Continuum of Care. Veterans: 1-877-424-3838.
State of California	The laws on holds and conservatorship (LPS, SB 43), CARE Court, Laura's Law, the	The Governor's 2025 model camping ordinance	Your State Senator and Assemblymember (findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov); public comment on the County's BHSA plan.

Level				What it controls	What i canno do
	Housing First law, Prop 1 and the Behavioral Health Services Act, Medi-Cal and CalAIM. Caltrans owns the I-10 and PCH rights-of-way.	is not binding on Santa Monica. The State does not run programs on the ground.			
LA County	Measure A (over $1 billion a year), the new Department of Homeless Services and Housing, the Department of Mental Health (who may write a 5150, mobile crisis teams, Laura's Law, CARE Court petitions, the Public Guardian), addiction treatment beds, the Superior Court, Metro.	Cannot write or enforce Santa Monica's municipal code. Cannot direct SMPD.	Third District office (213) 974-3333, ThirdDistrict@bos.lacounty.gov; Board meetings at 500 W. Temple St.; written comment at publiccomment.bos.lacounty.gov.		

Level				What it controls	What i canno do
City of Santa Monica	The camping, park-hours and right-of-way sections of the Municipal Code; every outreach, shelter and motel contract; the police and fire departments; 311; the Housing Authority; what gets reported and how often.	Cannot change State law. Cannot direct County mental health staffing. Cannot spend County money it has not been allocated.	Public comment at Council meetings (agendas at santamonicacityca.iqm2.com); council@santamonica.gov; 311 for service requests.		

What are the rules as they stand?

These are the rules that decide what happens on a Santa Monica sidewalk tonight. Each one names who wrote it and who decides how it is used.

Rule	Level	What it says	Who enforces or decides
Grants Pass v. Johnson (June 28, 2024)	Federal	A city may enforce a general camping ban even when shelter beds are short. Nothing in the ruling requires an offer of shelter first.	U.S. Supreme Court decided it; each city decides how to use it.
Lanterman-Petris-Short Act: 5150, 5250, conservatorship	State, run by the County	A 5150 is up to 72 hours of involuntary psychiatric evaluation for danger to self, danger to others or grave disability. It is not an arrest. In LA County only a peace officer or a clinician DMH has approved may write one. A 5250 extends the hold up to 14 days. Only the Public Guardian can petition for an LPS conservatorship, which lasts one year and is renewable.	Legislature writes it; DMH designates who can write holds; Public Guardian petitions; Superior Court decides.

Rule				Level	What it says	Who enforces or decides
SB 43	State, in effect in LA County since January 2026	Severe substance use disorder now counts toward grave disability on its own, and the test now includes being unable to provide for personal safety or necessary medical care.	DMH, the Public Guardian and the Superior Court.			
CARE Act (CARE Court)	State; LA County opted in Dec. 1, 2023	A civil court plan for adults with schizophrenia spectrum or other psychotic disorders who are not in treatment. Family, roommates, first responders and clinicians may petition. Filing is free. It is not a conservatorship.	LA Superior Court; DMH becomes the petitioner and provider.			
Laura's Law (Assisted Outpatient Treatment)	State, run by DMH	Court-ordered outpatient treatment for adults with serious mental illness and a history of refusing care. A parent, spouse, sibling, adult child or	DMH AOT-LA (213-738-2440); Mental Health Court in Norwalk.			

Rule				Level	What it says	Who enforces or decides
		cohabiting adult can refer.				
Housing First law (SB 1380, 2016)	State	State-funded homelessness programs house people without requiring sobriety or treatment. A 2025 bill to let up to 10 percent of state money fund sober housing was vetoed; the Governor said July 2025 guidance already allows it where residents choose it.	Legislature and Governor.			
Prop 1 / Behavioral Health Services Act (March 2024)	State, spent by the County	From July 1, 2026 counties must spend 30 percent of these funds on housing, half of it for people who are chronically homeless. A companion $6.4 billion bond funds treatment beds.	DHCS sets rules; LA County DMH and Public Health decide local spending; the Board of Supervisors approves.			
Medi-Cal / CalAIM Transitional Rent	State	Since Jan. 1, 2026 Medi-Cal plans must cover up to six	DHCS; in LA County, L.A. Care and			

Rule				Level	What it says	Who enforces or decides
		months of rent for people in the behavioral health population, plus housing navigation and deposits.	Health Net authorize it.			
Measure A (Nov. 2024)	LA County	A half-cent sales tax, in effect since April 1, 2025, raising over $1 billion a year. At least 15 percent of the services share goes to cities and councils of governments through a Local Solutions Fund.	Board of Supervisors; the County signs agreements with cities.			
SMMC 4.08.095, camping	City	No camping in parks, on the beach, the Pier, streets, alleys, rights-of-way or public school and college property. Tents, cots, sleeping bags and bedrolls are "camp facilities." Sleeping in public is not itself prohibited, and a bedroll alone cannot be the sole basis for a citation.	SMPD cites; the City Attorney decides whether to file; Council writes the text.			

Rule	Level	What it says	Who enforces or decides
		Misdemeanor, fine up to $500.	
SMMC 4.55.120, parks closed at night; 3.12.360, right-of-way; 4.08.097, doorways	City	Parks close overnight. No blocking, sitting or lying on the public right-of-way or leaving property on it. No sitting or lying in certain doorways at night.	SMPD; City Attorney; Public Works removes debris.
Offer of shelter before a citation	City practice, not law	The code does not require a bed to be offered first. The City's own Q&A says SMPD gives warnings and makes shelter referrals before citing, as a matter of practice.	SMPD policy today. Council could make it binding by ordinance or written protocol.
Homelessness Strategic Plan 2025-2030	City	Four pillars: prevention, intervention, coordination, communication. Received by Council March 11, 2025.	Housing and Human Services implements; Council funds.
Realignment Plan (Oct. 28, 2025)	City	Reimagine SamoShel as a treatment-focused healing	Council adopted; the City Manager

Rule			Level	What it says	Who enforces or decides
		center, expand SaMo Bridge, add a Downtown Services Unit, file about 90 percent of fileable misdemeanors, coordinate with Metro at the E Line's end of the line.		and departments carry it out.	
Housing Focused System of Care (summer 2026)	City	Council took direct control of the local system: the Palm Motel's 34 rooms under City management for Santa Monica Program Participants, 35 City-funded beds at the Salvation Army Bell Shelter so outreach always has a referral, and a plan to replace SamoShel's 60 congregate beds with smaller sites.		Council approved; Housing and Human Services implements.	

On bedrolls: Council took sleeping bags and bedrolls off the camping list in 2022, put them back in September 2024 by a 4-3 vote, and in January 2025 three members asked the City Attorney to return with an amendment on "comfort items." We have not found an adopted ordinance since, so we treat the current text as the September 2024 version.

Who does what in Santa Monica?

Santa Monica is a council-manager city: the Council sets policy, the City Manager runs the departments, and the City Attorney decides what gets prosecuted. Here is everyone who touches homelessness, what each can actually decide, and how to reach them.

Who			
City Council (7 members, elected at large, four-year staggered terms)	The City's legislature.	The camping, park and right-of-way rules; every outreach, shelter and motel contract; a written offer-first protocol; monthly public reporting; the budget; hiring the City Manager and City Attorney.	Public comment at meetings; council@santamonica.gov; how to speak.
Mayor	A councilmember chosen by the Council to preside. The current Mayor is Caroline Torosis, sworn in Dec. 9, 2025 for a one-year term; Jesse Zwick is Mayor Pro Tem.	Chairs meetings and helps shape the agenda. One vote of seven. No veto and no power over departments.	Same as Council.
City Manager (Oliver Chi,	Chief executive. Every department	Day-to-day deployment of	santamonica.gov/contact or 311.

Who			
since July 14, 2025)	reports to him. Authored the Realignment Plan.	police, fire, Housing and Human Services, Public Works and the Library; proposes the budget; can issue administrative protocols within Council policy.	
City Attorney's Office	Prosecutes municipal code misdemeanors and runs diversion.	Decides independently whether to file on a camping citation. Runs STEP Court (since January 2024, with the Superior Court, the Public Defender and Exodus Recovery) and SaMo Bridge pre-filing diversion, funded by a roughly $8 million state grant. Drafts any ordinance Council asks for.	santamonica.gov/departments/city-attorney
Housing and Human	The lead homelessness	Writes and manages the	311; the Housing and Human Services Commission.

Services Department (Director Aileen Reynolds, since Jan. 12, 2026)	department.	outreach, shelter, motel and interim-housing contracts; defines who counts as a Santa Monica Program Participant; runs the Housing Authority; reports outcomes to Council; partners with RAND on bi-monthly street counts.	
SMPD Homeless Liaison Program (HLP) team	The police unit that leads enforcement and outreach coordination.	Cites or arrests under the camping, park and right-of-way sections; officers can write a 5150 as peace officers; the only referral path into SaMo Bridge; runs Project Homecoming (family reunification). Shelter referral before a citation is practice, not a legal requirement.	(310) 458-8953 HLP and Project Homecoming; (310) 458-8491 non-emergency; 911.

Who			
Santa Monica Fire Department	Medical and behavioral field response.	The Advanced Provider Unit (a paramedic plus a nurse practitioner, since November 2025, two units since March 2026, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily) treats in place and screens for behavioral health; the Community Response Unit handles lower-acuity calls. No enforcement and no hold authority.	911; (310) 458-8491.
City-funded outreach teams	Three Multi-Disciplinary Street Teams, C3 teams, the Salvation Army 311 follow-up team, Exodus Recovery for diversion and treatment, and the Downtown Ambassadors.	Offer, transport and refer. They cannot compel anyone to accept help. Whether their clinicians are DMH-approved to write a 5150 is not published.	Request outreach through 311.

Who			
LA County DMH in Santa Monica	County-staffed, City co-funded therapeutic transport team (since Jan. 8, 2024) and a clinician embedded with HLP.	Can transport to urgent mental health care and write 5150 holds. The County sets its hours and staffing.	DMH Help Line (800) 854-7771; via SMPD or Fire dispatch.
SaMo Bridge	24/7 respite and diversion hub at Main and Pico, run by Exodus Recovery with the City Attorney and SMPD since May 2025.	Three to four people at a time, by police referral only, stays up to 72 hours; complete a 90-day plan and the City Attorney declines to file.	No walk-ins. Ask for SMPD contact through 311.
Public Works Homeless Support Team (HoST)	In-house crew that clears encampment debris and surveys hotspots, five days a week.	Removes debris; does not cite.	311.
Santa Monica 311	The single intake for non-emergency requests.	Routes outreach requests, encampments and abandoned property to HLP, outreach or HoST.	3-1-1 in the city; (866) 311-7266; 311@santamonica.gov; 311.santamonica.gov/csp.

Who			
Big Blue Bus	City-run transit (unlike Metro, which is a County agency).	No dedicated homeless unit; drivers call SMPD.	bigbluebus.com; 311.
Housing and Human Services Commission	Seven-member advisory body since July 1, 2026, with two seats reserved for affordable-housing participants, one of them unhoused or formerly unhoused.	Recommendations to Council; a public forum for program updates. It cannot bind Council.	Public comment at its meetings.
Public Safety Reform and Oversight Commission	Civilian review of SMPD policy, data and budget, seven members.	Advisory only. Relevant to how camping enforcement is written and reported.	Public comment at its meetings.
Downtown Santa Monica, Inc.	Downtown district management: Ambassadors and a private safety team, 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.	Refer people to services and de-escalate. No police powers; they call SMPD.	310-877-7731.
Santa Monica-Malibu Unified	Must enroll and support homeless students under	Enrollment, transportation and services for	Liaison 310-450-8338 ext. 70208; fdussan@smmusd.org.

Who			
School District	the federal McKinney-Vento Act; controls its own campuses.	students; school-adjacent safety planning with SMPD.	
Santa Monica College	A separate college district, not a City department.	Basic Needs referrals for housing-insecure students; controls its own property, where camping is prohibited under 4.08.095.	310-434-3100.
Santa Monica Public Library	City department that has hosted resource fairs and provider office hours.	Programming and referrals; no enforcement.	smpl.org.
Neighborhood associations	Private volunteer nonprofits, not official City bodies like LA's neighborhood councils. As of June 2026 four take part in the City's grant program (Ocean Park, Mid-City, Pico, Wilshire/Montana)	No legal authority. Influence through organizing and public comment.	Each association's own site.

Who			
	and three declined.		
Westside Cities Council of Governments	Regional body for Beverly Hills, Culver City, Santa Monica, West Hollywood, LA City and the County.	Coordination and advocacy, including the Westside adult crisis facility strategy; can pool Measure A Local Solutions Fund shares.	(213) 612-4545; westsidecities.org.

Who is Santa Monica's County supervisor, and what does the County control?

Santa Monica is in the Third Supervisorial District, represented by Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath, sworn in Dec. 5, 2022. The five-member Board of Supervisors controls the money and the agencies that decide whether a person in crisis has somewhere to go.

- Measure A. The half-cent sales tax, over $1 billion a year since April 2025. The Board adopted the regional plan on March 25, 2025. Santa Monica's Local Solutions Fund share for FY26-27 is $1,296,779.
- Department of Homeless Services and Housing. New on Jan. 1, 2026, with Sarah Mahin as its first director. It took over the County homelessness money and staff that used to flow through LAHSA, with the transfer due by July 1, 2026, and has applied to take over LAHSA's federal roles next year.
- LAHSA. The 1993 City-County authority still runs the annual homeless count (it ran Santa Monica's 2026 count) and the LA-HOP outreach request portal. HUD suspended it as the region's grant lead on June 11, 2026; a federal court kept it in place while the case continues.
- Department of Mental Health. Decides which clinicians may write a 5150, runs the mobile crisis teams and the 24/7 Help Line (800) 854-7771, runs Laura's Law, is the petitioner in CARE Court, and houses the Public Guardian, the only office that can petition for an LPS conservatorship.
- Public Health, Substance Abuse Prevention and Control. Funds and licenses the public detox and residential treatment beds. Reach them through (800) 854-7771, press 2.
- Superior Court. CARE Court, the Mental Health Court in Norwalk, conservatorship hearings, and the venue for Santa Monica's STEP Court.
- Metro. Handles homelessness on its own trains and buses, including the E Line, through a Care-Based Services Division created in January 2026. Its teams do not work Santa Monica streets off the system.
- Sheriff. Runs the county jails. Santa Monica has its own police department.

Who can make each of the six initiatives happen?

Each initiative on the plan is a resident draft. Nothing has been filed. Here is the body that holds the key to each one and the instrument it would use.

Initiative			Who holds the key	The instrument
1. Treatment, not tents: a clinician who can write a hold on every outreach team, and a bed at the end of every hold	LA County DMH approves who may write a hold. City Council and Housing and Human Services write the outreach contracts. The County funds the beds. The State pays through Medi-Cal.	A contract term requiring a DMH-approved clinician on each team, a request to DMH to designate them, and County BHSA and Prop 1 bed funding.		
2. Offer a bed first, then enforce	Santa Monica City Council.	Council direction to adopt a written offer-of-shelter protocol, or an amendment to 4.08.095. SMPD applies it; the City Attorney decides filing; HHS keeps a referral bed open (the 35 Bell Shelter beds exist for this).		
3. A 24/7 Westside crisis drop-off	LA County (Board of Supervisors and DMH), the Westside Cities COG, and Santa Monica City Council.	County BHSA crisis dollars and Prop 1 beds; the COG as convener; the City's $10 million from the 2022 Providence Saint John's agreement plus $1.5 million state and $1.5 million federal secured by 2023. On Feb. 25,		

Initiative			Who holds the key	The instrument
		2025 Council chose a multi-site approach over a single center.		
4. Open books: every dollar, contract and result, monthly	Santa Monica City Council; LA County for its contracts.	Council direction to staff to publish monthly. Measure A already requires annual audits and a public progress tracker at the County level. The two commissions can request and publicize data.		
5. Safe blocks near schools and parks	Santa Monica City Council, SMPD, Public Works, SMMUSD.	Park hours and camping rules are City code; 4.08.095 already covers parks and school property. SMPD and HoST enforce and clear; the school district controls its campuses.		
6. Bring them home: one desk for families	SMPD HLP (Project Homecoming), LA Superior Court and DMH (CARE Court and Laura's Law), the Public Guardian.	Expand Project Homecoming, (310) 458-8953, into one City desk; families can file CARE petitions and Laura's Law referrals themselves; conservatorship runs only through a DMH-designated facility to the Public Guardian.		

Where do residents push?

- City Council. General Public Input at any regular meeting is how a resident idea gets in front of all seven members at once. The next one that matters is Tuesday, November 10. Write to all seven at council@santamonica.gov. How to speak, with the deadlines.
- The County. Supervisor Horvath's Third District office: (213) 974-3333, ThirdDistrict@bos.lacounty.gov, 500 W. Temple St., Room 821. Board meetings take public comment in person, by phone (the number is on each agenda) and in writing at publiccomment.bos.lacounty.gov.
- The Westside Cities COG. (213) 612-4545. The regional table where a Westside crisis drop-off gets planned.
- The commissions. The Housing and Human Services Commission and the Public Safety Reform and Oversight Commission take public comment and can put data requests on the record.
- Your State legislators. For anything that needs a change in State law, find yours at findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov.

What are we still checking?

Three things on this page are reported from the best available source but not yet confirmed from the primary document. We say so rather than guess.

- Whether Council adopted any change to the bedroll language after January 2025. We have found no adopted ordinance; the page treats the September 2024 text as current.
- Whether the City's contracted street teams include clinicians DMH has approved to write a 5150 hold. The City's pages do not say.
- The current size of the SMPD HLP team: the program page lists one sergeant and six officers; a May 2024 City report listed one sergeant, nine officers and a DMH clinician.

Sources

1. U.S. Supreme Court: City of Grants Pass v. Johnson (June 28, 2024)
2. HUD: FY2025 Continuum of Care NOFO (Nov. 13, 2025)
3. HUD: suspension of LAHSA (June 11, 2026)
4. VA Greater Los Angeles: homeless veteran care
5. Governor: Executive Order N-1-24 on encampments
6. CalMatters: the Governor's model camping ordinance (May 2025)
7. CalMatters: AB 255 veto (Oct. 2025)
8. DHCS: CARE Act
9. DHCS: BHSA housing supports primer
10. DHCS: Transitional Rent (Oct. 6, 2025)
11. LA County: Supervisor Horvath sworn in (Dec. 5, 2022)
12. LA County Board of Supervisors: how to participate
13. LA County: first director of the Department of Homeless Services and Housing
14. LA County: Measure A
15. LA County: Measure A Local Solutions Fund FAQ
16. LA County DMH: SB 43
17. LA County DMH: Psychiatric Mobile Response Teams
18. LA County DMH: AOT-LA (Laura's Law)
19. LA County DMH: Public Guardian FAQs
20. LA County DMH: CARE Court overview (April 2025)
21. LA County: therapeutic transport team in Santa Monica (Jan. 8, 2024)
22. LAHSA: about
23. Metro: Care-Based Services Division
24. Westside Cities COG: about
25. City of Santa Monica: City Council
26. City of Santa Monica: Mayor Torosis and Mayor Pro Tem Zwick (Dec. 2, 2025)
27. City of Santa Monica: City Manager Oliver Chi
28. Santa Monica Next: Aileen Reynolds appointed HHS director (Jan. 2026)
29. City of Santa Monica: questions and answers on the anti-camping ordinance
30. Santa Monica Daily Press: split Council tightens anti-camping laws (Sept. 2024)
31. City of Santa Monica: Homeless Liaison Program
32. City of Santa Monica: connect with homelessness services
33. City of Santa Monica: Fire Department expands Advanced Provider Unit (Feb. 12, 2026)
34. City of Santa Monica: outreach programs and field-based teams
35. City of Santa Monica: SaMo Bridge respite hub

36. City of Santa Monica: Homeless Support Team (HoST)

37. City of Santa Monica: Santa Monica 311

38. City of Santa Monica: Realignment Plan (Oct. 24, 2025)

39. City of Santa Monica: Housing Focused System of Care (Aug. 4, 2026)

40. Santa Monica Next: Council activates homelessness plans (March 2025)

41. City of Santa Monica: behavioral health

42. Santa Monica Daily Press: commission overhaul (May 2026)

43. Downtown Santa Monica, Inc.: ambassador and safety programs

44. SMMUSD: homeless and foster youth services

45. Santa Monica College: Basic Needs

46. Santa Monica Next: neighborhood associations and the City grant program (June 2026)

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