

# Councilmember Aims to House Homeless Living Under 101 Freeway by Thanksgiving

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WOODLAND HILLS, Calif. — It's a common sight across Los Angeles County — dozens of tents clustered under freeway overpasses as the homeless find shelter from the weather and avoid hostile neighborhoods and businesses. That landscape is about to change, as county and city leaders rush to comply with a court order by U.S. District Court Judge David Carter to provide shelter to the roughly 7,000 homeless living over and under freeways.

In the city, each council member is responsible for finding — or building — housing for the homeless living along freeways in his or her district. So far Councilman Bob Blumenfield is the only one to say he can have it done by Thanksgiving.

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## What You Need To Know

- There are roughly 7,000 people living within 500 feet of a freeway overpass, underpass, or ramp in Los Angeles County
  - A U.S. District Court judge has ordered leaders to offer housing to those without a home as soon as possible
  - Councilman Bob Blumenfield says there are 33 homeless people living under the Ventura Freeway in his district
  - He's working with the county to have all of them housed by Thanksgiving
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"Compared to a lot of other districts, I have the lowest number of homeless in my district so, in that sense, it's the most achievable," Blumenfield said. The most recent homeless count found about 600 homeless living in Council District 3, but only a few dozen live under the Ventura Freeway, with tents mostly clustered along Winnetka and Corbin avenues. Blumenfield has partnered with the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, or LAHSA, to house them as soon as possible.

A Bridge Housing shelter in Canoga Park with 80 beds is scheduled to open by the end of the year, Blumenfield said. The City Council has also approved funds to build pallet shelters behind his District office in Reseda. The pilot program is based on a similar program in Riverside.

In May, Carter ordered that all individuals living within 500 feet of an overpass, underpass, or ramp must be offered shelter. The ruling came at the same time local leaders and LAHSA scrambled to house anyone vulnerable to dying from COVID-19. Carter pointed to California's welfare law, which requires every county and city to "support all incompetent, poor, indigent persons, and those incapacitated by age, disease, or accident."

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He also pointed to the U.S. Constitution's Eighth Amendment, writing "it is likely also cruel and unusual to act with such indifference that an individual experiencing homelessness is forced to take shelter in an inherently hazardous location."

Blumenfield said he is confident once those living under the Ventura Freeway are housed, he'll be able to keep underpasses clear of tents for good.

"The goal is to house folks and then, pursuant to Judge Carter's determination that it is unsafe to live under the freeways, make sure that these underpasses remain off-limits to future encampments," Blumenfield said.