



A large homeless encampment just off the 710 Freeway coming into Downtown Long Beach, Thursday, April 22, 2021.  
Photo by Brandon Richardson

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## City Council to vote on funding for new Homeless Court pilot program

[Anthony Pignataro](#)

Efforts to help homeless people get out of the criminal justice system and into more social services might get a boost Tuesday night. That's when the City Council [will vote on a proposed \\$254,000 grant](#) to run a pilot Homeless Court program.

The money, which comes from a Community Development Block Grant, would run the new Homeless Court through June 30, 2022, and would include the hiring of an additional full-time Homeless Court Coordinator in the City Prosecutor's office, according to a report to the City Council from Health and Human Services Director Kelly Colopy. The grant funding includes the option to renew the program for three one-year periods.

"The Health Department currently engages in extensive outreach and services for people experiencing persistent challenges, such as mental illness, substance use, and/or homelessness," states Colopy's report. "Many of those served also have a history of non-violent, low-level misdemeanor arrests and convictions, and a homeless court project could remove legal barriers that make it harder to find employment and housing."

Put simply, the goal behind Homeless Court is to get the City Prosecutor's office, service providers and homeless people with pending criminal convictions to work together to ensure that warrants, tickets and other past misdemeanors don't prevent homeless people from accessing services they need.

Homeless Court would not be like any other court in Long Beach. Sessions, at least to start, would be held at the Multi-Service Center, which already provides a host of assistance for those experiencing homelessness. Haubert hopes the first court session will take place this June.

"We're trying to have an open mind on the best way to run the court to help the most people," Haubert added.

There are only about 70 Homeless Courts in the country today, according to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. It was the one in Redondo Beach that inspired 4th District Supervisor Janice Hahn to

see if the system could work in Long Beach. Back in February, Hahn invited Haubert to visit the court, and he spent the day watching how it worked.

“I have been so impressed by the Homeless Court in Redondo Beach and I knew it would be a model for other cities to follow,” said Supervisor Hahn in a statement. “Too often, minor infractions and misdemeanors stand in the way of an unhoused person getting a job or getting housing. The idea behind the Homeless Court is recognizing that it is in all our best interests to help people in these situations turn their lives around—and it brings together every resource available to help them do it. This concept compliments the good work already happening in Long Beach and I know it is in good hands with Doug Haubert and his team.”

For Haubert, the Redondo Homeless Court was an inspiration, though he knows that Long Beach, being a much larger city, will have to scale it all up.

“I believe Long Beach can sustain a larger Homeless Court project,” Haubert said. “Certainly, our need is great. And if we’re successful, we’ll have more people put into services instead of incarceration, and we’ll have more homeless people clear criminal cases to ensure they’re successful when they’re in services. Both goals are possible.”

The most recent Long Beach Point-In-Time Homeless Count, [released in June 2020](#), found 2,034 people experiencing homelessness in the city, which was up 7% from the previous year.

In 2018, Haubert’s office created the Priority Access Diversion program to help many of the homeless people they were seeing in active cases get alternative options than simply fines and incarceration. But that program, [which was expanded in April](#), functions differently from the proposed Homeless Court. The former deals largely with people who already come across the City Prosecutor’s desk, while the latter will be set up to assist people who don’t have active cases.

Referrals for Homeless Court could come from case managers from homeless or mental health services. In this way, Haubert said Homeless Court would “support” the already existing PAD program.

Andy Kerr, a homeless advocate and Supervisor Hahn’s representative on the Measure H commission, agrees with Haubert that Homeless Court has the potential to do a lot of good.

“My sense is that this is a step in the right direction,” he said. “I’ve been very supportive of Doug’s efforts. And generally, I’m very supportive of anything that moves away from criminalizing the situation.”

*Editor’s note: This story originally misstated the stakeholders involved in the creation of Homeless Court, and has been updated.*