

PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

SKID ROW RESIDENTS/ORGANIZATIONS SUE DOWNTOWN BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT AND THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES FOR UNLAWFUL SEIZURE OF PROPERTY

LOS ANGELES, CA (September 19, 2014)—Los Angeles Catholic Worker, Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN), Harry James Jones, Louis Grady, Lloyd Hinkle and Walter Shoaf filed a lawsuit in federal court today against the Los Angeles Downtown Industrial District Business Improvement District (LADID), Central City East Association (CCEA), and the City of Los Angeles to stop the LADID and City from seizing the personal property of homeless individuals on Skid Row, in violation of their constitutional rights. They are represented by the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA) and Schonbrun DeSimone Seplow Harris and Hoffman, LLP.

The City of Los Angeles is already under a federal court injunction prohibiting it from seizing property that is not abandoned, an immediate threat to health or safety, or evidence of a crime. Despite the injunction, LADID's cadre of public safety officers in red shirts continue to take unattended property from homeless people living on the streets of Skid Row.

The seizures at issue are separate from street cleaning by the City and are not part of an organized maintenance schedule. Instead, BID officers take people's property without any notice – with seizures often occurring during times that officers know that homeless individuals are receiving services or eating at area missions. People step away from their property for often only minutes at a time to get a meal, go to a medical appointment, or even use the rest room. When they return, all of their worldly possessions, including tents, bedding, and warm clothing, are gone—taken by truck to a location at the edge of the district. The location is hard to reach and a far distance for people to transport property back to the places they regularly sleep, particularly without the assistance of the trucks that took the property away. These seizures serve no purpose other than to make life even harder for homeless residents in Skid Row.

Last year, Harry James Jones, a disabled Vietnam War veteran, neatly packed up all his belongings including his identification card, his life-saving medication, tent, and clothing. Same as every day, he went to get some food. While he was gone, LADID officers took all of his property. They left no receipt for him to retrieve the property when he got back. "I was only gone for a little while. When I came back, all of my things were gone," said Mr. Jones. "I had no way to know the Red Shirts would take my things when I was gone. I didn't have my medicine for weeks, and I didn't have my ID to get a refill. I got very sick and wound up in the hospital."

Lloyd Hinkle, another Vietnam War veteran, had similarly neatly packed his property, and a neighbor was watching over it while he went to eat. LADID officers, with the assistance of the LAPD, seized his belongings, despite being told they were not abandoned by both Hinkle's neighbor and members of LA CAN, who videotaped the incident. LAPD officers prevented witnesses and members and staff of LA CAN from intervening to stop the LADID officers from taking Mr. Hinkle's belongings. The LAPD officer insisted that BID officers were doing their jobs and that she and the officers were only taking abandoned property, even as LA CAN members insisted that the owner of the property was nearby. Mr. Hinkle was unable to predict the seizure, and he has no way of knowing when they will come for his property again. "Since they took my stuff, I'm less willing to leave, even to get a meal or see the doctor," said Mr. Hinkle. "I don't want to risk the red shirts coming and taking my stuff again."

Plaintiff Los Angeles Catholic Worker (LACW) distributes shopping carts to homeless people in Skid Row. The carts are given to people so they can store their belongings and also use the carts to assist them in moving their property from one location to another. LACW also provides meals, toiletries, and foot care to hundreds of homeless people in Skid Row every year. “Because of ill-fitting shoes and poor foot care and the challenges of being homeless, so many people on the Row have problems just walking and getting around. The carts not only give people a place to put their things, but they also help many people just walk down the street,” said Catherine Morris, one of the group’s organizers. “The BID’s constant taking of people’s things and our carts make it harder for people to live on the street and harder for us to do our work.”

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Spanish speakers available upon request.
