

## **Lawsuit seeks to stop big California homeless camp shutdown**

*The Associated Press, January 29, 2018, 6:24 p.m.*

SANTA ANA, Calif. - A religious organization that serves the poor in Southern California filed a lawsuit Monday to try to stop local governments from forcing homeless people out of a big encampment along a riverbed trail.

The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court by the Orange County Catholic Worker group and seven homeless people claims a broad range of violations of constitutional protections by the governments of Orange County and the cities of Anaheim, Costa Mesa and Orange.

The filing came a week after sheriff's deputies went tent to tent telling people the encampment was being closed down.

The lawsuit alleges the defendants forced homeless people from those jurisdictions into an area along the Santa Ana River and that the county is now trying to force those people back into surrounding areas without a plan for shelter or housing.

"The failure, if not the outright refusal of Orange County and its cities to adopt positive measures to address the housing crisis and the willingness to criminalize the mere act of existing in public spaces takes a toll on the County's most vulnerable people," the lawsuit said.

It added that "the County and its cities have invested in enforcement instead of housing, blaming other entities for the problem, and leaving unhoused people nowhere to turn, nowhere to live, and nowhere to sleep."

In a statement, Orange County Counsel Leon Page said there would be no comment on the merits of the litigation, but "we look forward to discussing positive solutions that will benefit all stakeholders, including the population encamped in the Santa Ana Riverbed."

The 2-mile-long (3.2-kilometer-long) camp lies along a bike trail paralleling the Santa Ana River, which flows at a trickle until storms bring it to life. The lawsuit estimates 800 to 1,200 people live along the trail, which passes by Angel Stadium of Anaheim, home of Major League Baseball's Los Angeles Angels.

It's one of the latest crisis points as cities up and down the West Coast grapple with a surge in homelessness caused in part by soaring housing costs, rock-bottom vacancy rates, drug addiction and need for mental health services.

In addition to the issues of people living on sidewalks, authorities have had to deal with problems ranging from the hepatitis A epidemic that hit San Diego for nearly five months and the threat of wildfires ignited by homeless camp fires in Los Angeles.

The lawsuit seeks restraining orders and permanent injunctions against closing the bike path, citing individuals for trespassing or nuisance, citing or arresting people for violations of municipal camping and loitering ordinances, among other things.