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who has been swept at least three times in the four years he's been homeless. "It is what it is. ... I just let it go."

Angelique Risby, 29, watched as workers in neon-yellow vests shoveled piles of litter into black garbage bags. Risby, who has been homeless for two years, said she was

“It’s really a misguided reaction to this homelessness crisis

prepared for a drill she’s done multiple times.

“Everything that I own,” she said, “can fit on my wagon.”

Tent encampments have long been a fixture of West Coast cities, but are now spreading across the U.S. The federal count of homeless people reached 580,000 last year, driven by lack of affordable housing, a pandemic that economically wrecked households, and lack of access to mental health and addiction treatment.

Records obtained by The Associated Press show attempts to clear encampments increased in cities from Los Angeles to New York as public pressure grew to address what some residents say are dangerous and unsanitary living conditions. But despite tens of millions of dollars spent in recent years, there appears to be little reduction in the number of tents propped up on sidewalks, in parks and by freeway off-ramps.

Homeless people and their advocates say the sweeps are cruel and a waste of taxpayer money.

They say the answer is more housing, not crack-downs.

The AP submitted data requests to 30 U.S. cities regarding encampment sweeps and received at least partial responses from about half.

In Phoenix, the number of encampments swept soared to more than 3,000 last year from 1,200 in 2019. Las Vegas removed about 2,500 camps through September, up from 1,600 in 2021. And in Minneapolis, camp removals have more than doubled from last year to 44 through Nov. 9, according to city records.

But even officials at cities that don’t collect data confirmed that public camping is consuming more of their time, and they are starting to track numbers, budget for security and trash disposal, and beef up or launch programs to connect homeless people to housing and services.

“We are seeing an increase in these laws at the state and local level that criminalize homelessness, and it’s really a misguided reaction to this homelessness crisis,” said Scout Katovich, a staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, which has filed lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of sweeps and property seizures in a dozen cities, including Minneapolis, Miami, Albuquerque, Anchorage and Boulder, Colorado.

“These laws and these practices of enforcement do nothing to actually alleviate the crisis and instead they keep people in this vicious cycle of poverty,” she said.

Read more at [TheSkanner.com](https://www.theskanner.com)



AP PHOTO/JASON LEE

Today in History: Oprah Films at High School

Daytime talk show hostess Oprah Winfrey gestures to the crowd at the Southwestern High School in Baltimore on Nov. 29, 1988, for quiet during the taping of her show on school violence.

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dling. The threat of COVID-19 decreased the number of worshippers comfortable with attending in-person, and most Sunday services are available by streaming.

“COVID really did the church a favor,” Payne told *The Skanner*. “If you look at the history of church, we have been self-centered. And COVID, via all the legislation, shut everything down. The church had to find a new way to reach people. Now that we’re free to roam around the country, it doesn’t mean that your nucleus of people are going to come back in the building. So for me, COVID did what we couldn’t do ourselves and that is to make us livestream.”

The church remains lively, maintaining the focus on civil rights and social justice that has characterized it since its inception. But both leaders and attendees have come to question whether the aging church structure – large and stately though it may be – is the best use of the property

anymore.

“We are moving forward with this thing called the rebirth of First Church,” Payne said. “I’d rather be part of the rebirth than something else.”

Better Use of Space

Church attendance in the U.S. is at a historic low: According to a recent Gallup poll, only 31% of adults across denominations report regularly going to a house of worship. Among Protestants, the number hovers around 40%.

“We are moving forward with this thing called the rebirth of First Church

Now, at First AME Zion, the question of how best to serve parishioners and the local Black community dovetails with housing shortages and rental markets that continue to price out resi-

dents.

And so the church has developed a new vision for itself as the site of a new, smaller ministry facility, affordable day care, affordable housing and homeless transition housing.

This will necessitate tearing down the landmark church.

“When we talk about the sanctuary, statistics show that after COVID, your average (church) attendance is about 65 to 75 people” nationwide, Payne said. “So for us, a sanctuary that can hold 300-plus is not needed.”

On Sunday, Payne described the complicated nature of such a transition by reading an email he had received from a colleague: “Such an exciting time, though certainly not without accompanying grief. My prayers are with you and your wonderful congregation as you stand at the precipice of something new.”

Payne added: “The message for the day: Just remember somebody’s watching you. And what

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bias for or against law enforcement” from participating.

To police oversight advocates, it appeared the city had missed the point.

“The community’s desire for a clear demarcation between the police bureau and the oversight board is evident, and any attempt to blur this line should be rejected outright,” former PAC member Aje Amaechi said. “Equally concerning is the removal of the right to appeal complaint decisions, a fundamental aspect of our previous oversight system since 1982. Additionally, the inclusion of a vague prohibition against anti-police bias is troubling. Such ambitious terms are open to misinterpretation, and could be used politically to sideline voices that advocate for accountability – and in fact I think this is the intent.”

Former PAC members and voting advocates called on city council to delay a vote on the proposed changes, and instead hold a public meeting between

the city attorney and PAC participants to allow for more public feedback. Instead, the council voted Wednesday to approve the city attorney’s recom-

“Eighty-two percent is an astounding number

mendations. Now, public comment will remain open until Dec. 15, leaving the possibility of further changes to the guidelines. The proposal must then be submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice under its 2014 settlement agreement with the city over the PPB’s excessive use of force. Because changes to police oversight must be approved on the federal level, there remains hope the DOJ might influence a system more in line with voter intention.

82% Approval

Former city commissioner Jo Ann

Hardesty introduced Measure 26-217 in October 2020, after more than 100 consecutive days of protests that began in response to George Floyd’s murder by Minneapolis police. In a city where in 2012 the U.S. Department of Justice found the police had violated the rights of people with mental illness, the measure passed with nearly 82% support among voters.

It was a number invoked repeatedly during last week’s council session to remind the city how much public will was behind strengthening police ac-



Former PAC member
Aje Amaechi

countability measures.

“Eighty-two percent is an astounding number,” Seemab Hussaini of the PNW Justice Group said to the council. “You’d hope that any of your initiatives passed by that and not be second-guessed. And to suggest that it is a flawed and emotional response to George Floyd is the excuse of corruption, privilege and, at its core, is racism.”

The passage of Measure 26-217 amended the city charter to create a new, independent police oversight board with the power to discipline and even fire law enforcement staff in cases of egregious misconduct. The measure grants the board some subpoenaing powers and prohibits current and former law enforcement officers, or those who have experience or immediate family members in law enforcement, from serving on the board. Also under the measure the board is guaranteed

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