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Over the past three decades, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have expanded rapidly across the United States, and they have systematically acted to criminalize the presence and activities of poor people in public spaces.

### ***What are BIDs?***

BIDs are private entities funded by assessments collected by local government on properties or businesses within a designated area. They use revenue from assessments on a variety of programs that take control of public spaces and divert public resources to the exclusive benefit of cities' largest landowners.

### ***What kinds of programs do BIDs fund?***

Each BID refers to their programs by different names, but all programs fall into the four categories of security, public space maintenance, communication and development, and administration and advocacy. Security programs are clearly the priority for BIDs. In Los Angeles, BIDs spent **\$26,406,166.24** on cleaning and security programs in 2018, or 67% of the total assessments. In San Francisco, BIDs spent **\$13,836,733** on cleaning and security programs in 2018, or 54% of their total assessments.

BIDs hire armed and unarmed security officers, fund camera surveillance programs, coordinate with police departments, and, most blatantly, contract with cities for additional police presence. BIDs have direct lines of communication with local police departments and report to the police about their security priorities. Specifically, BID security targets poor and homeless people for behaviors such as sitting, lying, and panhandling.

Cleaning programs also have an important role in criminalization, because cleaning crews move people on the streets out of public spaces. If people resist being moved, then cleaning crews call private security and police to escalate the situation. Other activities that BIDs spend their money on include:

- Drafting and promoting legislation that criminalizes poor people in public space. They lobby local and state legislators to pass legislation allowing the targeting, harassment and exclusion of homeless people, poor people, street vendors, and buskers from their districts.
- Opposing legislation that seeks to protect street based people from criminalization, including attempts to overturn sit-lie ordinances.

- Controlling the architecture and aesthetics of the district including creating parklets, holding festivals, and cleaning public spaces. Like private security, controlling design allows BIDs to determine what public space should offer and to whom.

### ***How are BIDs created?***

Different cities have different processes for establishing and disestablishing BIDs. Every city, however, has elections on BIDs which are weighted according to the amount of assessments that a landowner will pay. This means that:

- Only property owners and local and state governments are allowed to submit petitions and ballots in elections on the formation of BIDs.
  - Renters and homeless people are denied by law the right to vote.
- The larger the amount of property that a person owns, the more influential their vote.

City governments often support the formation of new BIDs before any public hearings. They provide hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants to fund the formation and renewal of BIDs, and they submit votes on behalf of publicly-owned properties in support of the creation and renewal of BIDs.

### ***TAKE ACTION – What You Can Do:***

With BIDs playing an increasingly greater role in controlling our public spaces in our cities and states, and in creating laws that criminalize poor and homeless people, it's important to take action and say NO to BIDs!

- Demand that your local government:
  - Create greater public oversight for BIDs.
  - Cancel all special agreements with BIDs.
  - Stop all public funding of BIDs.
  - Immediately disband all BIDs.
- Document (video, photos, take notes) incidents of BID harassment of vendors, poor people, buskers, homeless people, and send your documentation to [wrap@wraphome.org](mailto:wrap@wraphome.org) and your local groups fighting BIDs.
- Ask your local business if they support BIDs. If they do not, ask them if they would be willing to put signage in their windows. If they support BIDs, don't patronize their business!