

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **City of Berkeley Exacerbates Bacteria Risk, Uses Results of Their Own Inaction as Excuse to Sweep Homeless Encampment**

The City of Berkeley (COB) posted notice on February 17th, 2026, giving the residents of the encampment at Eighth and Harrison streets one week to move, or risk citation and arrest on or after February 24th, 2026.

The City claims that clearing the area to eliminate Leptospirosis (Lepto) is the reason for the sweep. The first case of Lepto connected with the encampment was confirmed in November of 2025.<sup>1</sup> Catherine Lewis, Where Do We Go? organizer and a leader in food distribution says “The city of Berkeley is unrelenting in its harassment and criminalization of the unhoused community. Rather than supporting the community at 8th & Harrison with sanitation including ongoing trash pickup, the COB is using the Lepto outbreak to justify sweeping the most marginalized among us. Many of us have been begging the COB for sanitation support for months and months. Where is that support? Not until two months after the “outbreak of Lepto” did the City choose to act. Their solution is displacement and intensifying trauma. Exactly where are people supposed to go? Where?”

The City’s January 13th Lepto outreach event advertised basic information about the symptoms and spread, and vaccine vouchers. This occurred the day after Paw Fund, a Berkeley-based non-profit organization providing veterinary care and resources to unhoused communities, came out and administered the 2nd and final dose of the Lepto vaccine to every dog in the encampment.

Before and since November, COB failed to provide adequate solid waste removal or sanitation infrastructure. Where Do We Go? brought up the inadequate trash collection at Berkeley encampments in a meeting with Mayor Ishii on September 24th, 2025, and nothing changed. Rats are known vectors for the disease; there is no excuse for the City allowing trash to accumulate. If the City is concerned about Lepto, whose spread is worsened by standing water and the presence of rats, they must ensure regular trash service. Residents have endured

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<sup>1</sup> Health Alert – [Addressing Leptospirosis at Harrison Street Encampments. January 12, 2026. page 3](#)

weeks of heavy rain, which left them with no way to dry out soaked belongings, or dispose of ruined items and food in rat-proof containers. COB would not subject a neighborhood of wealthy, housed people to such conditions.

Allowing these problems to persist for months before issuing a Public Health Alert to the whole neighborhood sends a clear message: the City will neglect unhoused people's health and safety until they can use them to publicly justify sweeping without adequately accommodating their need to relocate. The classism is extremely loud.

In accordance with the January 13th order by Judge Chen (Case 3.25-cv-01414-EMC, Document 202), those covered by the lawsuit are exempt from the impending sweep. However, the City of Berkeley had a responsibility to make efforts to protect *everyone* in the warning area starting in November, lawsuit or not. Many residents got no outreach from the City until mid-January, and some have received none to this day. The City's outreach was billed as a path to housing resources, which was negated by the City telling outreach workers to stop going to the corridor "for their own safety." This as COB tells us during every sweep that there are not enough open shelter beds.

COB is leaving those covered by the injunction to amend conditions they have deemed dangerous, adhering to the injunction without respecting the health of those covered by it. Merced Dominguez, a resident who has been in the community for 12 years asks "Why would you close down a campsite knowing people have nowhere else to go? That's the City's responsibility."

The Federal District Court's order says the City cannot just tell people to "relocate," and must identify at least three specific, nearby locations where those affected could lawfully move. If the City believes that doing so is unreasonable, it must explain why. They were also ordered to explain why they are sweeping the whole area rather than distributing personal protective equipment. They were ordered to explain why providing non-congregate, ADA-compliant relocation options before clearing the encampment poses a fundamental burden to the government. The Court is also requiring the City to describe any alternative accommodations it considered, and explain why those were rejected.

Stefan Kaiter, speaking from his experience building and operating the Warming Hut, which he brings to the camp to give relief from cold and rainy weather, said the following: "This is a perfect opportunity for the City to see the amazing idea that has been brought to it time and time again: giving people a safe place or RV park to move to, where they can find some semblance of stability and be located by homeless services, and be provided trash disposal, clean bathrooms, food support. All of those things can get people back into housing. The City could use this opportunity to pursue something new, rather than continuing the cycle of displacement and it's really disappointing to see."

**We demand that the City of Berkeley publicly designate multiple sites where people can safely relocate** without suffering more state violence. They owe Harrison corridor residents

answers and resources, not because a federal judge said so, but because it's the only right thing to do.

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