

LOCAL NEWS • News

\$6.8 million grant OK'd to extend Santa Ana River Trail in Redlands

Goal is for path to run from the sea to the mountains



Bicyclists ride on the Santa Ana River Trail Tuesday, May 9, 2023, through San Bernardino. (File photo by Anjali Sharif-Paul, The Sun/SCNG)



By **MADISON HART** | mhart@scng.com

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The [Santa Ana River Trail](#) will be extended in Redlands.

San Bernardino County approved a \$6.8 million state grant Tuesday, April 23, to complete a stretch of the trail from California to Orange streets.

The grant will be used to design, construct and complete a 3.9-mile portion of the trail, according to the county.

The project is part of the larger [Santa Ana River Trail](#), a 110-mile path for cyclists and pedestrians that will eventually run from the sea to the mountains — from Huntington Beach to the San Bernardino National Forest.

The trail is 60% complete, with two significant gaps, from Green River Road in Orange County to the Hidden Valley Wildlife area in Riverside County and from Waterman Avenue in San Bernardino to the national forest boundary line near Mentone.

The grant agreement is with the California State Coastal Conservancy. Work should be done by the end of January 2026.

\$6.8 million grant for Santa Ana River Trail

San Bernardino County approved a \$6.8 million grant from the state on Tuesday to complete a stretch of the Santa Ana River Trail from California to Orange streets in Redlands.

— Santa Ana River Trail



Source: San Bernardino County

JEFF GOERTZEN, SCNG

CRIME

Hesperia man dies while in San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department custody



Brian Day

Victorville Daily Press

Published 1:23 p.m. PT April 26, 2024 | Updated 4:22 p.m. PT April 26, 2024

A Hesperia man arrested on suspicion of vandalism early this month during what a family member described as a "mental health crisis" has died while in San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department custody.

Eduardo Lopez, 23, died about 3 a.m. Thursday at Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center, according to sheriff's officials.

He was arrested on suspicion of vandalism and resisting police on April 1 in the 15700 block of Cactus Street, according to sheriff's officials and county booking records. He was taken to the West Valley Detention Center in Rancho Cucamonga for pre-trial housing.

"On April 15, 2024, Lopez was observed harming himself in his cell at (West Valley Detention Center)," the sheriff's department said in a written statement. "Lopez was evaluated by medical staff and relocated to a safety cell. Lopez was monitored frequently in the safety cell by deputies and medical staff."

He was found unconscious in the cell the following day, sheriff's officials said. Sheriff's personnel administered first aid until paramedics transported him to the hospital for further treatment.

"Lopez's health continued to decline," law enforcement officials stated.

He died at the hospital on April 25, according to the statement.

An investigation into the death is being conducted by the Sheriff's Specialized Investigations Division.

An official cause of death will be determined through an autopsy by Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner investigators.

Unanswered questions

Cousin Ashley Lopez said her family has many concerns and unanswered questions about what happened to Eduardo.

"We suspect (he) was brutally assaulted in West Valley Detention Center," she said in a statement accompanying a GoFundMe.com campaign established to aid the family.

On the day of his arrest, "He was experiencing an acute schizophrenic episode that led to his caregivers — parents — call(ing) 911 for assistance," according to the cousin. "He was placed in a jail, West Valley Detention center, instead of a mental health hospital even after the mother had informed the officer that they were calling to request mental health assistance for him."

Eduardo's parents were told that he refused visitors while in custody, which they found strange, Ashley said. "It's not very like him, he loves his parents very much, as he's lived with them all his life."

Family members also found it strange that they were told he had refused to make his scheduled court appearance, "which again was very odd and unlikely of him," his cousin said.

Several days later, the family was told that Eduardo had suffered two heart attacks and was in a coma, she said.

"We feel something isn't right... The jail has been refusing to give us details and answers on the incident that lead Eduardo into a coma," Ashley stated. "We want to know what caused the two heart attacks, we want to know why he has bruises all over his body, we want to know why it appears that he has a broken leg, and why there's blood inside his eyes... We want to know why he didn't receive the proper care during his mental crisis."

Donate to Funeral expenses for Eduardo Lopez, organized by Ashley Lopez

Anyone with information was urged to contact Detective Travis Kleveno of the Sheriff's Specialized Investigations Division at (909) 890-4904. Tips may also be submitted anonymously to We-Tip at (800) 782-7463.

CRIME

'Operation Consequences' raids yield 34 arrests, 32 guns, 25 pounds of meth



[Brian Day](#)

Victorville Daily Press

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San Bernardino County's ongoing series of police raids and enforcement actions under the banner "Operation Consequences" last week resulted in 34 arrests, as well as the seizure of 32 guns and 25 pounds of methamphetamine, officials said.

Sheriff's deputies, aided by surrounding law enforcement agencies, carried out 12 search warrant throughout the county April 20 through April 26, the agency said in a written statement.

Targeted locations included the 15100 Block of Stable Lane in Victorville; the 8200 block of El Cerrito Avenue in Hesperia; the 18000 block of Arbor Court in Adelanto; the 6700 block of Wheeler Court in Fontana; the 1300 block of Visconti Drive in Colton; the 7800 block of Bonnie Street in San Bernardino; and the 2600 block of Macy Avenue in San Bernardino.

"During those contacts, investigators contacted gang members and persons prohibited from possessing firearms," according to the statement. "Over 25 pounds of suspected methamphetamine was recovered, and 32 firearms, which included two ghost guns, were seized. Investigators made 34 felony arrests."

Operation Consequences is a county-funded crime-suppression campaign intended to "curb violent crime, disrupt and dismantle targeted criminal street gangs, and locate and arrest criminals who are illegally possessing, manufacturing, and trafficking firearms," the statement added.

Sheriff's deputies were joined in last weeks raids by fellow officers from the California Highway Patrol, the San Bernardino Police Department, the Ontario Police Department, the Upland Police Department, the Fontana Police Department, San Bernardino County Probation and U.S. Department of Homeland Security Investigations.



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LOCAL NEWS

Found a firearm? Here's how to safely dispose of a firearm in San Bernardino County

Robert Haydon

April 29, 2024

👁 802

Reporting by Robert Haydon

There has been an increase in reports of found guns, legal and illegal – in unusual places around the Morongo Basin.

If you have found a firearm or ammunition and want to dispose of it responsibly but you aren't comfortable handing it – The San Bernardino Sheriff Station says it's as simple as calling them and asking a deputy to come and take possession of it.

However – If you do feel safe handling the firearm or ammunition you want to turn in – you can take it to the Morongo Basin Sheriff's Station. It's best to call ahead so the station knows to expect you, and once you've arrived check-in at the front window first – without the firearm. Once the clerk takes the firearm – you'll be provided with a receipt or case number for record keeping.

The Sheriff's Department says that they will ask basic questions involving whatever you know about the firearm – stating “we have a duty to document how we received the firearm and from who – just in case it is later found to be involved in a crime.”

If you wish to remain anonymous but still want to turn in the firearm – you can call the WE TIP line to report it – and if enough information is provided a detective will look into how to retrieve the firearm. That number is 1-800-78-CRIME

The Morongo Basin Sheriff's Station can be contacted at (760) 366-4175

Police officer hiring up in '23, survey finds

BY CLAUDIA LAUER

PHILADELPHIA — Police departments across the United States are reporting an increase in their ranks for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 killing of George Floyd, which led to a historic exodus of officers, a survey shows.

More sworn officers were hired in 2023 than in any one of the previous four years, and fewer officers overall resigned or retired, according to the 214 law enforcement agencies that responded to a survey by the Police Executive Research Forum.

Floyd's death at the hands of Minneapolis police officers spurred nationwide protests against police brutality and heightened scrutiny of law enforcement.

As more and more officers left, many of the departments had to redeploy stretched resources by shifting officers away from investigative work or quality-of-life issues such as abandoned vehicles or noise violations to handle increases in crime and, in some cases, the shortages meant slower response times or limiting responses to emergencies only, police officials say.

"I just think that the past four years have been particularly challenging for American policing," said Chuck Wexler, executive director of the research forum, a nonprofit policing think tank based in Washington. "And our survey shows we're finally starting to turn a corner."

Individual departments are turning that corner at different rates, however, said Wexler, who noted that many are still struggling to attract and keep officers.

As a whole, the profession "isn't out of the woods yet," he said.

The Associated Press left phone and email messages with several unions and police departments to ask about increased hiring.

The survey shows that although small and medium departments had more sworn officers than they did in January 2020, large departments are still more than 5% below their staffing levels from that time, even with a year-over-year increase from 2022 to 2023.

The survey also showed that smaller departments with fewer than 50 officers are still struggling with a higher rate of resignations and retirements.

The survey asked only for numbers, Wexler said, so it's hard to say whether those officers are leaving for larger departments or leaving the profession altogether. He also said smaller departments, which account for 80% of agencies nationwide, were underrepresented in the responses the think tank received.

Many larger departments have increased officer pay or started offering incentives such as signing bonuses for experienced officers who are willing to transfer, something smaller departments can't really compete with. At least a dozen smaller departments have disbanded, leaving the municipalities they once served to rely on state or county help for policing.

But even some of the highest-paying large departments are still struggling to get new hires in the door.

"I don't think it's all about money. I think it's about the way people perceive their job and feel they are going to be supported," Wexler said. "You have West Coast departments that are paying six figures, but still seeing major challenges in hiring."

In addition to pay and bonuses, many agencies are reexamining their application requirements and hiring processes.

Lauer writes for the Associated Press.



By Julie Sharp
April 26, 2024 / 12:44 PM PDT / KCAL News

Hesperia Unified School District officials announced an increase of law enforcement presence Friday at Oak Hills High School after a threatening video posted earlier in the week caught the district's attention and prompted safety concerns on the campus.

Be the first to know

A district letter to parents and the school community said that the video was brought to the attention of both the district and law enforcement Thursday night.

"The video shows several males in a home, wearing hoodies and cursing several individuals by first name while covering their faces. One of the individuals appears to be holding a weapon," the district letter said.

A police investigation determined that the video seems to have been posted earlier in the week, but recently gained traction on social media.

Oak Hills High School is not mentioned in the video, and a threat was not made against a particular school, but with recent criminal activity at Oak Hills, the district chose to increase police presence at that school as a precautionary measure. Also, district officials said that social media rumors claimed that the people in the video were involved in a recent incident at the campus.

On Tuesday, a student accused of carrying a loaded gun on Oak Hills High School campus was arrested. An approximate hour-long lockdown put the student body on edge as rumors circulated during the lockdown that there were multiple shooters, as well as other rumors.

Be the first to know

"Contrary to social media rumors, the individuals in this video were not involved in the incident at OHHS on Tuesday 4/23/24," district officials said. Despite Oak Hills not being mentioned, nor any particular threat made, the district still chose to increase police presence "Out of an abundance of



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LOCAL NEWS YUCCA VALLEY

Yucca Valley Fire Station #41 moving into new building and location

Z107.7 News

April 26, 2024

👁️ 774

At this week's meeting of the County Board of Supervisors, the board approved a commitment to purchase a piece of land with an eye towards building a new fire department. The lot is 4/5's of an acre of undeveloped land located on Joshua Lane just north of Yucca Trail and south of the new county library. The new location is on the same block as the current fire station #41, located west of the library.

State, county, and local officials have been working more than a year on finding a location for a new fire station to replace the existing fire station #41, which was built in the 1950s. San Bernardino County Fire Chief Dan Munsey said that though the current station was renovated in the 1990s, it was inadequate for the modern needs.

The parcel must be reviewed thoroughly before any sale can be approved, but the Board's commitment means that the necessary reviews can move forward.

Chief Munsey said the county had struggled to find affordable land in Yucca Valley, and that as of earlier this year, they planned to conduct additional renovation and modernization of the existing fire station. But the new parcel on Joshua Lane was found, and determined to be fit for further study.

Plans have been drawn up for a new fire station #41, featuring a community meeting room. Chief Munsey said that current plans are to convert the old fire station on Twentynine Palms Highway into an administrative building.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Caltech studying fiber-optic lines to detect earthquakes

BY TERESA LIU

TLIU@SCNG.COM

Imagine repurposing underground fiber optic cables, typically used for delivering high-speed internet to California residents, to detect and measure earthquakes.

That is the focus of recent research by scientists at Caltech led by Zhongwen Zhan, who presented his findings to students and community members during a lecture Wednesday evening.

“California is the earthquake country, and we have a pretty good seismic network starting from more than 100 years ago now,” said Zhan, a professor of geophysics at Caltech. “We really want to have even denser instruments so we can capture all the small seismicity from one neighborhood to another.”

Zhan’s team employed distributed acoustic sensing to study a section of the fiber-optic cable. By using laser emitters to project beams of light through the cables, which contain tiny defects every few meters that reflect a portion of the light back to the source, scientists gathered insights into the motion of seismic waves.

Using fiber optic cables to monitor earthquakes could potentially be a faster and more affordable approach than using conventional seismic sensors, Zhan said. His team was able to convert two fiber optic cables into over 5,000 sensors, he added.

The success of this experiment, which focused on the 2021 magnitude 6 earthquake in Antelope Valley, has prompted Zhan’s team to expand its research from California to other areas, including Antarctica.

“The Earth is constantly making sound,” Zhan said. “By listening to the Earth carefully, you can really learn a lot about the Earth and all the different processes, and I think there’s a lot more to be done.”

In addition to Zhan’s lecture, the event also gave attendees an opportunity to get hands-on experience with new seismology instruments and chat with members of Caltech’s seismological laboratory, as well as high school interns from Pasadena and Alhambra about their earthquake research.

NEWS > ENVIRONMENT

Lawmakers hope to use this emerging climate science to charge oil companies for disasters

Alex Brown | Stateline.org (TNS)

A fast-emerging field of climate research is helping scientists pinpoint just how many dollars from a natural disaster can be tied to the historic emissions of individual oil companies — analysis that is the centerpiece of new state efforts to make fossil fuel companies pay billions for floods, wildfires and heat waves.

When a flood or wildfire hits, researchers in “attribution science” run computer models to help determine whether the disaster was caused or intensified by climate change.

As those models become more precise, other scientists are working to measure how specific companies, such as Exxon Mobil or Shell, have contributed to climate change through their historic greenhouse gas emissions.

“This is a growing field, and it’s a game changer for addressing climate change,” said Delta Merner, the lead scientist for the Science Hub for Climate Litigation at the Union of Concerned Scientists, a climate-focused research and advocacy nonprofit. “It has a role to play in litigation and in policy, because it gives us that precision.”

For the first time, some state lawmakers are trying to turn that advanced modeling into policy. Under their proposals, state agencies would use attribution science to tally up the damages caused by climate change and identify the companies responsible. Then, they would send each company a bill for its portion of the destruction, from heat waves to hurricanes.

“This science is evolving rapidly,” said Anthony Iarrapino, a Vermont-based attorney and lobbyist for the Conservation Law Foundation who has been a leading advocate for attribution-based policy. “This is something that couldn’t have been done 10 years ago. [Lawmakers] are benefiting from this shift in focus among some of the most talented scientists we have out there.”

Lawmakers in Vermont and four other blue states have proposed “climate Superfund” bills, which would create funds to pay for recovery from climate disasters and preparation for sea level rise and other adaptation measures.

Oil and coal companies would pay into those funds based on the percentage of emissions they’ve caused over a set period. The legislation’s name references the 1980 federal Superfund law that forces polluters to pay for the cleanup of toxic waste sites.

States’ climate proposals come after years of lawsuits by state attorneys general against many of those same companies. They claim the companies knew years ago that fossil fuel use was causing climate change, but misled the public about that danger. While the courtroom fights are far from resolved, some advocates think it’s time for lawmakers to get involved.

“There have been a lot of lawsuits trying to get these companies to pay for some damages, and the industry’s message has been, ‘This is a task for legislatures, not the courts,’” said Justin Flagg, director of environmental policy for New York state Sen. Liz Krueger, a Democrat. “We are taking up that invitation.”

Oil industry groups object to the methodologies used by attribution scientists. Industry leaders say lawmakers are acting out of frustration that the lawsuits have been slow to progress.

“The science isn’t proven,” said Mandi Risko, a spokesperson for FTI Consulting and a contributor to Energy In Depth, a research and public outreach project of the Independent Petroleum Association of America, a trade group. “[The state bills] are throwing spaghetti at a wall. What’s gonna stick?”

Oil companies also assert that climate Superfund bills, if enacted, would force the penalized companies to raise gas prices on consumers in those states.

A legislative push

The push for climate Superfund legislation began with a federal bill in 2021, backed by U.S. Senate Democrats, that failed to pass. Lawmakers in a handful of states introduced their own proposals in the following years. Now, Vermont could soon become the first to enact a law.

Vermont's measure would task the state treasurer with calculating the costs of needed climate adaptation work, as well as the damage inflicted by previous disasters such as last summer's devastating floods.

The program would collect money from companies that emitted more than 1 billion tons of carbon dioxide around the world from 1995 to the present day. Those companies with a certain threshold of business activity in Vermont would be charged according to their percentage of global emissions.

"We can with some degree of certainty say how much worse these storms are [due to climate change]," said Democratic state Sen. Anne Watson, the bill's sponsor. "That really is the foundation for us to bring a dollar value into a piece of legislation like this."

Environmental advocates say the bill is a pioneering attempt to use the latest science for accountability.

"This is one of the first instances of climate attribution science being at the center of legislation," said Ben Ederly Walsh, climate and energy program director with the Vermont Public Interest Research Group, an environmental nonprofit. "That reflects the maturity of this field."

Walsh said the measure, if passed, is expected to bring in hundreds of millions of dollars. The bill was approved by the Senate earlier this month in a 26-3 vote, and a House version has been co-sponsored by a majority of that chamber's members. Republican Gov. Phil Scott has not said whether he would sign it into law, but he has said he would prefer to see larger states go first.

Exxon Mobil deferred an interview request to the trade group American Petroleum Institute. The institute did not grant an interview with Stateline, but pointed to the comments it filed with Vermont lawmakers last month. The group said its members lawfully extracted fossil fuels to meet economic demand and should not be punished for that after the fact. The letter also questioned states' authority to impose payments for emissions that were generated overseas.

Meanwhile, New York lawmakers are currently negotiating a budget that could include a climate Superfund policy. A measure that passed the Senate at the end of last year would seek to collect \$75 billion over 25 years to pay for the damages of climate change.

“It’s not intended to be punitive, it’s intended to pay for our needs,” said Flagg, the New York Senate staffer. “It’s going to be a lot of money, and \$75 billion is only a small portion of that.”

The proposal applied to companies with a presence in New York responsible for more than 1 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide between 2000 and 2018.

In Massachusetts, Democratic state Rep. Steve Owens introduced a similar bill last year. While the measure failed to advance, Owens said lawmakers are becoming familiar with the concept.

“Is this fraud that we can litigate or something that we can legislate?” he asked. “That question was not settled in time for this session. We’re going to keep working to get people used to the idea.”

Lawmakers in California and Maryland also have introduced climate Superfund bills this session.

Challenges ahead

If legislatures in Vermont and elsewhere pass climate Superfund bills, the state officials who carry them out are expected to rely heavily on researcher Richard Heede’s “Carbon Majors” project, which has tallied the historic emissions of 108 fossil fuel producers using public data.

“We know enough to attribute temperature response, sea level rise, build a reasonable case and apportion responsibility among the major fossil fuel producers,” said Heede, whose project is part of the Climate Accountability Institute, a Colorado-based nonprofit research group that has received funding from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. “But that hasn’t been tested in court.”

Heede said that more than 70% of carbon emissions from fossil fuels can be linked to just over 100 companies, but noted that many large emitters, such as Saudi Aramco, the national oil company of Saudi Arabia, are owned by international governments that are unlikely to face accountability from U.S. state governments.

Last year, [a study](#) looking at temperature and water vapor data found that much of the area burned by wildfires in the West over the past several decades was tied to emissions produced by the largest fossil fuel and cement companies. That research by the Union of Concerned Scientists' Merner and others was published in Environmental Research Letters. Similar research, looking at storms and heat waves, can show how much of an event's intensity and economic damage can be pinned on climate change.

Backers of the state bills say they expect strong legal challenges from oil companies if their proposals become law. Pat Parenteau, an emeritus professor of environmental law at Vermont Law School, has supported states' climate lawsuits, but cautioned that climate Superfund bills will likely face similar legal delays if enacted.

"The companies are gonna litigate the hell out of it," he said. "Throw something more at them, but don't for a minute think there's something magical about it."

He urged Vermont to wait for bigger states, such as New York, to pass the first climate Superfund bills and face the ensuing legal onslaught.

Advocates acknowledged the bill will face legal challenges, but said that's not a reason to pause their efforts.

"Vermont is already paying through the nose for the climate crisis," Walsh said. "The sooner we pass a law like this, the sooner we could actually see these companies be held financially accountable."

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NEWS

Sen. Scott Wilk gets tough on illegal dumping, new legislation makes it a misdemeanor



Rene Ray De La Cruz

Victorville Daily Press

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Senator Scott Wilk announced that the Senate Public Safety Committee approved his measure to combat illegal dumping.

Senate Bill 1359 will increase penalties and close a loophole that has enabled the problem for years, especially in rural areas, his offices stated on Tuesday.

“The High Desert has been treated as a dump for too long, but it’s not a dump. It is home to families and vibrant communities, who are routinely disrespected by outsiders destroying their neighborhoods all for a quick buck,” Wilk said.

The senator added that the bill will bring much-needed relief to residents forced to deal with the consequences of this problem, and “bring consequences to those who continue to skirt the law.”

How will SB 1359 benefit the High Desert?

Illegal waste dumping has been pervasive in the High Desert for decades, according to Wilk, who said the problem persists due to a loophole, one which waste haulers and property owners take advantage of for financial gain.

To avoid the permit fees required to dispose of waste properly, haulers work out deals with property owners to dump waste on their land. The landowner profits and the waste hauler pays a lesser fee, Wilk said.

This under-the-table arrangement has led to high volumes of large trucks in residential areas creating loud noise, air pollution, damaged roads, toxic and dangerous substances

contaminating the environment, and unsightly heaps of dangerous debris, according to Wilk.

SB 1359 would require a permit for any private property dumping, with or without the owner's permission. It would also increase mandatory fines for each violation and makes illegal dumping a misdemeanor rather than an infraction.

“By closing this exploitative loophole and imposing stricter penalties, SB 1359 sends a clear message to those who continue to trash the High Desert: enough is enough. You will be held accountable,” Wilk said. “Let's clean up our communities, protect their health and wellbeing, and show people what a beautiful place this area truly is.”

Keep the High Desert clean

Since its founding in 2017 by Scott Brown, the Pinon Hills-based nonprofit High Desert Keepers has picked up over 1.3 million pounds of trash in the High Desert, the group stated.

A team of over 535 volunteers has combated illegal dumping by participating in nearly 40 organized clean-ups across the region.

Earlier this month, organizers took to Facebook to share a list of upcoming High Desert Keepers cleanups and to say it is the “busiest month in our history.”

Volunteers conducted clean-ups in Adelanto, assisting the Inland Equity Community Land Trust. They also worked in Llano.

On April 22, Earth Day, they joined the Yuccas Club to clean up the Mojave River Walk. On May 17 and 18 in Lucerne Valley, the newly formed High Desert Keeper Lucerne Valley Group will conduct a clean-up on Milpas Road and the BNSF railroad tracks in unincorporated Apple Valley.

For more information on High Desert Keepers, visit highdesertkeepers.org.

Sen. Scott Wilk represents the 21st Senate District, which includes the Antelope, Santa Clarita and Victor valleys.

Daily Press reporter Rene Ray De La Cruz may be reached at RDeLaCruz@VVDailyPress.com. Follow him on Twitter @DP_ReneDeLaCruz

NEWS • News

How will Southern California be impacted by the Supreme Court case on homelessness?

Grants Pass v. Johnson could set a precedent on how cities are, or not, allowed to restrict camping in public



By **CLARA HARTER** | charter@scng.com

PUBLISHED: April 27, 2024 at 7:30 a.m. | UPDATED: April 29, 2024 at 9:55 a.m.

The Supreme Court of the United States is considering a case that could rewrite the rules for how municipalities across America address homeless encampments and have dramatic ramifications for California, where almost 30% of the nation's homeless reside.

The case, *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*, centers on whether homeless people have a right to camp in public.

The town of Grants Pass in Oregon is fighting to uphold its ban on camping at any place or time in the city, regardless of shelter availability—a policy its leaders say is necessary to keep streets and parks clear of encampments and preserve public safety.

The plaintiffs are individuals who have been fined or arrested under the city's policy. They are arguing that the camping ban equates to a ban on the status of being homeless and violates their constitutional right to freedom from cruel and unusual punishment.

The justices heard oral arguments earlier this week and are expected to deliver a ruling by late June.

But how exactly will this impact Southern California?

For starters, a ruling in favor of Grants Pass could prompt other cities to adopt a similar policy, said USC law professor Clare Pastore.

“If the court upholds what Grants Pass wants—which is to go ahead and criminalize sleeping in public at all places in your town, regardless of whether you have shelter available—it’s conceivable that some jurisdictions would say, ‘Great, that’s what we’re going to do, we’re going to make it a crime to sleep anywhere,’” she said.

More conservative municipalities in Southern California may be more likely to adopt this approach, potentially pushing homeless people into more liberal cities like Los Angeles where leaders do not believe in enforcing blanket anti-camping laws, she added.

On the opposite end of possible outcomes, a strong ruling against the city of Grants Pass could solidify the right of homeless people to camp in public without restriction.

Some advocates believe that would be a positive result, ending the criminalization of sleeping in public and driving investments in other [strategies to address homelessness](#) such as permanent supportive housing.

“It’s time for municipalities like Grants Pass, and others like it, to embrace evidence-based approaches to reducing homelessness and stop relying on these punitive responses that don’t work and only serve to make the homelessness crisis worse,” said Valerie Comenencia Ortiz, attorney at Relman Colfax, who filed an amicus brief on behalf of 226 homeless services providers to support the plaintiffs in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*.

Others feel that such a ruling would go too far and prevent cities from protecting the safety and cleanliness of its public spaces.

“Encampments are unsanitary and unsafe, and we have built public spaces for certain uses — like to bring your kids to the park to play or to walk along the street to get where you’re trying to go,” said Sen. Catherine Blakespear, D-Encinitas. “We shouldn’t have every public space be a living space.”

What Blakespear and many officials are hoping for is a middle ground ruling that does not criminalize people merely because they are homeless and need to sleep in public, but provides guidelines on the time, place and manner of restrictions that cities can place upon camping in public.

Currently, it is not clear how Southern California's cities are allowed to regulate camping.

The legal precedent is a 2018 Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling, which says that people camping in public cannot be forced to move unless the city has shelter available.

However, the ruling does not define what constitutes available shelter. This has led to a patchwork series of anti-camping rules in different municipalities and [spurred multiple lawsuits](#) challenging those rules.

Gov. Gavin Newsom, San Francisco Mayor London Breed and L.A. City Attorney Hydee Feldstein Soto are among the many leaders who [urged the Supreme Court](#) to take up City of Grants Pass v. Johnson in hopes of getting more clarity.

"A deeply divided Ninth Circuit delivered an opinion that purports to be 'narrow,' but its terms are so sweeping, ambiguous, and ill-defined that the result is intolerable uncertainty for the policies, options, and continuing efforts to resolve homelessness in the City of Los Angeles and elsewhere," wrote Feldstein Soto in an amicus brief in support of hearing the case.

Other Los Angeles officials however, did not want the Supreme Court to take up the Grants Pass case for fear that it would lead to a ruling in favor of harsh anti-camping restrictions.

"The Grants Pass case would further enable cities to push people from community to community, without a commitment to housing or services," said L.A. County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath in a February statement. "Relying on this case is not a solution to homelessness."

Nevertheless, justices selected Grants Pass v. Johnson as one of the 100 to 150 cases they would consider this year and are expected to deliver a ruling by late June.

NEWS > NATIONAL NEWS • News

California is joining with a New Jersey company to buy a generic opioid overdose reversal drug

FILE – California Gov. Gavin Newsom speaks during an event in San Francisco on Nov. 9, 2023. On Monday, April 29, 2024, Newsom announced California is partnering with New Jersey-based Amneal Pharmaceuticals to purchase a generic version of Narcan. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File)

By **ASSOCIATED PRESS** | ap@dfmdev.com

PUBLISHED: April 29, 2024 at 7:13 a.m. | UPDATED: April 29, 2024 at 9:11 a.m.

By ADAM BEAM | Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — California is partnering with a New Jersey-based pharmaceutical company to purchase a generic version of Narcan, the drug that can save someone's life during an opioid overdose, under a deal announced Monday by Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Anneal Pharmaceuticals will sell naloxone to California for \$24 per pack, or about 40% cheaper than the market rate. California will give away the packs for free to first responders, universities and community organizations through the state's Naloxone Distribution Project.

The deal is significant because it means California will be able to buy a lot more naloxone — 3.2 million packs in one year instead of 2 million — for the same total cost.

The deal means naloxone eventually will be available under the CalRx label. Newsom first proposed CalRx back in 2019 as an attempt to force drug companies to lower their prices by offering much cheaper, competing versions of life-saving medication. He signed a law in 2020 giving the authority to the state.

California governments and businesses will be able to purchase naloxone outside of the Naloxone Distribution Project, the Newsom administration said, adding the state is working on a plan to make it available for sale to individuals.

“California is disrupting the drug industry with CalRx — securing life-saving drugs at lower and transparent prices,” Newsom said in a statement provided by his office.

Naloxone has been available in the U.S. without a prescription since March of 2023, when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved Narcan, a nasal spray brand produced by the Maryland-based pharmaceutical company Emergent BioSolutions.

Anneal Pharmaceuticals makes a generic equivalent to Narcan that won FDA approval last week.

The naloxone packs purchased by California initially will be available under the Amneal label. The naloxone will move to the CalRx label once its approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, a process the Newsom administration said could take several months.

Opioid overdose deaths, which are caused by heroin, fentanyl and oxycodone, have increased dramatically in California and across the country. Annual opioid overdose deaths in California more than doubled since 2019, reaching 7,385 deaths at the end of 2022.

California began giving away naloxone kits for free in 2018. State officials say the Naloxone Distribution Project has given out 4.1 million kits, which have reversed a reported 260,000 opioid overdoses. The money has come from taxpayers and portions of a nationwide settlement agreement with some other pharmaceutical companies.

Last year, California lawmakers agreed to spend \$30 million to partner with a drug company to make its own version of naloxone. But they ended up not needing to spend that money on this deal, since Amneal Pharmaceutical was already so far along in the FDA approval process it did not require up-front funding from the state.

Instead, California will use a portion of the revenue it receives from a national opioid settlement to purchase the drugs.

Naloxone is just one drug the Newsom administration is targeting.

Last year, California [signed a 10-year agreement](#) with the nonprofit Civica to produce CalRx branded insulin, which is used to treat diabetes. California has set aside [\\$100 million for that project](#), with \$50 million to develop the drugs and the rest set aside to invest in a manufacturing facility. Newsom said a 10 milliliter vial of state-branded insulin would sell for \$30.

Civica has been meeting with the FDA and “has a clear path forward,” the Newsom administration said.

NEWS • News

VA Loma Linda blamed for serious staffing shortages at outpatient clinics

The health care system says many staffing and scheduling problems uncovered by federal investigators have been corrected



Staff File Photo

The main entrance of the Jerry L. Pettis Memorial VA Medical Center in Loma Linda.
(Staff File Photo)



By **SCOTT SCHWEBKE** | sschwebke@scng.com | Orange County Register

PUBLISHED: April 26, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. | UPDATED: April 26, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.

The VA Loma Linda Healthcare System failed to provide oversight for a company that encountered serious staffing shortages after assuming management of five outpatient clinics in October 2021, forcing a staggering number of patients to be referred to outside physicians for care, according to a new federal report.

The 40-page report, released this week by the VA's Office of Inspector General, said that in 2022 VA Loma Linda made 992 referrals from its clinics in Rancho Cucamonga, Corona, Murrieta, Victorville and Palm Desert — the highest among all VA community-based outpatient facilities.

The clinics are managed by Virginia-based STG International, which began operating the facilities on behalf of VA Loma Linda on Oct. 1, 2021.

About two weeks later, according to the OIG report, STGi operational problems surfaced when VA Loma Linda officials received a media inquiry about a patient who encountered “access issues” at the Palm Desert clinic.

VA Loma Linda officials expected the clinics would be fully operational but found instead that services were limited to urgent or emergency care, the report states.

Officials with STGi did not respond to repeated phone calls and emails seeking comment on the OIG report.

Six weeks after STGi assumed management, the five clinics had 63% of the staff required to operate the facilities. By February 2022, staffing levels at the clinics had increased to 73%, the OIG said.

By the end of 2021, each clinic provider was responsible for more than 1,400 patients, exceeding the maximum level established by the VA, the report states.

As a result of staffing shortages and full caseloads for providers, VA Loma Linda officials in May 2022 paused enrollment for new patients at the five STGi-operated clinics and began referring patients to outside physicians in the community. However, the OIG determined that VA Loma Linda did not meet the VA's expectations for scheduling timely patient referral appointments.

After the pause in enrollment at the clinics, the average time frame for making appointments ranged from 28 to more than 53 days, far exceeding the VA's target of seven days, said the OIG.

"The OIG is concerned that other factors, such as consult workflow or staff productivity, may have affected the ability of the system's community care staff to process consults timely," the report said, adding that no patients were identified as having poor outcomes.

Before handing over management responsibilities to STGi, VA Loma Linda lacked an organizational structure to provide oversight of outpatient clinics, communicate with stakeholders and review performance metrics, the OIG said

"The OIG determined that this lack of structure, coupled with the need to take steps to improve clinic management and a turnover of key leadership positions, created a vulnerability in the overall management and oversight of primary care services provided at the clinics," the report states.

VA Loma Linda said it has taken steps to address and correct issues uncovered by the OIG.

"We appreciate the Inspector General's review and have swiftly implemented multiple process changes to Increased Utilization of primary care in the community by the VA Loma Linda Healthcare System ... ensuring that we are fully ready to provide world-class care to veterans," VA Loma Linda said in a statement. "In addition, we initiated improvements in access and expanded sites of care with an increase in clinical staffing."

VA Loma clinics have reduced the use of referrals to outside, community providers by 75%

Also, as of this month, primary care access has improved, with wait times for new patients averaging about 22 days, a substantial decrease from previous years, VA Loma Linda said.

The OIG's findings are the latest in a string of management issues at VA Loma Linda.

For more than a year, employees have complained of retaliation for reporting missteps including the promotion of a supervisor who routinely harassed workers, the mismanagement of more than \$1 million in patient transportation funds, and the illegal use of involuntary psychiatric holds.

Congress is investigating complaints from VA Loma Linda employees.

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Californian mayor sues own city for race and age discrimination

Deborah Robertson says Rialto city did not provide her security door to protect against active shooters despite giving 'white' colleague one



A California Democrat mayor is suing her own city for more than \$7 million alleging race and age discrimination – but still wants to be reelected.

Deborah Robertson, who is black, claims the city of Rialto didn't provide her with a special security door in case of an active shooter, despite giving one to a “white” colleague.

The 73-year-old also says the authorities gave her the wrong kind of pension and failed to arrange ergonomic furniture following a 2019 car crash, and that the city's police department looked her up on their database without a good crime-fighting reason.

If successful, her three claims, filed last year, would amount to \$7,482,000 – or 3.3 per cent of the city's annual budget – \$6 million of which would be in relation to the alleged police snooping.

Ms Robertson, a Democrat, has been mayor of the city, in San Bernardino county, which is 56 miles east of Los Angeles and has a population of 100,000, since 2012.

‘Lost sight of direction of city’

Rival councilman Rafael Trujillo, who is running against her in November's election, claimed the cases have become a distraction.

“It's shocking, because if you're not the fiduciarily responsible representative, then who is there for the taxpayer?” he told the Daily Mail.

“She's so embroiled in all these lawsuits, she's lost sight of the direction of the city.”

Mr Trujillo was the colleague provided with a security door before Ms Robertson but, as fellow Republican councilman Ed Scott pointed out, is Latino and not white, as Ms Robertson suggested.

Mr Scott said the city did provide Ms Robertson with ergonomic furniture and a security door but delays were caused by the pandemic and an office move.

“I don’t think it was a fair analogy on her part that she was being singled out,” he said.

Mr Scott was himself targeted by city police, winning \$500,000 after his details were looked up for no good reason on a database.

But he said he was targeted because of his anti-union stance and Ms Robertson’s claim did not make sense because she is pro-union.

Rialto will go to the polls on Nov 8, with Ms Robertson, who before being mayor served as a council member from 2000, running for a fourth consecutive term.

Ms Robertson has been approached for comment.

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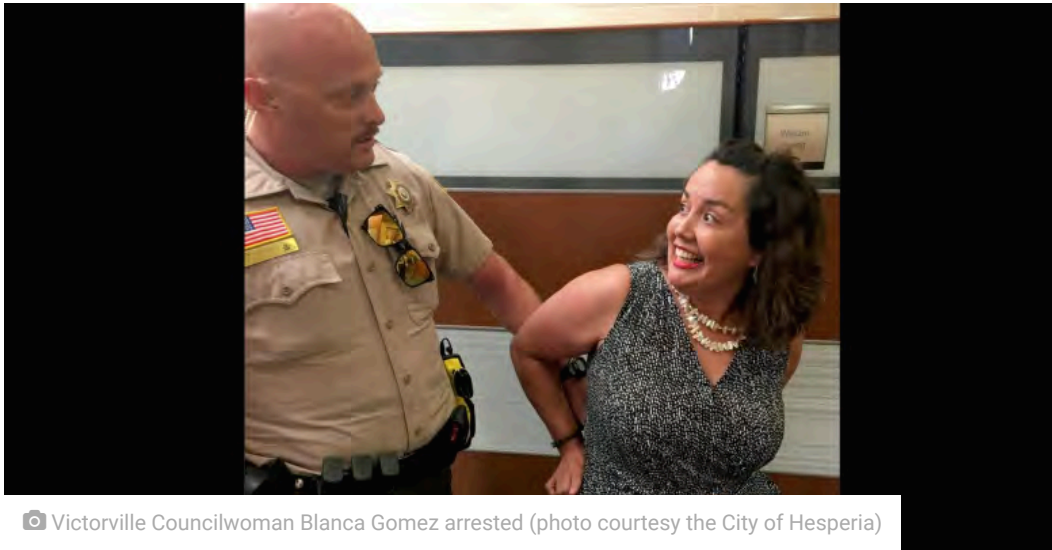
California, Age discrimination, Racism, Democrats



Nonprofit prepares to fight charges against Victorville City Councilwoman Blanca Gomez



Victor Valley News Group • April 28, 2024 | 2:23 pm Last Updated: April 28, 2024 | 2:23 pm



📷 Victorville Councilwoman Blanca Gomez arrested (photo courtesy the City of Hesperia)

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VICTORVILLE, Calif. (VVNG.com) – Ahead of a hearing scheduled for May 2, attorneys for a non-profit organization representing Victorville City Councilwoman Blanca Gomez – who is facing two misdemeanor charges related to her conduct during a city meeting last year – say the official is being targeted while pressing city issues remain ignored.

On Feb. 21, 2023, sheriff's deputies removed Gomez from council chambers at Victorville City Hall after she began speaking at the podium as an audience member during the public comment portion of the meeting. Gomez was later arrested on suspicion of California Penal Code 403 disturbing a public meeting and PC 602.1(B) interfering with a lawful business.

Gomez's arrest in 2023 followed several arrests for multiple charges, including resisting arrest and trespassing at Hesperia City Hall in 2018, and several misdemeanors from two separate incidents in 2021.



Vonya Quarles Esq., an attorney and executive director of Starting Over, Inc., a nonprofit that helps individuals who have been in the criminal justice system, disagreed with the charges against Gomez and said the councilwoman has only exhibited a pattern of boldly challenging the status quo.

(Superior Court of California, County of San Bernardino Case Number: MVI23001156)

“The fact is, Ms. Gomez has been elected twice by her constituents who want her to represent them. She fervently advocates for her constituents and raises awareness of issues happening in Victorville that she believes have not received the attention they deserve. I believe she has always been an outspoken woman who pushes the boundaries, and has simply disagreed with leadership in Victorville, which she is within her rights to do,” said Quarles.



“The council may have been concerned about maintaining decorum during the meeting but to pursue charges against her doesn’t make sense. When only 8 percent of property crimes are ever charged, it begs the question, why Blanca Gomez, and why is this case even moving through the courts? This is a waste of the city’s time and resources which would be better suited for addressing the concerns of the citizens of Victorville,” she added.

To aid Gomez’s pending defense, Starting Over, Inc. tapped [Najar Investigations](#), one of the leading [private investigation](#) firms in Southern California, to help compile discovery and pertinent information on the case.

“Starting Over is a strong advocate for local communities, including vulnerable populations. We are grateful the non-profit organization

wants to utilize our service, and understands the value our experienced team of professionals can provide in Ms. Gomez's case," said Mohammed Najar, CEO of Najar Investigations.

Nonprofit backs Victorville Councilmember Blanca Gomez in meeting disturbance case



Brian Day

Victorville Daily Press

Published 3:34 p.m. PT April 26, 2024

A nonprofit organization has announced it is backing Victorville City Councilmember Blanca Gomez ahead of a planned hearing next week related to her arrest at a council meeting last year.

San Bernardino County Superior Court records show that lawyers from Riverside-based Starting Over, Inc., which advocates social justice and combats poverty and incarceration, are representing Gomez in the case. She faces a misdemeanor criminal charge of disturbing a public meeting.

A hearing in the ongoing case, which stems from Gomez's arrest during a Feb. 21, 2023, council meeting, is scheduled for Thursday, according to Starting Over representatives.

Attorney Vonya Quarles said the charge was unfounded.

"The fact is, Ms. Gomez has been elected twice by her constituents who want her to represent them. She fervently advocates for her constituents and raises awareness of issues happening in Victorville that she believes have not received the attention they deserve," she said in a written statement.

"I believe (Gomez) has always been an outspoken woman who pushes the boundaries and has simply disagreed with leadership in Victorville, which she is within her rights to do," Quarles.

More: Victorville Councilwoman Blanca Gomez arrested during council meeting

The attorney said Gomez was being prosecuted unfairly.

"The council may have been concerned about maintaining decorum during the meeting but to pursue charges against her doesn't make sense. When only 8% of property crimes are ever charged, it begs the question, why Blanca Gomez, and why is this case even moving through

DAILY PRESS

the courts?" Quarles said. "This is a waste of the city's time and resources which would be better suited for addressing the concerns of the citizens of Victorville."

The February arrest took place when Gomez addressed the council chamber as a private citizen but was admonished after bringing up discussions that occurred during closed sessions of the city council.

More: First Amendment Coalition defends Victorville Councilwoman Blanca Gomez

The argument escalated until Gomez was ultimately removed from the meeting, handcuffed, and arrested.

Start Over representatives pointed out that the incident followed three prior arrests, including one for trespassing and resisting arrest at Hesperia City Hall in 2018 and two other incidents in 2021.

Gomez has since pleaded not guilty to the charge of disturbing a public meeting, court records show.

NEWS • News

Federal review slams Redlands Unified's failures to address sexual abuse complaints by students

The district, which has a long history of improper handling of misconduct complaints, entered into a resolution agreement to ensure reforms are followed.



Former Redlands Unified School District Superintendent Mauricio Arellano addresses attendees at a workshop at Cope Middle School to teach parents and community members how to prevent child sexual abuse by recognizing grooming behaviors employed by sexual predators, April 6, 2022. (Photo by Michael Lopez, Contributing Photographer)



By **JOE NELSON** | jnelson@scng.com | San Bernardino Sun and
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Register

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The Redlands Unified School District has entered into an agreement with the federal government to address concerns that the district failed to respond properly to reports of sexual misconduct against students, including by employees, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights announced Thursday, April 25.

Among a litany of violations detailed by the Office for Civil Rights are claims that Redlands Unified failed to create or maintain sufficient records of its responses to sexual harassment complaints to demonstrate compliance with [Title IX](#), a federal law enacted in 1972 that protects individuals from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance.

In 74% of the 35 incidents reviewed involving complaints of sexual assault or harassment against students from 2017 to 2020, Redlands Unified did not provide any evidence that the district took action required under Title IX to "address the effects of harassing conduct on targeted students where necessary and to prevent recurrence of the harassment," the OCR said in a statement accompanying a [20-page letter](#) to the district.

“In addition, OCR found that the district failed to investigate or redress employee-to-student and student-to-student sexual assault allegations after they were reported to law enforcement or other state agencies, leaving affected students vulnerable to the discrimination that Title IX prohibits but that law enforcement does not address,” the OCR said. “Likewise, the district did not complete or take required investigative steps in other reported employee-to-student and student-to-student cases.”

Redlands Unified has entered into a [resolution agreement](#) with the Office for Civil Rights to remedy its deficiencies. Although the district did not admit to any Title IX violations, it has agreed to, among other things, ensure compliance through its Title IX coordinator and revise, as necessary, its Title IX policies and procedures.

In a statement Thursday, Redlands Unified spokesperson Christine Stephens commended the Office for Civil Rights for its “thorough review and collaborative efforts in finalizing this agreement.”

“The District is fully committed to complying with the terms of the resolution agreement,” Stephens said. “We take the findings seriously and are dedicated to making necessary improvements to ensure a safe and equitable learning environment for all students continues to be our number one priority.

“We are actively working with the Office for Civil Rights to implement the agreed-upon measures, as well as continuing processes the District implemented prior to this agreement, and are optimistic about the positive changes these efforts will bring to our community.”

A [Southern California News Group investigation](#) of Redlands Unified that began in 2018 and spanned more than two years revealed that the school district, for decades, frequently failed to report to authorities those teachers and other employees accused of grooming and sexually abusing students.

SCNG’s investigation revealed that, in some cases, Redlands Unified officials thwarted police investigations of sexual abuse cases.

“Redlands Unified School District has a sordid history of enabling and ignoring sexual assaults on students by at least 25 predators during the past 20 years, and this is the latest example,” said Irvine attorney Morgan Stewart, whose firm has represented 37 former Redlands Unified students in lawsuits dating back to 2011 and was instrumental in uncovering the problems at the school district that prompted widespread publicity and federal and state probes.

In an email Thursday, Stewart said the sexual abuse involving his clients occurred at the elementary, middle and high school levels.

“This review echoes the claims that we have made in many of our lawsuits,” Stewart said. “It is my hope that this damning report will spur action by state and federal law enforcement against the administrators, teachers and staff who allowed this rampant abuse to continue unchecked for decades.”

Earlier this month, Stewart’s firm announced it had settled another sexual abuse lawsuit against the district, this one against former Clement Middle School teacher Timothy Rochester, who allegedly “sexually harassed, assaulted, and abused” the female victim in 2003, when she was in the seventh grade, Stewart said.

Stewart said he believes, based on the facts, that Rochester was one of the cases reviewed by the Office for Civil Rights.

Since 2016, Stewart’s firm has collected more than \$45.5 million from Redlands Unified to settle lawsuits by former students claiming they were sexually abused.

The Office for Civil Rights said that as a result of the district's limited and incomplete recordkeeping practices, it was able to identify only seven incidents of student-to-student sexual misconduct that could constitute sexual assault over the three-year review period.

Based on the OCR's review of documents and interviews with witnesses, it determined Redlands Unified:

- Failed to address the effects of known sexual harassment on the targeted student or to take action to prevent further harassment, including retaliatory harassment.
- Did not promptly and effectively investigate all reports of possible sexual harassment of which it had notice.
- Failed to provide adequate notice of investigation outcomes to targeted students and their parents who made complaints of sexual harassment.
- Did not offer or implement interim measures to support targeted students who reported sexual harassment..
- Systemically failed to coordinate its response to sexual harassment, including sexual assault, through its designated Title IX coordinator.
- Failed to notify the school community of the Title IX coordinator and how to file complaints with the Title IX coordinator by posting inconsistent information about the person the district designated to coordinate Title IX.
- Failed to adopt, publish and apply equitable grievance procedures to address student-to-student sexual harassment.
- Did not provide adequate notice of investigation outcomes to targeted students or their parents who complained of sexual harassment by staff and fellow pupils.

Furthermore, the OCR determined Redlands Unified had no system in place to monitor whether schools' responses complied with Title IX requirements or to identify emergent patterns or systemic problems by school or districtwide.

According to the letter, Redlands Unified's responses to sexual harassment incidents were inadequate. The OCR noted that in 26 of 35 cases, it did not provide any evidence to indicate that it took action to address the effects of the harassing conduct.

"In fact, during the review period, documentation maintained by the district showed that school administrators failed to identify many of the 35 incidents as sexual harassment," the OCR said in the report.

Rocked by years of scandal and paying out tens of millions of dollars in legal settlements over sexual misconduct by teachers and staff, the district adopted [sweeping reforms](#) in 2018 and implemented its ACT (Actions Create Trust) Now initiative that included 10 measures to enhance student safety and raise awareness with employees.

In 2021, the district touted those [reforms](#) as paying off.

However, less than three months later, a San Bernardino County grand jury issued a [report](#) saying that, despite the reforms, school and district personnel were still vague on state-mandated reporter laws and did not have a clear understanding of “reasonable suspicion” – information rising to the level that it warrants reporting suspected abuse to law enforcement or the Department of Children and Family Services.

Redlands Unified school board President Alex Vara said in a statement Thursday that during his tenure on the board the district has been committed to the safety of all students.

“We take the (OCR) findings seriously and are dedicated to continuing to provide safe learning environments for all our students,” Vara said.

He said the district implemented safety measures prior to the date of its agreement with the OCR, which included the creation of a Title IX director, Mark Bline, who ensures all complaints are properly reported and that all staff attend monthly micro-trainings related to sexual harassment, mandated reporting and the district’s boundaries policy.

“We will fully implement the necessary improvements described in the agreement to further enhance and ensure safe and equitable learning environments for all students as this is our number one priority,” he said.