

# Los Angeles Times

## L.A. County to Track Violence against Homeless People

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During the last year, the homeless in Los Angeles County have been set on fire, stabbed, shot and beaten with baseball bats in attacks that advocates say have become more violent.

As the economy worsens and the number of homeless in the county increases -- rates are up nearly 400% at some shelters this winter -- this morning county supervisors unanimously recommended that sheriff's deputies, prosecutors and the county Human Relations Commission track and report attacks on the homeless as hate crimes.



Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who sponsored the proposal with Supervisor Don Knabe, said he was concerned about "an emerging pattern of homeless individuals being an easy target of violence in our community."

Richard Pearson, 40, a homeless chef with 94 stitches in his jaw after he was attacked by an acquaintance with a straight razor near Skid Row on March 15, said he welcomed the measure.

Pearson said the man who attacked him had a grudge and was later arrested but that he and other homeless people remain targets, especially those he knows who are disabled or mentally ill. Last week, someone set off fireworks among those sleeping on Skid Row, and there have been incidents of smoke bombs and paint-ball and BB gun attacks in the area, police said.

"There's a lot of people [who] have hate for the homeless, especially those who panhandle downtown," Pearson said as he sat at the downtown Union Rescue Mission this morning.

Local and national homeless advocates support the proposal. Although Los Angeles Police say they have not seen more attackers targeting the homeless on Skid Row in recent months or years, advocates cite several brutal attacks countywide during the last year: the March 9 stabbing of a 66-year-old homeless man in Lincoln Heights, the Oct. 9 burning death of John Robert McGraham in Mid-Wilshire and the fatal Nov. 3 shooting of five homeless men and women in Long Beach.

"The intensity has gotten much worse," said Union Rescue Mission Chief Executive Officer Andy Bales, calling the hate crime proposal, "long overdue."