

**HISTORIC HIGHLAND PARK NEIGHBORHOOD
COUNCIL**

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Certified as NC #33 May 28, 2002

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**CITY OF LOS
ANGELES**

CALIFORNIA



**DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD
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Historic Highland Park Neighborhood Council

RE: Council File: 20-0190

Title: Armed While On Duty / Park Rangers / Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC)
Section 63.41 / Amendment

Position: Opposed

On February 11th, 2020, at the Health, Education, Neighborhood, Parks, Arts and River committee, Councilmember Buscaino introduced a motion to allow LA park rangers to carry guns while on duty. It is no surprise that the uptick of homeless encampments on city parks has led the city to take a closer look at the perceived threat that Park Rangers face. We strongly support the safety of our Park Rangers. However, we strongly oppose the motion to permit Park Rangers to be armed while on duty or any expansion of their investigatory powers "into criminal activity and beyond" not currently granted to them.

We further oppose any allocation of additional funds to create and maintain the administrative, reporting, training and equipment costs needed to effectuate the stated outcomes of this proposed motion.

It is our firm belief that such a proposal would undermine public safety by putting more of our most vulnerable residents at greater and unnecessary risk of physical and psychological harm. We believe this proposal will result in more Angelenos, especially those from marginalized groups, at the threat of being shot by law enforcement. Last year alone, nationally, police killed 1004 people with Black Americans being 2.5 times more likely to be victims than White Americans. With Black Americans encompassing 42% of the city's un-housed, this is a clearly misguided approach. We are particularly disturbed that this motion is coming on the heels of a damning increase in homelessness throughout the city.¹ As we have seen in our own neighborhood, unhoused people are left with few options other than local parks for safe spaces to sleep that have lighting and accessible public toilets. We have observed that as housed residents grow increasingly agitated at the sight of so many visibly desperate people, park rangers have taken an increasingly aggressive posture towards those with no choice but to seek shelter in public places. Rather than diminish conflict some rangers have instead responded with force, exacerbating already fraught situations.² As this video clip from an incident that occurred on February 26, 2020 shows, had this ranger drawn a weapon instead of a baton in this crowded and chaotic interaction, fatal consequences might have quickly come to pass.

We also believe this contradicts many years of progress the city has made. City officials have consistently moved to more progressive community tactics, which include prioritizing non-lethal use of force and community policing where law enforcement work with communities to find solutions. The recent controversy at Echo Park Lake, where unhoused neighbors deploying non-violent, Gandhian tactics to preserve their homes, were met with aggression by the Park Rangers and the LAPD, is an example of a breakdown of this progress. Park Rangers are already equipped with batons, pepper spray, handcuffs and work closely with LAPD. Arming them further only takes the city in the wrong direction. Simply put, our city does not need another militarized force.

Rather than spending money on guns to support this poorly-conceived, fear-driven motion, we believe that the city's vast resources and energy should be used for securing safe housing and the supportive services necessary to maintain stable lodging. The City and all of its Departments and residents, must change the approach to unhoused communities in our public spaces, and provide health-based solutions and resources that improve living conditions for all of us.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/12/875888864/homelessness-in-los-angeles-county-rises-sharply>

² <https://mobile.twitter.com/ABC7/status/1232907316585910272>