Greenlots Initiative, Homeless Encampment Sweeps

US Top 40 U.S. Cities with Major Homelessness & Encampment Pressure (2026)

🧭 Tier 1 — Reactive / Emergency Sweeps (Lowest structure, highest disruption)

What it is:

- One-time or short-notice removals
- Triggered by complaints, fires, crime concerns, sanitation issues, or political pressure
- Often no guaranteed shelter placement

Key features:

- 24–72 hour notices (or sometimes less)
- Police + sanitation crews lead removal
- Belongings often stored or discarded
- People typically relocate nearby

Where you see it:

- Many mid-sized cities
- Some neighborhoods in larger cities during “cleanups”

Core reality:

> Displacement happens faster than housing placement

🧭 Tier 2 — Routine Encampment Management (“Rotate and Relocate” Model)

What it is:

- Ongoing cycles of clearing and reappearing encampments
- Cities manage encampments like “mobile zones” rather than eliminating them

Key features:

- Scheduled sweeps (weekly/monthly rotations)
- Outreach teams sometimes present, but not always before enforcement
- Encampments often return within days or weeks nearby
- Focus is “public space access” rather than permanent resolution

Common cities:

- Seattle
- Portland
- Denver
- Chicago (in transit areas)

Core reality:

> Encampments move more than they disappear

🧭 Tier 3 — Coordinated “Encampment Resolution” Systems (Hybrid enforcement + services)

What it is:

- Structured programs combining outreach + enforcement + temporary shelter offers
- More formal policies and interagency coordination

Key features:

- Advance notice + engagement teams
- Offers of shelter/motel beds (when available)
- Site-by-site closures (“resolution” instead of “sweep”)
- Legal frameworks defining “high sensitivity zones” (parks, schools, waterways)

Common cities:

- San Francisco
- Oakland
- San Jose
- Phoenix
- Houston (more housing-forward variant)

Core reality:

> More planning exists, but outcomes still depend heavily on shelter availability

🧭 Tier 4 — State-Coordinated / High-Intensity Corridor Sweeps (Most centralized + aggressive)

What it is:

- Large-scale operations led or heavily directed by state governments
- Focus on highways, bridges, waterways, rail corridors, and public land

Key features:

- Multi-agency coordination (state + city + transit + police)
- Rapid clearance of large encampments
- Often tied to infrastructure or safety enforcement
- Frequent relocation of large populations at once

Where you see it:

- California freeway corridor sweeps (Caltrans-led operations)
- Large LA encampment operations
- Phoenix “Zone” clearance cycles
- Bay Area highway/RV corridor enforcement

Core reality:

Highest scale displacement events in the country

🧭 A simple way to understand all 4 tiers

Tier	Style	Main Goal	Outcome Pattern
1	Emergency cleanups	Immediate removal	Displacement
2	Rotational management	Maintain visibility control	“Move it along” cycle
3	Coordinated resolution	Combine services + enforcement	Partial stabilization
4	State corridor sweeps	Large-scale clearance	Mass relocation events

⚠️ Important underlying pattern

Across all tiers, research consistently shows:

- Sweeps **reduce visibility locally**
- But often **do not reduce homelessness overall**
- They frequently result in **relocation rather than resolution**

So the “tier” is mostly about:

> **how structured the displacement is**, not whether homelessness is solved

🔴 Tier 1 — Highest national concentration (largest + most visible encampments)

1. New York City, NY

Eric Adams — Gov: Kathy Hochul — election 2026

2. Los Angeles, CA

Karen Bass — Gov: Gavin Newsom — election 2026

3. Seattle, WA

Bruce Harrell — Gov: Bob Ferguson — election 2028

4. San Francisco, CA

Daniel Lurie — Gov: Gavin Newsom — election 2026

5. Portland, OR

Keith Wilson — Gov: Tina Kotek — election 2026

6. Chicago, IL

Brandon Johnson — Gov: J.B. Pritzker — election 2026

7. San Diego, CA

Todd Gloria — Gov: Gavin Newsom — election 2026

8. Denver, CO

Mike Johnston — Gov: Jared Polis — election 2026

9. Phoenix, AZ

Kate Gallego — Gov: Katie Hobbs — election 2026

10. Oakland, CA

Barbara Lee — Gov: Gavin Newsom — election 2026

🟠 Tier 2 — Large metro homelessness + growing encampment zones

11. San Jose, CA

Matt Mahan — Gov: Gavin Newsom — election 2026

12. Sacramento, CA

Kevin McCarty — Gov: Gavin Newsom — election 2026

13. Las Vegas, NV

Shelley Berkley — Gov: Joe Lombardo — election 2026

14. Washington, D.C.

Muriel Bowser — Federal system — mayor election 2026

15. Miami, FL

Francis Suarez — Gov: Ron DeSantis — election 2026

16. Boston, MA

Michelle Wu — Gov: Maura Healey — election 2026

17. Philadelphia, PA

Cherelle Parker — Gov: Josh Shapiro — election 2026

18. Houston, TX

John Whitmire — Gov: Greg Abbott — election 2026

19. San Antonio, TX

Ron Nirenberg — Gov: Greg Abbott — election 2026

20. Minneapolis, MN

Jacob Frey — Gov: Tim Walz — election 2026

🟡 Tier 3 — High regional homelessness / visible corridors or RV encampments

21. Tucson, AZ

Regina Romero — Gov: Katie Hobbs — election 2026

22. Atlanta, GA

Andre Dickens — Gov: Brian Kemp — election 2026

23. Baltimore, MD

Brandon Scott — Gov: Wes Moore — election 2026

24. Detroit, MI

Mike Duggan — Gov: Gretchen Whitmer — election 2026

25. St. Louis, MO

Tishaura Jones — Gov: Mike Kehoe — election 2028

26. Kansas City, MO

Quinton Lucas — Gov: Mike Kehoe — election 2028

27. Dallas, TX

Eric Johnson — Gov: Greg Abbott — election 2026

28. Austin, TX

Kirk Watson — Gov: Greg Abbott — election 2026

29. Fort Worth, TX

Mattie Parker — Gov: Greg Abbott — election 2026

30. Orlando, FL

Buddy Dyer — Gov: Ron DeSantis — election 2026

🟡 Tier 4 — Mid-large cities with growing or shifting encampment patterns

31. Salt Lake City, UT

Erin Mendenhall — Gov: Spencer Cox — election 2028

32. Albuquerque, NM

Tim Keller — Gov: Michelle Lujan Grisham — election 2026

33. Fresno, CA

Jerry Dyer — Gov: Gavin Newsom — election 2026

34. Long Beach, CA

Rex Richardson — Gov: Gavin Newsom — election 2026

35. Bakersfield, CA

Karen Goh — Gov: Gavin Newsom — election 2026

36. Stockton, CA

Cristina Garcia (interim leadership varies) — Gov: Gavin Newsom — election 2026

37. Cleveland, OH

Justin Bibb — Gov: Mike DeWine — election 2026

38. Columbus, OH

Andrew Ginther — Gov: Mike DeWine — election 2026

39. Cincinnati, OH

Aftab Pureval — Gov: Mike DeWine — election 2026

40. Richmond, VA

Levar Stoney (recent transition cycles) — Gov: Glenn Youngkin — election 2025/2026 cycle

🧭 Across all 40 cities, patterns are very consistent:

🔥 West Coast dominance of visible encampments

- CA + OR + WA = most visible tent/RV clusters

🧱 Sunbelt growth pressure

- Phoenix, Tucson, Vegas, Dallas, Austin rising fast due to housing costs

🧊 Cold-weather shelter systems (less tents, more institutional homelessness)

- NYC, Chicago, Boston, Minneapolis

🚧 “Corridor homelessness” cities

- Baltimore, St. Louis, Atlanta, Philadelphia