

CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles homeless chief to resign after the county guts her agency



Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority chief executive Va Lecia Adams Kellum announced Friday that she will resign from her post. (Genaro Molina/Los Angeles Times)

By Doug Smith and David Zahniser

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Va Lecia Adams Kellum, the head of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, announced her resignation Friday, just days after the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted to [strip her agency](#) of more than \$300 million and hundreds of workers.

In a letter delivered to the agency's board of commissioners Friday afternoon, Adams Kellum said that due to the board's decision to shift key responsibilities from LAHSA to the county, "now is the right time for me to resign as CEO."

Adams Kellum, whose agency had been under [intense scrutiny](#) in recent months, committed to stay for a transition period of 120 days or longer if needed.

Wendy Greuel, who chairs the 10-member commission that oversees LAHSA, described Adams Kellum's departure as a loss for the agency. In an interview, she said Adams Kellum, working with the city and county, brought down unsheltered homelessness two years in a row.

"We brought her in to be a change agent," she said. "And she's been a change agent."

Adams Kellum took the helm of the agency in March 2023, at a time when it was in the midst of a historic growth spurt, with new funds flowing into homelessness programs, but also faced heightened criticism for disjointed services, poor accounting and, ultimately, the inability to reduce the number of people on the streets.

In the last five months, two outside audits found that the agency had lax accounting procedures and poor financial oversight, potentially leading to the loss of millions of dollars.

Those reports were "devastating" for LAHSA and fueled calls for a separate county agency, said Elizabeth Mitchell, attorney for the L.A. Alliance for Human Rights, which has sued the city and county over the delivery of homeless services.

"Even though I think she took some steps in the right direction, they weren't nearly enough," she said. "There was a lack of accountability, a lack of transparency and just a culture at that agency that is broken."

Supervisor Lindsey Horvath, who spearheaded the effort to pull county funding out of LAHSA, said local leaders need to “replace this broken system.”

“This is a pivotal moment — one that calls for long-overdue change,” she said. “LAHSA has seen multiple leadership transitions during challenging times. While change is uncomfortable for some, it’s what this moment requires.”

Mayor Karen Bass, in her own statement, praised Adams Kellum for her “bold vision” — and for being willing to take on an array of difficult issues.

“Despite knowing that LAHSA was broken, she answered the call of service to serve as CEO because she knows that above all else, we must work to save lives,” she said.

“She helped us move the needle to save lives, restore neighborhoods and show that homelessness can be solved,” Bass said. “I thank her for her work and wish her the best in all that she will do moving forward.”

The former head of the St. Joseph Center in Venice, which she helped transform into a major provider of homeless services, Adams Kellum brought experience to a job that historically had been in the hands of career bureaucrats.

Adams Kellum vowed to tackle the agency’s well-documented deficiencies. She brought a [reputation as a problem solver](#) for her management of the cleanup of a [massive homeless encampment](#) that grew on the Venice beach and boardwalk during the pandemic. She also was credited with designing Bass’ Inside Safe encampment removal program based on that experience.

In an interview with The Times on Friday, Adams Kellum said she hasn’t taken a new position but that she will stay in homeless services.

“That’s my mission in life,” she said. “I remain so steadfast in my commitment to addressing homelessness and helping prevent it and make sure it’s rare, brief and non-reoccurring.”

Adams Kellum said she had hoped to the last minute that her agency could “continue to move in sync with the city and county with a collaborative and real aligned focus on driving down homelessness and reducing unsheltered homelessness.”

“I’ve been hoping to the end that we could keep doing it but doing better and different,” she said.

It wasn’t to be.

On Tuesday, the Board of Supervisors voted 4-0 to take its funding out of LAHSA and put it into a new county homelessness agency. The county provides \$348 million — or about 40% of LAHSA’s yearly budget — and pays for an estimated 470 workers.

Under the board’s timetable, most of that money, and potentially all of those workers, would be moved into the new county agency by July 1, 2026.

In recent weeks, Adams Kellum had touted her agency’s work, including a decrease in street homelessness of more than 5% in the county and more than 10% in the city last year.

Before Tuesday’s vote, county supervisors gave her little opportunity to defend her agency. Rather than extending her the courtesy of speaking at length as a visiting official, which Adams Kellum had done frequently before, board chair Kathryn Barger granted her only 30 seconds more than a member of the public.

After she had spoken for 90 seconds, her mic was cut off. “We have kept our promises,” she said after the county had stopped broadcasting her words on their audio system.

Adams Kellum and her agency had been under fire for months. In response to critical audits, she has repeatedly acknowledged its flaws, and characterized her mission as one of reforming problems that she inherited from prior administrations.

In her resignation letter, she outlined half a dozen accomplishments, including a master leasing program that has quickly secured 772 units of supportive housing, an advance payment model to get providers upfront funding and a shelter reservation system set to launch in July.

“It’s been known as a problem in the system for years of not knowing where the openings are and how that impacts referrals,” she said in the interview.

Councilmember Nithya Raman, who heads the council’s homelessness committee, praised Adams Kellum’s work, saying that, under her leadership, the city saw its “first signs of real progress” on homelessness.

“Working with LAHSA, the City was finally making real headway against our most intractable crisis,” Raman said in a statement. “I deeply hope that this momentum won’t be lost, because it would be the most vulnerable people — those on our streets — who would suffer.”

In November, the county’s auditor-controller issued a report concluding that [lax accounting procedures](#) and poorly written contracts had prevented LAHSA from recouping millions of dollars it had provided to its contractors as an advance in the 2017-18 fiscal year. (LAHSA officials responded by saying full repayment was not due until 2027.)

Another audit, demanded by a federal judge overseeing a case involving homelessness services, found that LAHSA [lacks sufficient financial oversight](#) to ensure that its contractors deliver the services they are paid to provide. That has left the agency vulnerable to waste and fraud, the audit said.

U.S. District Judge David O. Carter, who commissioned the audit, criticized Adams Kellum for failing to show up for a hearing where the findings were discussed. Told that she was in Boston and would not attend, Carter said that was “not acceptable.”

Adams Kellum sent a letter to the court outlining reforms by her agency to improve financial and contract oversight.

Carter, at his hearing, said LAHSA had offered “meaningless” promises.

“And frankly, I could care less,” he said. “If they were going to do it, they should have done it, or they should have given you a road map now of ... how they’re going to do it.”

Adams Kellum also had drawn criticism for [signing a \\$2.1-million contract](#) between her agency and Upward Bound House, a nonprofit group that employs her husband.

Barger said Adams Kellum’s handling of the issue was “sloppy,” while others called it a clear conflict of interest.

Adams Kellum said the contract, which she signed in May 2024, was sent to her for her electronic signature in error. LAHSA officials said the agency’s 10-member commission had already taken up that contract nine months earlier. When the item came up at that meeting, Adams Kellum stepped out of the room, according to the meeting minutes.

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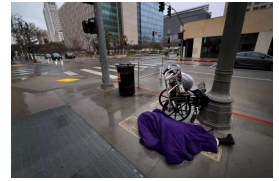
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