

Poverty Behind the Orange Curtain

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One in five Californians live in poverty. The average poverty rate in California stands at close to 20 percent with more than 7 million people that still struggle to get by in the state. Although California has a vigorous economy and a number of safety net programs to aid needy residents, it's often not enough to forestall economic hardship for one out of every five residents.

Despite boasting one of the largest economies in the world, California has consistently surpassed national rankings of poverty. While the state only accounts for about 12 percent of the national population, for example, Californians comprise one-third of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families beneficiaries. One of the most significant factors driving California's shamefully high poverty rates is the high cost of housing and food insecurity.

That brings me to Orange County, CA., affectionately known as the Orange Curtain (*a metaphoric reference to the separation of the poverty of Los Angeles and the wealth of Orange County*) it has some of the most beautiful homes, beaches, best school districts, and communities in the United States. It is the home to many major corporations, industry executives, and has tremendous wealth across its beautiful land. I forgot to mention it also houses **Disneyland**, *the happiest place on earth*. And, it's my home where I raised three amazing children. But, it's time to lift the Orange Curtain and face our issues of poverty.

The "**Orange Curtain**" is a local term for the border between Orange and Los Angeles County. It is a sometimes derogatory, and other times a lighthearted name that is used to describe Orange County's more conservative and suburban population as compared to the more liberal, diverse, and urban population of Los Angeles.



The phrase is a wordplay on the so-called Iron Curtain which represented separation in capitalist Europe. It's the perceived separation of good versus evil; black versus white; democrat versus republican; and poor versus wealthy. It's an eerie reality of what our country can be known for, and then the opposite of the ideologies of the dreamer Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Much of it is perception, while some are born out of cold reality.

In a time where there are so much division and political posturing, we must not forget we have so many women, children, veterans, and families who are struggling with

poverty and homelessness. The tide is turning, and we must take this opportunity to take action.

*“Poverty is moving to the suburbs.
The war on poverty hasn’t followed.” – Aaron Wiener*

There was a rise in homelessness behind the Orange Curtain of almost 10% between 2015-2017, and that number continues to rise. Homelessness in Orange County has become a lead story and front page headlines in the recent news, this coupled with the current legal battles as to who and what cities will bear the brunt of Federal Judge Carter’s directive to shelter the homeless in the County. Homelessness has created a situation unseen in our history.

Between 2015 and 2017, the number of homeless people in Orange County increased, and continues to grow. These numbers will likely climb, especially given the high cost of living in the County. Pockets of homeless encampments have formed in areas close to services in Central Orange County, with the largest concentration of unsheltered individuals being along the Santa Ana River Trails and the Santa Ana Civic Center.



Cities across Orange County are trying to determine how they might contribute to developing long-term solutions as the homeless have moved away from the Santa Ana River. As the County of Orange works towards rehousing homeless individuals and families, there are many approaches currently being employed that have previously been used by both government agencies and non-profit organizations. There is more momentum today than ever before.

Organizations like [Community Action Partnership](#) have been on the frontline battling the “*War on Poverty*” across the nation, started during a time of civil unrest as evidenced by racial and economic inequality, and the civil rights movement among other documented efforts that have shaped our country. Today more than ever before this war

to end poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, racial and gender injustice, lack of affordable housing is even more prevalent. It is time for an economic platform that will provide a *pathway to prosperity* for all members of our community even behind the Orange Curtain.

Every member of the community should be alarmed by the human rights issues of leaving people on the street; seniors who don't know where their next meal is coming from; children who go to bed hungry; issues of domestic violence; and families who can't pay their utility bills. There's a hard dollar cost of keeping community members in crisis, but more importantly we need to lift the Orange Curtain and change our region together.

There is no one-size-fits-all when coming up with a solution to homelessness, but there is no doubt that addressing this on various fronts could have lasting positive effects on our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness. The recent news headlines marred by legal battles and rising rents, can serve as an excellent opportunity for impactful change to finally move the needle in enacting some immediate and long-term solutions to homelessness and poverty. It's time for action and renewed leadership to have a resolve for excellence, proactiveness, innovation, and collaboration in eradicating the poverty of Orange County.

You can get involved by participating in our [Hope for the Holidays](#) campaign. A [donation](#) of any amount will help make this holiday a happy one for families facing hunger. Your support will enable Community Action Partnership of Orange County to serve needy families. Together let's create a pathway of prosperity for everyone!