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TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Los Angeles workers union plan to house homeless next to paying guests alarms US hoteliers

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Los Angeles' exclusive Chateau Marmont Hotel on the famous Sunset Strip is a celebrity favorite. Image credit: Shutterstock

By STAFF REPORTS

More than seven in 10 U.S. consumers would be deterred from booking a hotel room in Los Angeles if hotels there are forced to house homeless people next to paying guests as the Unite Here workers union is proposing in a ballot initiative.

That is the chief finding of a new national poll commissioned by the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) and conducted by Morning Consult. The results confirm the trade lobby's biggest fear that travelers would avoid Los Angeles, which is the United States' second-largest city with a vast number of luxury hotels.

"Homelessness is a serious and complex problem that can only be addressed by professional social and health care workers with specialized training," said AHLA president/CEO Chip Rogers, in a statement from Washington, DC.

"Unite Here's insistence on forcing hotel workers and guests to deal with this issue is dangerous," he said.

"If Unite Here succeeds in turning all L.A. hotels into homeless shelters, eventually there will be no hotels and no hotel workers left in the city."

AHLA is the largest hotel association in the U.S., representing more than 30,000 members including global brands, 80 percent of all franchised hotels and the 16 largest hotel companies in the country.



Tents housing the homeless in Los Angeles have become a common sight, highlighting a growing social and economic concern for residents of the United States' second-largest city and entertainment capital. Image credit: American Hotel & Lodging Association

LA story

Los Angeles residents are set to vote in March on whether to require all local hotels to house homeless people next to paying guests as part of a ballot initiative proposed by Unite Here, a labor union that represents Los Angeles-area hotel workers.

If Unite Here's ballot initiative passes, Los Angeles would become the first city in U.S. history to force hotels to house homeless people next to paying guests.

The AHLA poll highlights the dramatic deterrent a policy like this would be to tourism and hotel stays in the city.

The poll of 2,203 U.S. adults was conducted online Sept. 18-20. Key findings include:

- 72 percent of Americans said they would be deterred from booking a hotel room in Los Angeles if hotels there are forced to house homeless people next to paying guests. That number jumps to 83 percent among those who have previously visited Los Angeles.
- 71 percent of Americans said they would be deterred from visiting Los Angeles for leisure or vacation if hotels there are forced to house homeless people next to paying guests. That number jumps to 80 percent among those who have previously visited Los Angeles.
- 70 percent of Americans said they would be deterred from attending a business conference in Los Angeles if hotels there are forced to house homeless people next to paying guests. That number jumps to 79 percent among those who have previously visited Los Angeles.
- Equal numbers of Americans (71 percent) said they are concerned about the safety risks to hotel staff and guests caused by forcing all Los Angeles hotels to house homeless people next to paying guests.
- 71 percent of Americans said they are concerned about hotels reducing the amount or quality of amenities if the city forces all Los Angeles hotels to house homeless people next to paying guests.
- 70 percent of Americans said they are concerned about the risk of damage to hotel property caused by forcing all Los Angeles hotels to house homeless people next to paying guests.
- 75 percent of Americans said they are concerned that forcing all Los Angeles hotels to house homeless people next to paying guests ignores the root causes of homelessness, and 74 percent said they are concerned that the policy fails to address long-term housing needs of homeless people.

Unite fear

According to the [City of Los Angeles Initiative, Referendum & Recall Petition Handbook](#) (page7), Unite Here can withdraw the ballot initiative as long as it does so 88 days before the election, or Dec. 8.

Thus far, Unite Here not changed its stance.

On the contrary, AHLA alleges that Unite Here leaders have made their insistence on housing homeless people in hotels next to paying guests a [focal point](#) in collective bargaining negotiations with Los Angeles-area hotels. Unite Here has even demanded that hotels support the dangerous practice, the association claims.

The Los Angeles City Council has yet to hold a hearing regarding the economic effect that this policy would have on the city.

AHLA has called on the council to hold an economic impact hearing as soon as possible and to enact a resolution in opposition to Unite Here's homeless in hotels ballot measure to more clearly inform the public of the council's stance on the measure.

THE ISSUE WILL not just impact tourists, but also recruitment of talent to hotels in Los Angeles.

"Safety concerns will prevent workers from taking hotel jobs and drive tourists to other locations," Mr. Rogers said in the statement. "That's a fact, and these poll results prove it."

"That's why we're calling on Unite Here to drop its dangerous demand to turn hotels into homeless shelters in L.A. or any other city where they might try it," he said.

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