

Measure H was approved — barely. Now L.A. will have billions of dollars to combat homelessness



L.A. County Supervisor Mark Ridley Thomas offers words of encouragement to supporters of Measure H as they wait for returns on election night. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)



By **Doug Smith**

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A quarter-cent sales tax increase in Los Angeles County to fund anti-homelessness measures pulled out to a narrow victory early Wednesday as the nearly complete tally showed the measure polling just above the two-thirds majority needed for passage.

Around 1:30 a.m. Wednesday, with 100% of precincts reporting, the L.A. County Registrar-Recorder reported that the yes vote stood at 67.44%, up from less than 63% early Tuesday night in vote-by-mail balloting. With only about 123,000 vote-by-mail ballots that had not yet been counted, supporters considered the victory wrapped up.

“Voters across L.A. County have made the historic decision that Measure H is a smart investment and the right thing to do for our fellow human beings,” said Supervisor [Mark Ridley-Thomas](#), whose office spearheaded the measure.

Measure H is projected to generate about \$355 million annually for homeless programs over 10 years, backers say. The tax increase would raise the sales tax rate to 9% across most of Los Angeles County and up to 10% in a few communities.

The victory completes the funding officials have said is necessary to implement coordinated homelessness initiatives adopted by the city and county last year.

Los Angeles city voters set the stage in November by approving Proposition HHH, a \$1.2-billion bond measure to provide supplemental funding for 10,000 units of permanent housing with support services for the chronically homeless.

The new sales tax revenue would pay for services attached to those units and provide rental subsidies and services for thousands more units across the county.

On election night, tension lingered over the fate of Measure H even as supporters celebrated the defeat of city Measure S at a joint party in a downtown hotel. Support for the homelessness tax largely overlapped with opposition to the unsuccessful proposal to restrict development in the city.

A lineup of elected officials waited until after 10 p.m. to address an anxious crowd and then were only able to ask supporters to be patient.

"Every new report that has been received since the first one is trending in the direction we want," Ridley-Thomas said.

[Los Angeles City Council](#) President [Herb Wesson](#), Councilman [Marqueece Harris-Dawson](#) and county Supervisor [Janice Hahn](#) all said they were optimistic based on strong support developing in the city of Los Angeles. The vote in the city was ultimately more than 71% in favor, the campaign said Wednesday morning.

“What a ride; 5.5 hours of hitting ‘refresh!’” said communications director [Tommy Newman](#), who was on loan to the campaign from the homeless service organization [LA Family Housing](#). “It kind of felt like we were waiting for a baby to be born.”

The party finally broke up hours before the final votes were counted. Campaign strategist [Steve Barkan](#) said the turning point came at 1:26 a.m. when the Los Angeles County Registrar released the last bulletin including ballots from the Los Angeles Council districts of [Paul Koretz](#) and [Mike Bonin](#), showing more than 83% yes vote.

Earlier Tuesday evening, with the measure falling below two-thirds, Hahn had vowed not to give up.

"Win or lose, I'm going to have homelessness at the top of my priorities as a supervisor," said Hahn, who was elected to the board in November.

Now that voters have given them all they asked, officials will have big promises to fulfill.

Advertising for the measure promised it would move an estimated 45,000 homeless families and individuals into permanent housing during the first five years, while preventing 30,000 more families and individuals from becoming homeless.

"Measure H revenue will enable the most comprehensive plan to combat homelessness in the history of Los Angeles County," said Phil Ansell, head of the county's Homeless Initiative.

The complex and still-evolving spending plan includes rent to house thousands of people in existing apartments and services for those units, as well as services for the 10,000 units to be built over a decade with help from the Los Angeles city homeless housing bond.

County officials have outlined the basic strategies that would be funded, but they have not yet issued a budget showing the proportions each would receive. Those decisions would be sorted out by a panel of 50 people appointed from county government, cities and the nonprofit world, Ansell said.

The panel would consider six main categories: subsidized housing, coordinated outreach and shelters, case management and services, homelessness prevention, income support and preservation of existing housing.

More than 250 business, nonprofit, labor, government and religious organizations endorsed Measure H, which faced no organized opposition.

A \$3.5-million campaign received contributions from real estate and investment firms, labor organizations, philanthropists and other groups with ties to Los Angeles. Those donors include Disney Worldwide Services Inc., USC, former [DreamWorks](#) Animation Chief Executive Jeffrey Katzenberg and the Los Angeles Chargers. The campaign sent about 4 million mailers and advertised in Los Angeles County newspapers.

The county Board of Supervisors added \$1 million for a campaign including television spots.

United Way of Greater Los Angeles also committed \$200,000 for community engagement activities in support of the measure.

Awaiting late returns, Hahn called Measure H "the most inspiring and moving campaign I've ever been a part of," adding that it was "about helping people most of us will never meet."

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