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bribed people on Skid Row with money, cigarettes



A homeless encampment is seen in downtown Los Angeles on May 30, 2019. (Credit: FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP/Getty Images)

by: Erika Martin

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ballot petitions and voter registration forms, prosecutors said Wednesday.

Richard Howard, 64, and Louis Thomas Wise, 37, both pleaded no contest Friday to subscribing a false name to a petition and registration of a fictitious person, both felonies, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office said in a news release.

Christopher Joseph Williams, 41, and 45-year-old Nickey Demelvin Huntley also pleaded no contest Friday to one felony count of circulating an initiative containing false, forged or fictitious names, the DA's office said.

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Howard was given a suspended sentence of three years in state prison and three years of probation, while Wise was given a suspended sentence of 16 months in state prison and three years of formal probation. A suspended sentence means the jail time would be served after their probation is completed, and may be eliminated entirely, provided the men do not commit additional crimes.

Williams and Huntley were each sentenced to three years' formal probation.

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Their conviction comes after co-defendant Norman Hall, 62, pleaded guilty in the case in February. He was sentenced to one year in county jail, three years' formal probation and 100 hours of community service.

Four others remain charged in the scheme on allegations including the use of false names on a petition and voter fraud.

The group allegedly gave homeless people $1 each and cigarettes in exchange for forgery. They amassed hundreds of false signatures to help initiatives qualify in the 2016 and 2018 election cycles, the DA's office said.

The Los Angeles Police Department and FBI investigated the fraud.

"They paid individuals to sign the names," LAPD Officer Deon Joseph previously told the Los Angeles Times. "That's an assault on our democracy."

One of the remaining defendants — 37-year-old Jakara Fati Mardis — is at large. The other three are expected to appear in court Sept. 1 for a pretrial hearing, prosecutors said.

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