



National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI | New Hampshire

Statement on Forcible Eviction of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness (November 20, 2020)

Today's actions to forcibly evict homeless individuals from an encampment on the grounds of the Hillsborough County Courthouse in Manchester will accomplish little in working toward a solution to the burgeoning crisis of homelessness and affordable housing facing New Hampshire's cities and towns. This longstanding crisis has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the individuals experiencing homelessness, today's forced eviction will further marginalize, and potentially traumatize, people at what is likely the lowest point in their lives. National estimates find 25%–50% of individuals who are chronically homeless have serious mental health conditions.

Earlier this week, NAMI NH Executive Director Ken Norton spent a day at the encampment, where he engaged with those present and observed the situation. Ken strongly encouraged officials to avoid the planned eviction in favor of intensifying efforts to work one-on-one with individuals to identify safe housing and treatment options for them. Yesterday's social service team efforts by the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services were a significant step in the right direction, resulting in connecting more than 20 individuals from the encampment with available beds in shelters and treatment programs.

Today's actions were a step backward, with vulnerable people caught in the middle of the state and city's inability to work together to address the situation. Homelessness is not a crime. As has been said for other complex societal issues, ***we cannot arrest our way out of this.***

A key component of the calls for police reform which have swept across our state and nation is the recognition that we need to significantly strengthen our mental health, addiction, domestic violence, homelessness and other social service delivery systems. By strengthening these systems, we can stop putting police in the untenable position of frontline responders to individuals in a human service crisis.

As winter rolls in, with fewer beds available at existing shelters due to pandemic distancing requirements, it is imperative the state, cities, and nonprofit organizations work together to identify and stand up additional shelters, programs and services.

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