

NH Advocates Call for Human-Centered Solutions to Address Homelessness (July 24, 2024)

CONCORD, NH — In response to recent decisions at the local and national levels making it easier for municipalities to criminalize those experiencing homelessness, we, the undersigned, have grave concerns about the impact of those decisions on unhoused people across the state of New Hampshire. We call on our elected leaders and our communities to invest in solutions, not punishments, to address homelessness in the Granite State.

It is crucial to remember that none of us, nor our loved ones, are immune to the symptoms of poverty or the potential to experience homelessness. The unfortunate truth is that many of us are just one bad circumstance away from losing our homes and finding ourselves in a very similar position to the thousands of Granite Staters currently experiencing homelessness.

Our communities of unhoused people in New Hampshire represent a wide array of ages, abilities, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and professional and educational achievements. Homelessness is a complex issue resulting from varying causes, which can include the loss of a job or inability to be paid a sustainable wage, the scarcity of affordable, accessible housing, domestic violence, or other harmful living situations.

While individuals experiencing homelessness face higher rates of poor health outcomes, including mental health and substance use disorders, we know that the experience of homelessness itself is a traumatic experience that can lead to, or exacerbate, poor mental and physical health. People experiencing homelessness deserve help, not handcuffs.

Penalizing and displacing those who need support will not solve homelessness because it does not address the root causes of homelessness or the symptoms of poverty impacting our communities. Responding with increased police enforcement and legal consequences only perpetuates the conditions that cause homelessness and will result in grave consequences for Granite Staters in need. Punishing individuals for circumstances beyond their control keeps people in an endless cycle of poverty and fuels mass incarceration. Further, it fails to acknowledge the harsh realities faced by many who have no other option but to sleep outside. Homelessness should be met with compassion and support, not with punitive measures.

Effective approaches to address homelessness must be humane, collaborative, and responsive to the entire community. We call upon our elected officials and local decision-makers to invest in evidence-based solutions and provide for the basic needs of our community members.

Solving the crises affecting our communities can only be accomplished by strengthening the resources available to them and investing in our public care infrastructure. Our focus must be on expanding access to employment, healthcare, shelter, sanitation, and other low-barrier services, including mental health and substance use treatment. Instead of using criminal punishment to try to push people out of sight, we must work together to interrupt the pipelines leading to homelessness and provide unhoused Granite Staters with the care and support they need to obtain safe housing and get and stay well.

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American Friends Service Committee - NH Program

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