



HSC Statement of Values: Ending Criminalization of Homelessness

Everyone deserves a life free from homelessness and the associated traumas. To effectively address homelessness, it is crucial to adopt fair and housing-centered approaches that uphold the dignity and autonomy of each individual.

All approaches to ending homelessness must be housing-focused. Affordable housing remains insufficient both nationally and within our community, demanding our immediate attention and investment. By adopting housing-focused strategies, we benefit our entire community. Helping people move into stable housing alleviates the burden on healthcare and legal systems, among others.

The criminalization of homelessness refers to the enforcement of laws and ordinances that target and penalize individuals experiencing homelessness for everyday activities, which results in fines, citations or even arrests.

The criminalization of homelessness exacerbates and prolongs the challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness. Citing and/or arresting unhoused individuals will only make it harder for someone to get into housing, secure a job, or move forward with anything that may require a clean record. This will keep individuals unhoused longer. Criminalization fails to address the root causes of homelessness and provides no meaningful assistance in resolving the issue. If a person experiencing homelessness does not have housing after leaving jail, they return to the streets.

Moreover, the criminalization of homelessness worsens existing racial disparities by further burdening the people of color, who are disproportionately impacted by over-criminalization. People of color are significantly over-represented among unhoused individuals. By criminalizing homelessness, we further widen the disparity.

All policy decisions must be grounded in an equitable and systemic approach to address homelessness. By viewing homelessness as a failure of our systems rather than an individual choice, we can start a transformative change. True progress lies in providing secure and stable housing, ultimately solving homelessness.

By understanding the broader implications and working collectively, we can create a community that offers security and stability to all people, regardless of their housing status.