The criminalization of homelessness is inhumane, ineffective, expensive to tax payers, and violates the constitutional and human rights of individuals experiencing housing instability.

MAIN IDEA: CRIMINALIZATION IS INEFFECTIVE:
TALKING POINTS: Criminalization does not address the root cause of homelessness: a lack of affordable housing. Criminalization also perpetuates homelessness by creating legal barriers to accessing housing and employment, and to exiting homelessness. The solution to the homelessness crisis is not to criminalize people who lack housing, but rather to make affordable, permanent housing available to those who need and want it.

Starting in the late 1970’s, the federal government drastically cut it’s funding of public and affordable housing, causing a large increase of homelessness nationwide throughout the 1980’s.

In 1996 the federal government stopped funding new public housing. Homelessness has since tripled or quadrupled in every major U.S. city.

Subsidized housing in Denver is at capacity. Only one in 70 people who apply for affordable housing has a chance of receiving a voucher, and there are over 6,500 families on affordable housing waiting lists.

People who lack housing and are forced to conduct their survival activities in public space are being treated as criminals.

Laws criminalizing homelessness do not enhance public safety. There is no statistical evidence to support stereotypes about a relationship between homelessness and real crime, such as assaults or burglary. In fact, people who lack housing are more likely to be the victim of violent crime than the perpetrator. There is a documented relationship between the increase of criminalization laws and the rise in hate crimes against individuals experiencing homelessness.

MAIN IDEA: CRIMINALIZATION IS EXPENSIVE:
TALKING POINTS: Currently, we lack adequate housing and services to meet the needs of homeless Coloradans, and instead municipalities have chosen to allocate these resources to law enforcement. We should instead spend the money spent on the enforcement of anti-homeless laws (including policing, court processing costs, and the costs of incarceration) on permanent affordable housing.

Numerous cost-studies have found that providing housing and support services is significantly more cost-effective than managing homelessness on the street or in emergency shelters.

USICH estimates that chronic homelessness, due in part to its criminalization, costs the public between $30,000 and $50,000 per person every year.

The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) has shown that by moving homeless persons off the street and into subsidized housing, along with free medical care, tax payers can save an average of $31,545 per homeless person.

CCH estimates that simply housing 150 homeless persons would save tax payers $4,731,734 over a two-year period.

The annual cost of incarcerating one individual in Colorado is $30,374.

The annual cost of housing an individual in subsidized housing in Colorado is $10,800.
MAIN IDEA: CRIMINALIZATION VIOLATES CONSTITUTIONAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS
TALKING POINTS: We have a moral imperative to protect the civil and human rights of every American. Criminalization deprives individuals of safe, legal and dignified opportunities to perform necessary human functions. It forces vulnerable people who lack housing into more hidden, and therefore more dangerous, areas—with deadly consequences. Persons experiencing homelessness are subject to unreasonable searches and seizures of their personal property—a violation of their constitutional rights. Sweeps often result in the loss or destruction of tents, clothing, and identification documents. Without such documents it is difficult or impossible for someone to access employment, gain access to housing, or even to exercise their basic right to vote. The loss of warm clothing, protective tents, and medication can become a matter of life and death.

The UN Human Rights Commission has condemned the criminalization of homelessness as a violation of the United States’ international treaty obligations and as “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment”.

Since 2012 the US has officially recognized that criminalization violates civil and human rights and is ineffective at reducing homelessness. But, without a federal or state homeless bill of rights and without federal enforcement, policies that criminalize homelessness continue to proliferate at the municipal levels.

By criminalizing homelessness instead of providing appropriate solutions, our local and state governments are sending the public the message that “homeless lives don’t matter”.

MAIN IDEA: “SERVICES” ARE NOT A REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE TO BASIC RIGHTS TO REST
TALKING POINTS: Services such as emergency shelter do not end homelessness, and should not be used as an excuse or justification for criminalization ordinances.

Homeless services are intended to be temporary emergency services, not permanent answers to homelessness. Emergency services do not ensure permanent housing that people can afford, and thus do not end homelessness.

Emergency services often do not adequately meet the diverse needs of homeless people. For instance, there is not a single shelter in the city of Denver where a homeless couple (married or unmarried) can stay together. Shelters are often overcrowded, unsafe and unsanitary.

The use of “sweeps” and laws to push homeless people out of sight to more distant areas makes it even harder for homeless people to connect with outreach workers and pursue efforts to improve their lives.

Emergency services are costlier to tax payers than subsidized housing.

The tradeoff of services that don’t make sense for homeless populations in exchange for taking away basic rights of survival is cruel and unfounded.

MAIN IDEA: WHAT THE RIGHT TO REST ACT DOES AND DOES NOT DO
TALKING POINTS: The Right to Rest Act simply makes it legal for people to move about freely, rest, sleep, protect themselves from the elements, eat and share food, and carry out other activities necessary for survival. This bill does not prevent law enforcement from pursuing criminals or addressing safety issues—it prevents law enforcement from pursuing people simply for living in public spaces.

The Right to Rest Act does NOT give people the right to leave trash about, urinate in public, be drunk in public, aggressively panhandle, harass others, trespass, block passageways, sleep/sit in an obstructive manner, or engage in illegal activities.

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