



Texas Homeless Network
1713 Fortview Road
Austin, Texas 78704
Contact: Samantha Foss, Director of Development and Communications
Phone Number: 512-861-2124
Email: samantha@thn.org
Website: www.thn.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Texas Homeless Network Stance on Homeless Encampment

Austin, TX Thursday, June 13th, 2019-- Homeless encampments are a highly visible by-product of the housing crisis and lack of affordable housing in the U.S. The increase in “sweeping” and forced dispersal of encampments has led to trauma, possible 8th amendment violations, and a waste of precious taxpayer dollars. Texas Homeless Network fundamentally disagrees with policies that further exacerbate homelessness and ordinances aimed to criminalize encampments.

Some say homeless encampments are unsightly and use this as justification for their removal, but one must take a step back and realize these individuals are doing what they must do to survive. Life-sustaining actions such as sitting, lying down, and sleeping in public become unavoidable when one has no place to live—to criminally punish this conduct is in effect violating the 8th Amendment through cruel and unusual punishment. The factors that lead to homelessness greatly vary, but almost always involves trauma and the experience of being homeless itself is traumatic. Through encampments and steady outreach, encampment residents can create community, support, and care needed to become healthy and housed. Eviction of homeless encampments, or homeless “sweeps,” can lead to the destruction of the few possessions homeless individuals can have, including vital identification documents that are critical for housing and can cause a heavy setback that prolongs the time these chronically homeless individuals are unsheltered.

In a Strong Statement of Interest brief filed in regards to Bell vs Boise, Vanita Gupta, head of the U.S Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, reinforces that “criminally prosecuting those individuals for something as innocent as sleeping, when they have no safe, legal place to go, violates their constitutional rights. Moreover, enforcing these ordinances is poor public policy. Needlessly pushing homeless individuals into the criminal justice system does nothing to break the cycle of poverty or prevent homelessness in the future. Instead, it imposes further burdens



on scarce judicial and correctional resources, and it can have long-lasting and devastating effects on individuals' lives."¹ Correspondingly, the U.S Interagency Council on Homelessness published guidance on encampment, "Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments: Advancing the Dialogue" reiterating that sweeping and forced dispersal of encampments is not an appropriate solution to homelessness and instead makes homelessness harder to exit.²

Criminalization is the most expensive and least effective way of addressing homelessness. Instead, Texas Homeless Network supports rational, cost-effective policies such as Housing First as this has been proven to be the most affordable and effective method to end homelessness. In a 2014 analysis by Creative Housing Solutions, the study found that providing chronically homeless people with permanent housing and case managers in Central Florida cost approximately \$21,000 less than what the region was spending on law enforcement and medical costs for each person experiencing chronic homelessness.³

¹ U.S. Dept. of Just., Justice Department Files Brief to Address the Criminalization of Homelessness (August 6, 2015) available at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-files-brief-addresscriminalization-homelessness>.

² United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments: Advancing the Dialogue (August 2015) available at https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Ending_Homelessness_for_People_Living_in_Encampments_Aug2015.pdf.

³ Gregory A. Shinn, The Cost of Long-Term Homelessness In Central Florida: The Current Crisis & The Cost of Providing Sustainable Housing Solutions, (2014), <http://shnny.org/uploads/Florida-Homelessness-Report-2014.pdf>.