

Arresting Our
Way Out of the
Problem: The
Criminalization of
Homelessness

Strategies For Change

thn.org

Who we are



Jen Beardsley, Local Homeless Coalition (LHC)
Coordinator at Texas Homeless Network
(Austin)



Kim Pickens, Founder of The Humility Project
(Victoria)



Tammy Chan, Executive Director of Grand Prairie
Homeless Outreach Organization (Grand Prairie)



Objectives

- Definition of criminalization
- Prevalence in Texas
- Effects of homelessness criminalization
- Community responses to criminalization



Criminalization of Homelessness

“Manner in which cities are criminally punishing [people experiencing homelessness] for engaging in necessary life-sustaining activities that any human being must engage in to survive.”

- National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty



Ordinances and Laws Criminalizing Homelessness

- Criminal trespass
- Public camping
- Loitering
- Panhandling
- Toileting in public

Asking for help is not a crime!



"You've got to have a good heart and be strong to do this."
- Victor

 invisible PEOPLE



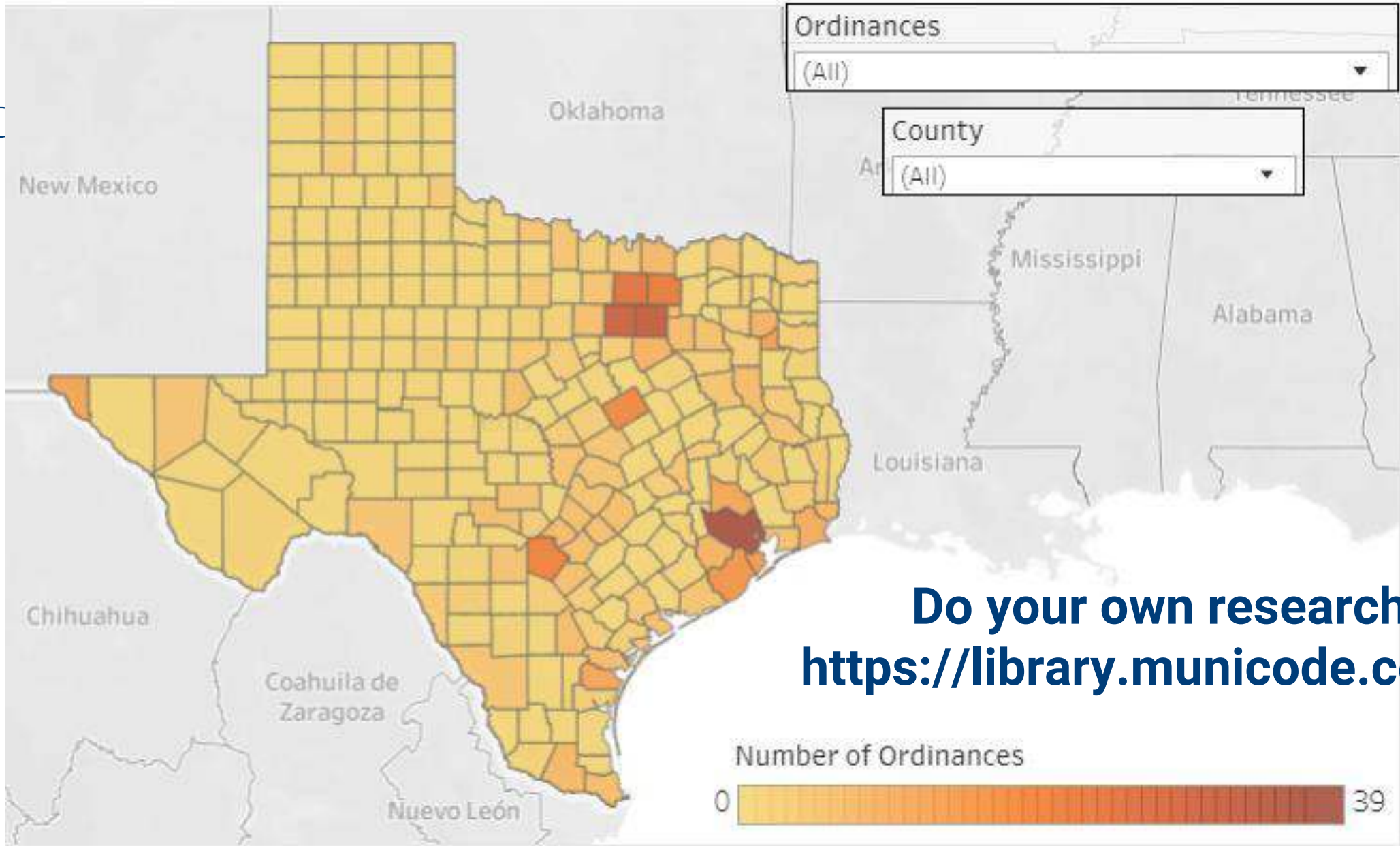
Ordinances and Laws Criminalizing Homelessness



- Scavenging
- Sleeping in vehicle
- Soliciting rides (hitchhiking)
- Sleeping/sitting/lying down in public
- Restrictions on manner of (e.g. tents, blankets), location of, timing of public camping



Assistance criminalization (e.g. feeding in certain places)



Do your own research:
<https://library.municode.com/tx>



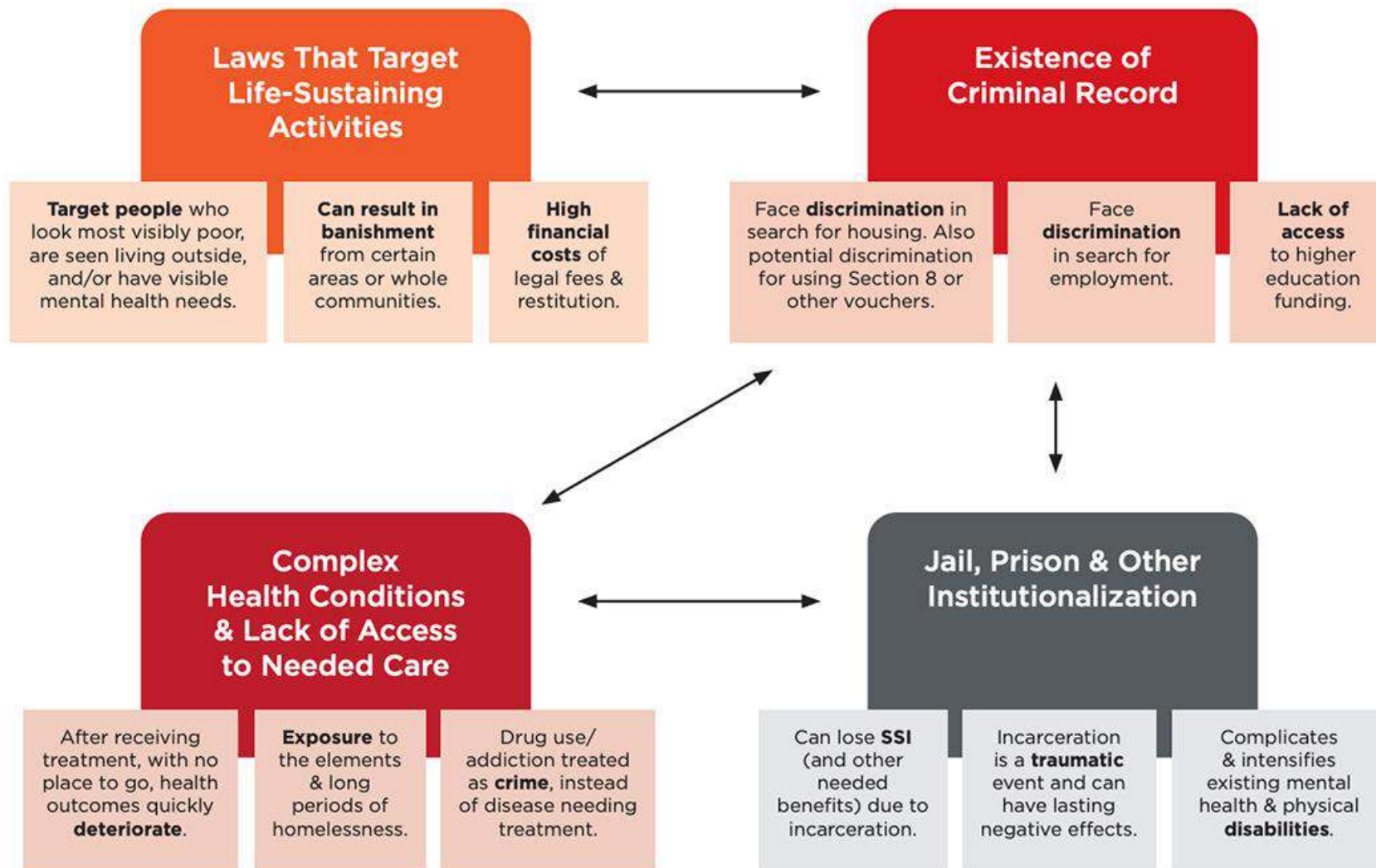
Effects of Homelessness Criminalization



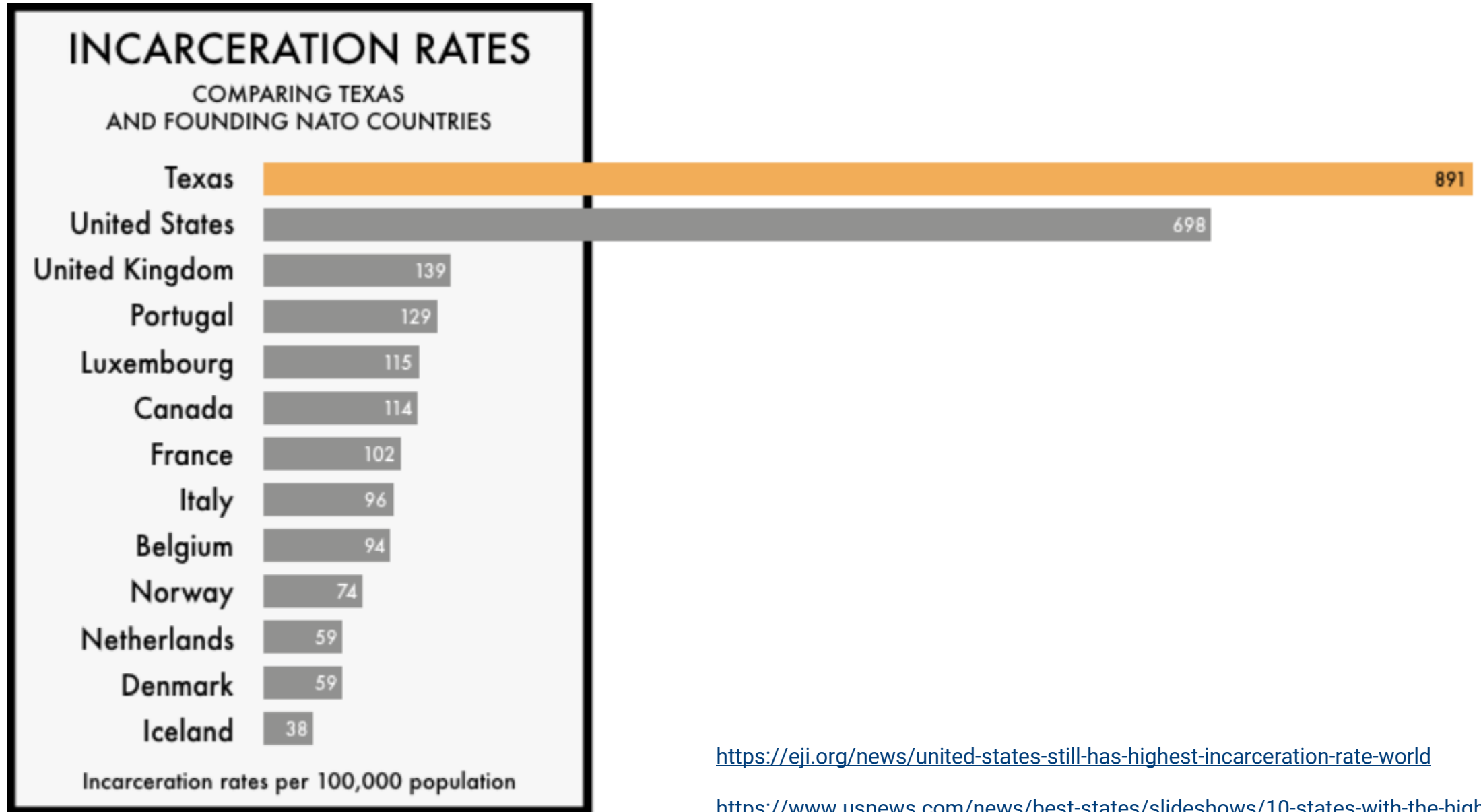
- Vague language can lead to disparate enforcement
- Unhoused clients constantly moving to avoid arrest
- Marginalized populations at higher risk of homelessness and arrest
- Arrest record = harder to get into housing



The Cycle of the Criminalization of Homelessness



Today, Texas's incarceration rates stand out internationally



Source: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2018.html>

<https://ejournal.org/news/united-states-still-has-highest-incarceration-rate-world>

<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/slideshows/10-states-with-the-highest-incarceration-rates>



Cost of Homelessness Criminalization: Case Study

Osceola County, Florida, tracked **37 homeless people** arrested **1,250 times** over 10 years for **61,896 total days of incarceration**. Here's what they cost:

\$130,000



Booking costs



\$4,951,680



Jail costs



\$1,336,225



Mental-health care in jail

= \$6,417,905

Source: The 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress

Mother Jones



Growth of Homeless Outreach Teams, Mental Health Teams in Police Departments

/NEWS/LOCAL-NEWS /NEWS/POLICE-COURTS

Officials: Mental health officer program already successful

TOP STORY

The 'H.O.T.' cop: Killeen police officer delves into homeless community

By Emily Hilley-Sierzchula | Herald staff writer May 13, 2018

The cellphone beeps for attention, ringing and dinging in an invisible population.

On the receiving end is the sole member of the Killeen Police Officer Kyla Moore.

Thank you for Reading!



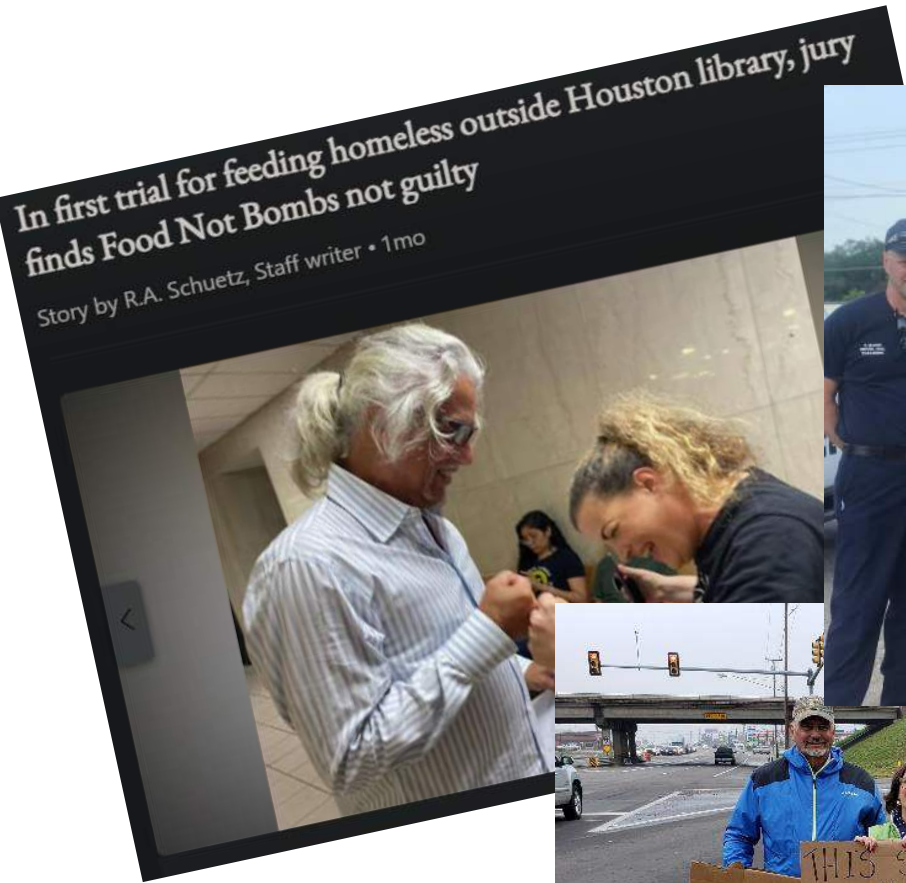
Police Outreach Services Team (POST)

Team officially began on January 1, 2018 with 2 officers dedicated to the team is to reduce homeless-related complaints by acting as a liaison between police and available appropriate services. The creation of the POST is a result of the recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness in Denton. The Service Team is modeled after successful programs in other cities like Dallas and Houston.



CITY OF DENTON

Community Responses to Criminalization



Panel Discussion



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GPHOO
Clean Camp
Program



























GPHOO Clean Camp Program

GPHOO Works Program



Grand Prairie Homeless Outreach Organization (GPHOO) Clean Camp Agreement Form

If given at tent and/or sleeping bag, I _____ agree to the following rules:
Print Name

- 1) A photo will be made of me with the tent and/or sleeping bag to document when a tent is given to me.
- 2) I will share the location of my camp with the GPHOO Case Managers so they can document my homelessness for homeless housing assistance. I understand that means they will/may come once a week to take photos.
- 3) I will keep my camp site litter-free at all times.
- 4) I will not do any illegal activities or illegal drugs at my campsite at my campsite.
- 5) I will handle my human waste responsibly, including picking up my poo and disposing of it in trash bins.
- 6) I will document my efforts with photos to keep my campsite clean and handle my human waste responsibly. If I don't have a phone that can take photos, I will ask the GPHOO Case Managers for help.
- 7) If my tent becomes damaged, I will let my GPHOO Case Managers know and I will bring in my old tent to exchange it for a new tent, if GPHOO has an extra tent to exchange. I am not guaranteed a replacement tent.
- 8) If my sleeping bag becomes wet or soiled, I will attempt to wash it before asking for another one. By appointment, GPHOO will meet me at a laundromat and provide laundry soap and will put quarters in the machine to help me wash my sleeping bag, blankets and clothing. I can make these appointments every two weeks, if needed. The GPHOO can pick me up if I make arrangements in advance. GPHOO Laundry days are Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- 9) The GPHOO cannot recommend a place for me to camp and they cannot accept liability for any damage the tent may sustain due to my use of the tent or weather related events or for any other reason.
- 10) The GPHOO cannot give me permission to camp in any location in Grand Prairie. The GPHOO does not own any property, nor does it have any agreements with property owners to allow me to camp.
- 11) The GPHOO is not liable for any injury I may sustain related to using the tent, setting up the tent or while camping.
- 12) The GPHOO is not liable for any damage I cause to the property. I am responsible for any damage I cause to the property, including bringing items to the camp that I don't carry back out, cutting of branches on living trees and earthwork to change drainage patterns.
- 13) The GPHOO will run a background check on each person to whom we give a tent. The purpose of the background check is to determine if I am required live at a fixed address as a condition of probation or if I am required to register where I live with the local Police Department. If either case applies, the GPHOO cannot give me a tent as they cannot be at risk of enabling a person to be in violation of their probation, requirements to live at a fixed address or registration of address with the local Police Department.
- 14) I will not sell my tent or give it to someone else or invite someone else to stay in my tent without first contacting the GPHOO and coordinating a background check of my guest/tent mate with the GPHOO.

I further acknowledge the following recommendations:

- A. When possible, it is good to get the permission of the property owner where I will camp. If I get permission, it is good to have it in writing with a phone number of the person giving the permission so the police can verify should the police come to my camp and ask if I have permission or if I just tell them I have permission.
- B. It is good to take before photos of my campsite to show the condition before I moved in.
- C. If I move into an old camp site that is littered, it is good to get trash bags from GPHOO to clean up the litter. I can stack the trash bags in a pile and work with GPHOO to pick them up by appointment.
- D. It is good to take photos during my cleanup efforts to show the positive difference I am making to the environment.
- E. When available, the GPHOO will give me a tarp for under the tent. To help repel water, it is best to use it under the tent to protect the floor of my tent from being punctured by twigs and rocks. It is best to fold the tarp under the tent rather than leaving parts of the tarp extending past the footprint of the tent.
- F. I can earn positive recommendation letters for employment if I volunteer with the GPHOO Works Environmental Cleanup Crew to cleanup existing camp sites and other locations. The cleanups take place bi-monthly from 2-4 pm on Sundays. I can check with the GPHOO to find out when and where the next cleanup will take place. Also, I can earn community service credit for court requirements if I register properly to do so.
- G. It is good to share photos of my camp cleanups with my GPHOO Case Managers so they can defend me if ever needed. They can't promise the defense will help but they will try.

Printed Name _____

Signature _____

Phone Number _____

Date _____

_____ Tent _____ Sleeping Bag

Name of Person Giving the Sleeping Bag/Tent _____

Case Managers: Tammy Chan 214-212-7958

David La Flash 214-629-6655









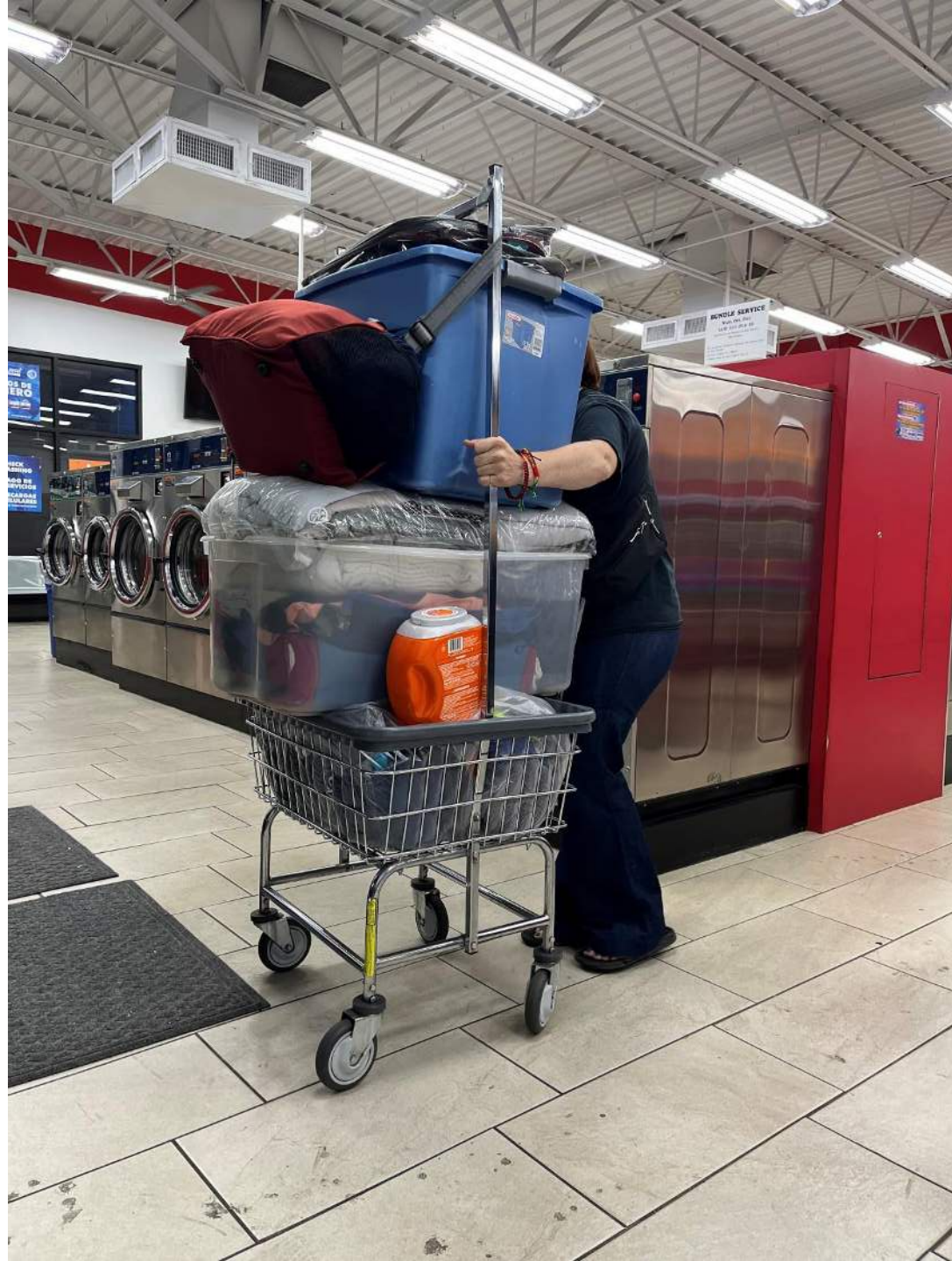




























It's been getting
better!

















