



1 year since Grants Pass: Increase in laws that make it a crime to be homeless sparks increased support for Housing, Not Handcuffs.

The past year has been hard for those of us who want to solve homelessness, and especially hard for those who live outside. We've seen:

- The basic rights for our unhoused neighbors overturned,
- The election of a President who talks openly about forcing homeless people into government-run detention camps,
- Proposed budget cuts and policy changes that will make homelessness much worse; and,
- Billionaires and politicians continue to put profit over people, all while the rent keeps getting higher.

Everybody needs a safe place to live. Rising housing costs are not only the primary cause of homelessness, but they are also the most significant economic worry for most people. Instead of ensuring that everybody has housing that meets their needs, politicians across the country are trying to make it a crime to be homeless.

Despite this hostile climate, our work not only continues, but it has won some major victories. Over the past year, at least 57 state-level bills that make it a crime to be homeless¹ were introduced across 17 states. Of those, while 8 have passed and 4 remain pending, 45 were defeated. **That means we've beaten back these backwards bills nearly 4 times out of 5.**

Despite these wins, know that we face a growing, billionaire-backed foe with deep ties to the White House. The Cicero Institute, led by billionaire venture capitalist [and Palantir co-founder](#) Joe Lonsdale, is making headway in their use of cookie-cutter, racist, and backwards policies in states across the country. Needless to say, these and similar laws waste taxpayer money, redirect money away from proven housing solutions, and make homelessness worse. These laws hurt us all, but they hurt Black and other communities of color, as well as migrants and people with disabilities, first and worst.

While this report focuses on legislation, we must remember that these anti-homeless laws hurt real people. Sadly, we've seen many instances in which homeless people have been harmed and even killed during the enforcement of anti-homeless laws. No matter what Cicero says, there is nothing compassionate about passing laws that hurt or kill people. In Louisville, KY, a state with a Cicero Law, police gave a [camping ticket to an unhoused woman in active labor](#).

- In Pensacola, FL, [August Bucki](#) froze to death after he was evicted by police enforcing a Cicero law.
- In Georgia, yet another state with a Cicero law, [Cornelius Taylor](#) was killed by heavy machinery during the eviction of his encampment.
- And in California, the state that has pushed through the highest number of anti-homeless laws since the Grants Pass ruling, [James Edwin Oakley](#) was similarly killed during an encampment eviction.

¹ Criminalizing homelessness means passing laws that arrest, fine, cite, and jail people who live outside for engaging in life-sustaining activities like sleeping, sitting, eating, and existing in public.

A growing number of people know that homelessness is primarily caused by the sky-high rent, and most people rightly believe that we need housing, not handcuffs. In fact, there is a robust set of research that speaks to the sheer ineffectiveness of laws that make it a crime to be homeless. Conclusive data show that **camping bans** [do not reduce the number of tents](#), that **evicting encampments** [does not improve public safety](#) and actually [make individual and public health worse](#), and that **anti-homeless laws** [divert resources that can be better spent on housing and support](#).

Please see below to explore new trends and updates from across the country.

Cicero State-level Impact Recap

Since 2021, the billionaires at the Cicero Institute have pushed through harmful, backwards cookie-cutter bills that make homelessness worse in Texas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Utah. **This year, advocates defeated bills in Arizona, Georgia, Iowa, Indiana, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas.** Missouri's Cicero law was struck down by the state Supreme Court. Cicero bills in North Carolina are still pending as of this writing.

Note: due to Cicero's vast resources, they can push for multiple bills in the same state, or bills that worsen their previously passed yet still harmful laws. For this reason, some states might have both wins and losses. We wish Cicero and their cronies would use their money and time to fund housing and supports, not to make it even harder for homeless people to survive.

Anti-homeless Laws Met with Bipartisan Condemnation

High rents remain the leading cause of homelessness. This is true in both red and blue states, and across the country. In fact, in [no state or county in the entire United States can a person working full-time afford a modest two-bedroom while making minimum wage](#). As more and more people struggle to pay rent, more and more people from all political parties are waking up to the fact that our housing system is rigged for billionaires and corporate interests and does not work for most people. As this consensus grows, so does the growing recognition that laws that make it a crime to be homeless are ineffective, expensive, and simply wrong.

The defeat of a Cicero Bill in [Iowa](#), a Republican stronghold, helps tell this story. Dave Sires, a Republican State Senator in Iowa, said the following:

The more I look through it [the bill] I'm shocked - \$800 fines for people who really don't have any money or are down on their luck. We've got to think of something else. . . because this is not fair to people. I know that sounds crazy coming from a conservative Republican, but I do support my food pantry in my own hometown... That's all I can say. I won't be signing onto this either."

New Polling Shows Widespread Opposition to Criminalization

New polling conducted by the [American Civil Liberties Union and YouGov](#) shows that laws that make it a crime to be homeless are deeply unpopular. By a three-to-one margin, voters indicate that homelessness is caused by high rents, not by a lack of laws that make it illegal to live outside. More importantly, 77% of respondents believe that homelessness should be addressed by housing and support, not by treating sleeping outside as a crime. This is consistent with polling conducted by the National Homelessness Law Center in collaboration with the Housing Narrative Lab and Lake Research Partners, [which shows that](#)

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[72% of people reject jailing](#), ticketing, or fining individuals for sleeping outside when they have nowhere else to go.

Polling also looked specifically at North Carolina and Indiana, two states where the Cicero Institute is active. In both states, results show that the vast majority of people favor housing, not handcuffs.

- In Indiana, only [13% of voters](#) think making it a crime to sleep in public will help public safety.
- In North Carolina, [four out of five voters](#) think homelessness should be solved with housing and support, not arrests, force, or tickets.

New Tricks from the Cicero Institute

Advocacy opposing draconian anti-homeless bills across the country is so effective that the billionaires at the Cicero Institute are changing their strategies.

As in Iowa, we have seen a [new template bill](#) crop up that targets both homeless people and those trying to help them. While this uses different tactics than Cicero's original cookie-cutter bill, it is the same backwards, racist, harmful approach in new packaging.

- Instead of a blanket statewide camping ban, there is now a push for a statewide prohibition that prevents cities and towns from allowing encampments. This loophole allows state politicians to pretend that their hands are clean while forcing local lawmakers to become the face of encampment evictions and putting local officials on the hook for costly lawsuits if they don't evict encampments quickly enough. Obviously, this, like Cicero's original cookie-cutter bill, does nothing to help people living outside. Examples include [Arizona](#), [Idaho](#), [North Carolina](#), and [two bills in Louisiana](#).
- Bills in [North Carolina](#), [Utah](#), and [two in Iowa](#) create "drug-free service zones," which impose increased and even criminal punishments on homeless service providers if drugs are found within or even outside of their facility. It's worth remembering that most people who use drugs will never be homeless, and most people who are homeless will never use drugs. These laws are a clear attempt to "other" homeless people while doing nothing to help people access housing or healthcare.

Cicero continues to promote skewed public opinion polling in an attempt to drum up support for their deeply misguided approaches. However, both mountains of research and recent public polling show their backwards laws are both ineffective and deeply unpopular, with [nearly three out of every four Americans](#) choosing against laws that make it a crime to be homeless.

Gloria Johnson Act Introduced in Congress and in 11 States

Defeating harmful bills is part of a broader strategy. Anti-criminalization legislation, many based on the Law Center's template [Gloria Johnson Act](#), has been introduced in 11 states: [California](#), [Connecticut](#), [Delaware](#), [Illinois](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Maryland](#), [New York](#), [Rhode Island](#), [Utah](#), [Virginia](#), and [Washington State](#). It has advanced through committee in Connecticut and Illinois. These bills have various protections including:

- Prohibiting imposing civil or criminal punishments for life-sustaining activities like sleeping and existing on public land in an unobtrusive manner when there is nowhere else to go;
- Protecting homeless persons' belongings from unconstitutional searches and seizures; and,
- Requiring zoning laws permit up to two mobile dwellings (RVs or tiny homes) per residence.

To mark the one-year anniversary of the shameful Grants Pass ruling, a similar bill named the [Housing Not Handcuffs Act](#) was introduced into Congress on June 26th.

Concerning Growth in Non-Cicero laws that Make Homelessness Worse

Although advocates defeated 79% of state-wide anti-homeless bills this session, several still passed despite growing objections. These non-Cicero measures criminalizing homelessness have passed in California, Montana, and Washington State. Similar measures were defeated in Hawaii, Mississippi, Oregon, and West Virginia. One is pending in Pennsylvania. A number of these bills make it both a crime to be homeless and some even prohibit people from helping those who live outside. Examples include:

- Standalone anti-camping legislation, like in [Arizona](#), [Hawaii](#), [Mississippi](#), [Montana](#), [Oklahoma](#), [Oregon](#), [Washington](#), and [West Virginia](#),
- Bills banning homeless services in entire communities or the creation of large homeless exclusion zones around certain facilities, like in [Oklahoma](#) and [Idaho](#),
- Bills creating “workhouses” for homeless individuals where they are required to work as punishment for not being able to afford rent, like in [Louisiana](#) and [West Virginia](#); and,
- A ballot measure allowing residents to withhold municipal taxes if they believe their property or business value has been diminished by a municipality's failure to remove encampments, like in [Arizona](#), and similar legislation in [Georgia](#).

A special note about California

Although advocates defeated a standalone bill attempting to make it a crime to sleep outside and repeal the state’s Housing First mandate in the state legislature ([CA AB 20](#)), California Governor Newsom earns a dishonorable mention for taking a backwards, ineffective, and expensive approach to homelessness. He has encouraged all municipalities to pass a [template encampment ordinance](#) that makes it a crime to be homeless. This template ordinance forces homeless people to move repeatedly and takes the focus off real solutions to homelessness, like housing and support.

Growth of City-wide Anti-homeless laws following Grants Pass

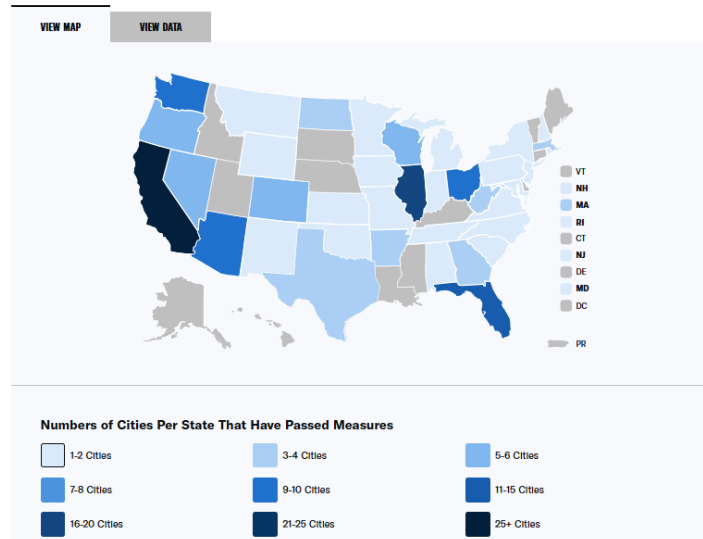
Following the June 28th Grants Pass decision, over 320 anti-homeless, anti-survival ordinances were introduced across the country. To date, at least 260 of these have passed, the large majority of which are camping bans. Like Cicero’s backwards laws, these city bans waste resources, make everybody less safe, and make homelessness worse. These laws fail to address the high cost of housing, which remains the primary driver of homelessness, and instead target people who have nowhere else to go.

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Tracking the Criminalization of Homelessness Across US Cities

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Source: <https://www.aclu.org/one-year-since-grants-pass-tracking-the-criminalization-of-homelessness>

It's beyond time for housing, not handcuffs.

The federal government's failure to ensure that every person has a safe place to call home has led to statewide camping bans, which in turn have prompted citywide camping bans. None of them will work. On top of these bans loom massive federal cuts to housing and other safety net programs like food and healthcare that will force more people into homelessness. Instead of passing the buck and placing blame on people living outside, politicians must fund housing and support, not tax cuts for billionaires and handcuffs for the poor. Homelessness will never be solved by making it illegal to live outside, because homelessness is not a legal issue. Homelessness is basic math: there just are not enough houses that poor, disabled, and working-class people can afford.