

In a study conducted by Susan Frisch at Princeton University, participants viewed photos of people and then of objects to determine what parts of their brains reacted to each. Afterward, they were shown photos of people who were obviously homeless or drug addicted. Instead of registering in the brain as people, these individuals registered as objects. While there may be many reasons for this result, it is extremely disturbing and calls into question our basic notions of humanity. If we can see the homeless as the people they are, we can tackle the problem and solve it. Included here are some ways we are and can continue to address this important issue.

- Karen Richards

“Home is a notion that only nations of the homeless fully appreciate and only the uprooted comprehend.”

- Wallace Stegner

In This Issue

- [From the Executive Director](#)
- [Criminalization, Discrimination & Economic Profiling](#)
- [Homelessness in Vermont](#)
- [Fact or Myth?](#)



Did you know?

According to the [2017 Point In Time Count Report](#), on a single day in January, 1225 Vermonters were homeless. This is an increase of 11% compared to the previous year. Of the 1225 counted, 306 were children.

The [McKinney-Vento Act](#) is a federal law that ensures that children, who are homeless are allowed to continue to attend the school they attended previously.

The [Vermont House Committee on General Housing and Military Affairs](#) is considering a bill [H.412](#), that establishes a homeless bill of rights and prohibits discrimination against people without homes.

Currently Rhode Island, Illinois, Connecticut and Puerto Rico have enacted Homeless Bills of Rights.

According to the [National Alliance to End Homelessness](#) 564,708 people experience homelessness on any given night in the U.S.; 36,907 are children; 47,725 are veterans; and 269,991 are people with disabilities who are unable to work.

The Alliance states that the two main causes for the rise in homelessness in the U.S. are a shortage of affordable housing and an increase in poverty. Read their full Report [here](#).

According to the [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness](#), map; California has the highest number of homeless people with 134,278; Wyoming has the least number at 873.

According the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty report, [No Safe Place](#), criminalization of homelessness is on the rise with many municipalities criminalizing "life-sustaining" activities of homeless individuals.



Criminalization, Discrimination and Economic Profiling

In April 2014 the National Coalition for the Homeless released a [report](#), *Discrimination and Economic Profiling Among the Homeless of Washington, DC*.

During the process of collecting data for purposes of drafting the report, homeless individuals were surveyed and asked to describe their personal experiences. One individual mentioned being turned away from a coffee shop; another was instructed by a police officer that she could not sleep lying down on a park bench and could do so only sitting up; and another was accused by an emergency medical technician of faking a stab wound in order to get out of the rain.

In November 2011 the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty released the [report](#), *The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities*. This report cites examples of types of criminalization related to homelessness including:

- Enactment and enforcement of laws making sleeping, sitting, and storing personal belongings in public spaces illegal.
- Enforcement of 'neutral laws' including loitering, jaywalking, or open container.
- 'Sweeps' of areas where homeless persons live in order to drive them out. Most often these sweeps result in the destruction of what little property they own.
- Enactment and enforcement of laws that punish homeless individuals for begging or pan-handling.
- Enactment and enforcement of laws prohibiting groups from sharing food with homeless people in public spaces.
- Enforcement of ordinances including public urination, regardless of whether there are, or more likely are not, public facilities available for a homeless individual to use.

All of these behaviors, enactments and enforcement actions are directed at one group of people simply due to their status— that of being without a home. People are targeted, harassed, denied services, jobs and housing opportunities. The homeless face daily implicit and explicit bias, discriminated against by businesses, law enforcement, agencies, medical facilities and people just like you and me each and every day.

On February 23, 2017 State Representatives Stevens, Carr, Christie, Fields, LaLonde, Morris, Rachelson, and Troiano introduced [H.412](#) proposing a homeless bill of rights and prohibiting discrimination against people without homes. Essentially this bill, if passed, would protect homeless individuals from further criminalization related to homelessness and from being discriminated against in employment, places of public accommodation and housing. This bill is currently being considered in the House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs.

"The intent here is to end homelessness." - Philip Mangano



Photo Credit: Rooted in Rights

Homelessness in Vermont

According to the 2017 *Point in Time Count Report*, on a cold January night in 2017, 1225 Vermonters experienced homelessness, three hundred and six of those counted were children. This count reflects an 11% increase from the previous year and does not include those 'at risk' of becoming homeless or those who are 'couch surfing.'

We expect the homeless to 'pull themselves up by their bootstraps' and magically not be homeless anymore without providing the level of support necessary to achieve this outcome. The homeless are human beings, most of whom through no fault of their own, are without a place to live. If 'lucky' enough to find a place under a bridge or in a wooded encampment, they are often 'swept out' because those having homes are uncomfortable with their presence. This has been the case since the early 1640's. How many years must pass before we as a human race stand together and make the significant changes necessary to help this vulnerable population?

According to the 2017 GAP *report*, *A Shortage of Affordable Homes*, Vermont has a deficit of 10,866 affordable rental homes available for the 18,138 extremely low renter households (defined as at or below 30% of the federal poverty level). Also reported is that the wage necessary to afford housing in Vermont (known as the "housing wage") is \$21.90 per hour, making it the fifth state with the largest affordability gap and the seventh most expensive rural state. Even if Vermont's minimum wage is raised to \$15 an hour by 2024, this still leaves a significant gap for those struggling with homelessness and/or finding/keeping affordable housing.

On June 27, 2017, in an effort to create safe and affordable housing for Vermonters, Governor Scott proposed and legislature passed a [\\$35 Million housing bond](#) intended to create rental housing and home ownership opportunities for 550 - 650 low to moderate income Vermonters. Construction of rental units began in the end of 2017.

Even with these progressive steps on behalf of some of Vermont's most vulnerable, the proposed [FY19 budget](#) cuts by the Trump Administration to programs such as HUD and USDA housing programs and the CDBG program would seriously undermine the steps being taken. These draconian cuts will increase the number of homeless individuals in our state and create more hardship by eliminating pretty much every grant and loan program that builds and repairs affordable housing. These cuts would also under-fund rental assistance, eliminate energy assistance and cut SNAP food assistance programs. These proposed cuts would decimate the safety net for our most vulnerable citizens and undermine the hard work Vermont is doing to ensure that all Vermonters have a safe, affordable place to live.



MYTH: Homeless people are all mentally ill.

FACT: 30 to 35% of homeless people in the U.S. have mental health disorders, but only 25% suffer from severe mental illness.

MYTH: Homeless people are all just lazy.

FACT: Survival requires daily activity seeking shelter, food, other life necessities and seeking employment—often without supports or use of technology.

MYTH: Ample services and supports exist to help the homeless.

FACT: Support is mainly focused on emergency services which offer little to no assistance to escape the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

MYTH: Being homeless is a choice or consequence of bad decisions.

FACT: Most have lost their housing due to illness, disability, gender violence or unemployment—none of which are by choice.

MYTH: Most homeless people are single white men or people of color.

FACT: Women with children make up 60% of our homeless population.

MYTH: Homeless people should only get housing if they prove they deserve it first.

FACT: This misconception perpetuates the stereotype that all homeless people are at fault for their housing status when for most, the cost of housing, loss of a job or a job that pays insufficient wages, divorce, domestic violence, untreated mental illness are the primary causes. Everyone deserves a home. It is a basic human right.

Contact Us

Vermont Human Rights Commission

14-16 Baldwin Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-6301

Phone: 802.828.1625

800.416.2010

Fax: 802.828.2481

Email: human.rights@vermont.gov

Visit us on the web at
hrc.vermont.gov

RESOURCES

[Silent Warriors](#)

[Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness](#)

[Agency of Human Services—Vermont Ending Family Homelessness 2020](#)

[Vermont Commission on Women—Housing & Homelessness](#)

[Vermont Coalition of Runaway & Homeless Youth Programs](#)

[National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)

[Spectrum Youth and Family Services](#)

[Vermont Agency of Education, Homeless Education](#)

[Vermont Law Help, Homeless Education](#)

[The Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program](#)