

# Comment Report

SSB 3175

A bill for an act relating to homelessness, providing penalties, and including effective date provisions.

Subcommittee Members: Green-CH, Knox, Webster

Date: 02/13/2024

Time: 08:30 AM

Location: Room 315

**Name:** Monika Owczarski

**Comment:** It is baffling to me how we can look at the most vulnerable, the most in need, the people struggling the most around us and choose to make their existence a crime. What are people supposed to do???? The minimum wage is still \$7.25. There are at times quite literally ZERO mental health beds in the state available. There are no where near enough shelters for people to go to. Over 200,000 Iowans were kicked off of Medicaid in 2023. People who are desperately struggling to survive, despite addiction, despite mental health struggles, should be given help. Not criminalization. My father is a pastor and I grew up in the church , and bills like this from the folks who talk about Jesus the most are the reason that myself and so many of my generation have left it. This is a disgrace. You should be ashamed of yourselves for even submitting this for committee.

**Name:** Brant Kassel

**Comment:** Homelessness is not a crime. It is a symptom of economic failures. We have enough houses and food and money to fix these issues. We lack a moral backbone to stand up for those who are worse off. Never mind that it will cost more to enforce these laws than to house these folks. Never mind that giving people money results in them finding stable housing. How shameful that in the face of human suffering and misery that we are somehow choosing penalties and punitive action for the crime of being poor or not being able to afford housing.

**Name:** Natalie Harwood

**Comment:** It is incredibly evil to further criminalize our most vulnerable population, people who are driven to the edge of their lives through OUR public policy, our economic policy. I oppose this bill because Im a human being who wants to be able to sleep at night.

**Name:** Natasha Drake

**Comment:** This bill will do more damage to our community and will criminalize our neighbors simply for existing. We cannot criminalize homelessness and simultaneously do nothing to ensure people have the proper support in life to meet their basic need. Most Iowans dont even have enough savings in the bank to cover a \$1,000 emergency. As someone with two chronic medical conditions who incurs thousands in unexpected bills at a time due to visits to the emergency room, surgeries, & ongoing treatments, were it not for the financial security & backing of my parents & grandparents, I too would be homeless. In this economy & society, someones wealth is not determined solely by hard work. It is by sheer luck & privilege. Human beings dont deserve punishment for being less fortunate, they deserve compassion. Nothing in this bill will do anything to solve homelessness and will instead only criminalize your family members, friends, & neighbors for situations that could be resolved by simply dedicating enough resources to our communitys needs.

**Name:** Amy Dushane

**Comment:** Homelessness is NOT a crime and it is our responsibility help find solutions to help and not hurt this population of our community.

**Name:** Maggie Canero

**Comment:** Its inhumane that we have to convince our government that people deserve housing and assistance before being incarcerated for not having a home. Its obvious you are attempting to maximize prison populations in order to exploit people for free labor using the 13th amendment. Its cowardly you try to hide these things from your constituents. Behind closed doors its easy to strip people of their most basic rights. Its a lot harder when you look us in the face, isnt it? We see what youre doing and we arent going to forget it. Your silence will not protect you. Your complicity will be remembered.

**Name:** Catlin Curry

**Comment:** Instead of actually doing something to help our most vulnerable citizens, this legislation actually puts in more rules about how to be homeless. Our house less community is already targeted by police officers and this will only make it worse. We should not be criminalizing homelessness but finding ways to support and take care of our neighbors.

**Name:** Kelsey Vail

**Comment:** Its unfathomable to me that our government would spend time and energy debating the legality of a persons right to exist. Poverty is cause by our government. If people are without adequate housing they have not broken a law, we as a society failed them. How can anyone think the answer is to criminalize people for circumstances beyond their control. This is absolutely shameful and a complete waste of time. Time and effort should be spent helping people without adequate housing not punishing them.

**Name:** Abigail Voyna

**Comment:** Homelessness is NOT a crime. Criminalizing those who are already struggling is dehumanizing. Those who are experiencing homelessness deserve respect, love, and assistance, not being arrested. Instead, the leaders of our city and state should be working closely with agencies already trying to fight homelessness. We should also be working towards raising the minimum wage so people can actually make a living!

**Name:** Michaelyn Mankel

**Comment:** Criminalizing people who dont have homes for falling asleep is cruel and it doesnt make anyone safer. Policies like this keep people entrenched in poverty. Please read this out loud, we want to penalize people who dont have beds to sleep in and then ask yourself what kind of human being would do this to another human being? People have died outside and alone MY NEIGHBORS IN DES MOINES HAVE FROZEN TO DEATH because they have nowhere safe to sleep.

**Name:** Jordan Scheibel

**Comment:** Criminalizing homelessness solves nothing, it just makes peoples lives who are already struggling, already looked down and dismissed, worse and more precarious. Nothing in this bill mitigates that fact. The fact that we cant house everyone in a wealthy society is indictment on our economy and our culture. Its an embarrassment. And it seems the response to that, instead addressing root causes, is to try to sweep people under the rug. Out of sight, out of mind. You dont like being confronted with them in public. You wish they would just go away. Its only going to get worse, because its only getting harder for people to stay housed and survived, and your only response will ever be policing and jail. When youre a hammer, everything is a nail.

**Name:** Abby Banks

**Comment:** Criminalizing homelessness is the most backwards way possible to solve

homelessness. First of all, how is someone experiencing homelessness supposed to find housing considering our minimum wage is still absolutely impossible to survive on? Secondly, if this bill passes and people are arrested and get charges on their record simply for living outside because THERE ARE NO OTHER OPTIONS, do you know how much harder that would make it for them to find housing??? Have you talked to anybody who has ever been homeless ever? Based on the contents on this bill, the answer is a resounding NO. If you had, I hope you'd be finding a solution to why our neighbors keep freezing to death instead of ways to incarcerate them.

**Name:** Emily Burress

**Comment:** This proposed bill is cruel and I strongly oppose it. We have the resources to create safe spaces for our most vulnerable communities but instead we use those resources to criminalize people. WHY? Where's our humanity?

**Name:** Tricia Ingram Williams

**Comment:** This is absolutely disgusting. Leave unhoused people alone! Sleeping in public spaces is no threat to anyone. Use common sense and decency to guide your decisions, rather than hatred and fear.

**Name:** Kaleb Van Fosson

**Comment:** So instead of helping take care of homeless people you are instead wanting to arrest them just for being poor? You people are disgusting. What a worthless wretched group of soulless monsters you must be to support this!

**Name:** Allan Merz-Rosendale

**Comment:** Instead of trying to fix homelessness with a stick, why not try a carrot? I don't see how criminalizing poverty eliminates it. If you want to solve a homelessness crisis, you provide better access to housing. Period. This is just unnecessary cruelty.

**Name:** Alejandro Murguia-Ortiz

**Comment:** This bill is disgusting and will do nothing to address homelessness. Punitive measures like these simply give the government more opportunities to ruin and end lives.

**Name:** Ren Mattson

**Comment:** Homelessness is not a crime. Please do not advance this bill. Instead of criminalizing homelessness, why not support our houseless neighbors? There are so many alternatives that could help houseless folks rather than further jeopardizing them for something that's out of their control.

**Name:** Molly Schintler

**Comment:** The fact that this is even up for comment is deeply disturbing. While the minimum wage is \$7.25 and mental health care is wildly inaccessible and veterans services often have long waitlists and the addiction epidemic rages, why would we ever punish our neighbors who are struggling the most? This proposed legislation is not the answer to Iowa's homelessness issues. Kicking people when they are down is not Iowa nice.

**Name:** Zakariyah Hill

**Comment:** Criminalizing houselessness adds an unjust layer of suffering to those already facing hardships. It's crucial to approach this issue with empathy, recognizing the underlying struggles people endure. Addressing homelessness through compassion and support rather than punishment is a step toward building a more compassionate society.

**Name:** Luis Gomez

**Comment:** criminalizing not having stable housing or a place to live is counter effective and

harmful to society. Our state legislators continue to move backwards and against the interests of our communities by attacking the most vulnerable of us. This bill does not solve anything, does not help anyone and does not make anyone safer. Please use your time and your positions as decision makers to create actual sustainable change for the betterment of our communities instead of using your positions to further militarize our state and further push your white supremacy agenda.

**Name:** Meghan Johnson

**Comment:** Homelessness is not a crime and should not be addressed as such. We need action that will aid Americas homeless population. Criminalizing activities that individuals depend on for survival is despicable.

**Name:** Cassandra Monroe

**Comment:** A majority of the population is one to three paychecks away from homelessness. I can say that as a service industry worker trying to put herself through college, I am also only two paychecks away from being homeless, I am lucky to have a landlord that is understanding but It can happen to any of us, for any reason for any time. If you only care about other people when it personally affects you and you cant see the humanity in all of us citizens, then you are not qualified for public government. To escape poverty is difficult. Most never escape. If youre going to put out a law like this, there should be a replacement or a countering law that PROTECTS our houseless citizens and encourages their recovery. Its so easy for you to make these laws from the comfort of your privacy. You have no idea what the citizens of your city are going through. For anyone reading my comment, May I offer a book suggestion? Poverty, by America Matthew Desmond. You will see the City of Des Moines reflected in this book. I saw this as someone who genuinely cares about her community and the people I see every day in my city. And, I can speak from experience as my family and I have been briefly homeless when I was a child.

**Name:** Luke Bascom

**Comment:** What is the intent of this bill? To penalize people who don't have beds to sleep in? What would that accomplish?? Who would it help? Policies like this are cruel they destroy lives & make the problem worse. What kind of person would support this bill?

**Name:** Annie Sarcone

**Comment:** Our houseless community shouldnt be treated like this. They are some of the most vulnerable in our communities and pushing them down when they are struggling is shameful. Ask yourselves do we as a state do enough to help our most vulnerable? What circumstances got them to where we are. You havent raised minimum wage, you havent made housing more affordable, and you are feeding our hungry. Absolutely ridiculous, trying to survive should never been seen as a crime. Do better

**Name:** Nicole Gomez

**Comment:** The moral test of a society is the way it cares for and treats its most vulnerable members. If you cared, you would want to solve the problem of homelessness. It is a no brainer that you cannot solve homelessness with fines, jail time and trashing the little possessions they have. Provide housing, stop othering and criminalizing poor people. Instead of creating more separation and barriers make it easier for these people to be helped by their community members who would love and care for them.

**Name:** Tayler Grittmann

**Comment:** This is absolutely abhorrent. Being unhoused is not a crime or even a personal failure. It's a failure of our government to not provide support to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. It is a surprise to no one that instead of providing humane solutions to a problem the government created that they are instead choosing to criminalize it so that they can further exploit those affected. We

all see what this is about. Do better.

- Name:** Millie Varley
- Comment:** You need to provide support to people who can't afford a home, not criminalize being unhoused.
- Name:** Michael Duede
- Comment:** Homeless people in Iowa already experience a huge amount of hardship and struggle. This bill would only make it harder on folks who are suffering. Under no circumstances should legal penalties be put on homeless people.
- Name:** Asher McClain
- Comment:** Provide access to housing. Provide a solution to the problem. Criminalizing poverty has never been and will never be a solution. Shame on you!
- Name:** Amber Sobczak
- Comment:** The way this body is able to ignore the many issues that plague this city in favor of criminalizing the existence of certain people is something to behold. Stop this fabrication of issues and hold yourselves accountable to the citizens you should be serving.
- Name:** Olivia Houchins-McCallum
- Comment:** The further criminalization of the unhoused has no benefits. Making existing while poor even more difficult and expensive and dangerous is a poor choice that will hurt everyone. All people deserve understanding, resources, and care.
- Name:** Elston Tortuga
- Comment:** It is dangerous to provide additional pathways to criminalize homelessness. Please direct state funding to the many services that are underfunded in our state, including health care, education, and infrastructure. Provide people with a universal basic income instead of penalizing people for finding shelter on public land. This bill must not pass!
- Name:** Luis No last name
- Comment:** I am not gonna sit here and try to appeal to your humanity as you've proven time and time again that you have none. I'm addressing Iowans at this point. Dear working class Iowa, I see you struggle to make ends meet while rich Republicans and Democrats divvy up your tax dollars and deny you your thriving wages. Wages they hold over your heads to threaten you with the same unfortunate fate our houseless siblings endure. I see you struggle as they push on an AntiTrans bill targeting you while you just wish to live on peace and in community. I see you struggle as these people prioritize the profit they make over the death of 10s of thousands civilians in Gaza and the West Bank telling us, we don't have money for Iowans sorry we were too busy murdering children and paying for others healthcare. I see you struggle when these rich politicians introduce bills that criminalizes homelessness, a human condition only capable of existing under a system that prioritizes capital over human lives. I urge you as working class people to start coming together to build the infrastructure we need to take care of each other and the community because the people sitting in that capital don't care about you or your families and much less the most vulnerable people in our community. We are all much more likely to find ourselves at the receiving end of these atrocious bills than we will ever be able to live these cushy lifestyles that these politicians live in while the rest of Iowa struggles. They only care about their pockets and the sooner we realize we're on the same team, they lose.
- Name:** Tina Patterson
- Comment:** Dear Legislators Do NOT Please please. Do NOT. EVER use religion or faith or morality in your personal or professional statements ever again if you push this

legislation through as law. What has happened to our humanity and our core values?  
This is sickening.