

Bill: HB1662

<https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2025/bills/house/1662/details>

Committee: House Government and Regulatory Reform

Chairperson: Representative Miller

Testimony:

Thank you, Chairperson Miller and committee for giving me the time to speak about an issue that has affected me for most of my life. I am Sarah, I come here today from Fort Wayne and I'm a policy fellow at the Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute. The Institute is supporting my efforts to advocate for policies I'm passionate about. With that being said, my opinions stated here are my own and do not represent the institute. I am NOT in support of this bill, which expands the criminalization of being homeless. This bill is not consistent with our values as Americans, we value caring for our fellow neighbors. Punitive action against those who have no choice but to sleep outside is absolutely abhorrent and doesn't align. Suggesting that we should do anything other than protect our most vulnerable would be very telling about where our representative's priorities lie.

Let me provide you with some context with my story of experiencing housing instability and homelessness. It's the early 2000's, my siblings and I were still pretty young. My parents would tell us for the first time that it is likely that we will lose our house. This was a yearly event. I became a runaway at age 14 and thus homeless for the first time but not the last. Despite this, I graduated from North Side High School in 2013 and became a fulltime student at the University of Saint Francis while working full time. All the while living in an extremely dilapidated farmhouse without heating or air conditioning. In 2015, I lived in a 1996 Ford Taurus where I was constantly harassed by police and threatened with tickets. I never once understood: How was that going to stop me from being homeless?

Policies and actions targeting homeless individuals only worsen the crisis. Between the years of 2006-2017, the National Homelessness Law Center tracked 187 cities that used a punitive model for policing homelessness. Those cities saw significant growth in violations that these ordinances sought to prevent. These ordinances are influenced by the public perception held by individuals who believe that unhoused people threaten the profitability of business, ignoring the humanity of those who are homeless. By using punitive approaches to addressing homelessness these cities worsen the financial conditions of those they punish for experiencing homelessness (Tars, 2021).

Housing First is the solution to end homelessness instead of spending taxpayer dollars on jailing these people. This bill further dehumanizes those that are the most vulnerable in our society and shows a complete rejection of care for our fellow humans, neighbors and Hoosiers in need. Any approval of this bill would only prove to Hoosiers

that you have never truly known struggle and that their representatives do not hold a value of care for the lives of struggling Americans.

I call on you to reject this bill, to show you care about those struggling with homelessness, to help prevent situations like I experienced and show Hoosiers you care for them. I thank you for your time in listening to my story today and hope it reinforces the value of listening to those who are or have been impacted by issues you are working on. Thank you.

Works Cited

Tars, E (2021) Criminalization of Homelessness, National Low Income Housing Coalition https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/AG-2021/06-08_Criminalization-of-Homelessness.pdf