

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/no-access-to-justice-homelessness-and-jail>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

On any given night in the United States, more than 550,000 people experience homelessness. The U.S. legal system criminalizes survival behaviors associated with homelessness and fails to acknowledge that people who are homeless face impossible odds within the legal process. Black people, who already face a disproportionate risk of homelessness, are exposed to even greater disproportionate levels of policing after becoming homeless.

This report outlines the ways in which people experiencing homelessness are vulnerable within the system and how this leads to negative outcomes at each justice system decision point. It also highlights the urgent need for alternate approaches to break the cycle. In a year when the United States is weathering an unprecedented public health crisis, it is more important than ever that jurisdictions implement policies that prioritize safety, health, and justice for all.

The criminalization of homelessness leads to a never-ending and escalating cycle that shuffles people from the streets to the jail and back again.

Citations for low-level offenses associated with homelessness such as sitting or camping outside often result in arrest and jail time if a person fails to appear for an initial court date.

Formerly incarcerated people are nearly 10 times more likely to experience homelessness than the general public.

Fees for probation or parole such as required alcohol treatment and electronic monitoring fees can add up to amounts that are impossible for people who are experiencing homelessness to pay.

PUBLICATION

PUBLICATION

PUBLICATION

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

Vera Institute of Justice. All rights reserved.