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Senior Project Proposal:
Reagan M.

I. Title of Project:

Homelessness: A Divide

II. Contact Information:

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Homelessness: A Divide

The most efficient way to get, and keep, the homeless population off the streets is by dealing with homelessness in a non-punitive manner.

Thesis:

With the housing market on the rise it is important to notice that the rate of homelessness is also increasing. With this increase there are different ways to deal with homelessness, the most efficient way to get and keep the homeless population off the streets is by dealing with homelessness in a non-punitive manner.

Background:

My interest in politics started very young, both of my parents worked in local politics my whole life. When my parents took on new jobs they started working more closely with the local politicians and I got old enough to start asking questions and researching the propositions and laws passed in my city and state. When the division in the political parties rose in 2016, I started wondering why. In 11th grade (2022-2023) I took a U.S. history seminar course where sometimes throughout the class one of the teachers mentioned that political parties shouldn't matter in real-life experiences, but more often than not many people take it into consideration.

Part of my mom's job is keeping downtown safe and that sometimes involves removing homeless pedestrians. I never really understood why they had to be arrested. My mom explained that they had a place to stay at night without being in danger.

There are a lot of personal contradictions in my life especially involving homelessness. I try to keep an open mind and remember that the pedestrians are just doing their best, like everyone else. When I go to work or hang out with my mom there is a lot of talk about how inconvenient the homeless are. One of the problems is there is not enough of a push to find a place for them to go, they are only perceived as annoying or a problem if they are acting out and that stereotype expands to all homeless people, even the ones who want help.

Once my parents started talking about retirement the phrase "getting away from the crazy" was getting thrown around. It doesn't take a genius to realize that part of that "crazy" is the homeless population of Flagstaff, Arizona. I had to remind them that you can't get rid of homeless people. But the conversation got me thinking of the most beneficial way to approach homelessness.

Problem:

One of the ways that Former president Trump described homelessness is a "public safety issue" (Meyer). With this view being projected at the federal level many cities have been taking measures to put a stop to homelessness and try to prevent it. There are two common approaches when trying to solve homelessness: The punitive approach, police involvement, banning tent cities, threatening arrest, etc. The other option is the non-punitive measure, establishing free housing, and as little police involvement as necessary.

Argument:

When approaching the subject of homelessness, a non-punitive measure is most likely to advocate for a policy that is more focused on the long-run aspect of things. “Unpaid tickets or criminal convictions can severely restrict homeless persons’ employment options. Jobs that require a driver’s license, for example, may not be available to a homeless person who has had her license suspended because of unpaid fines or a criminal conviction. It’s difficult to find a landlord to rent to you if you have a criminal conviction.” (United Way of King County, 2022) This non-punitive mindset is beneficial because it allows a homeless person to gain opportunities to obtain a job, or a house, and get them off the streets, permanently, in an easier fashion than if they had a criminal record, even something small.

Counter argument:

When approaching the subject of homelessness, punitive measures are going to enforce the usage of police. Former President Trump’s policy relied heavily on the involvement of police. For example, Trump’s executive order promotes police involvement “executive order on homelessness to assign new resources to police departments to remove homeless encampments.” (Capps, 2019). With the police involvement and risk of disproportionate violence, the homeless population is more likely to alter their criminal record making it harder to get off the streets, keeping the cycle going.

Reflection:

A reflection will be turned in at the culmination of my project, alongside my final product. The reflection will describe my experiences in my internship and my perspectives through my research on this topic.

Literature review

Homelessness is one of the subjects where you must be in the know, to be aware of just how bad of an issue it is. It seems there are many crossovers between punitive and non-punitive policies, but there's been a 50% rise in camping bans in the past 15 years, 72% of cities have such bans, and there has been a push for major housing changes. This grey area becomes black and white because when talking about homelessness the candidates will get the public to associate punitive policies with Republicans and non-punitive policies with Democrats.

A non-punitive policy also looks to address the lack of housing and healthcare. When looking at the support of these policies the arguments tend to turn fiscal, it is cheaper to build housing than to go through jail and court costs, and the annual savings are \$13,531 per person. This alternate housing not only keeps people off of the street, but it provides a long-term solution that allows homeless people to go to someplace that isn't as overcrowded as a shelter, including "services like meals, medical care, and help to find housing" 24/7 (Rihl, 2023).

Many cities have been trying to combat homelessness by limiting police involvement "A Democratic-backed bill in the Maryland state house would prevent police from enforcing Failure to Obey Lawful Orders laws" (Hauf & Foldi, 2022). Another idea that has been pushed into action is turning hotels into alternate housing. This idea is seen in action through other cities "The Lantern is not the first hotel-turned-housing in Flagstaff. In 2022, Flagstaff Shelter Services purchased the 58-room Howard Johnson Motel on Route 66, now called The Crown. The \$6.19 million purchase was also made possible by ARPA [American Rescue Plan Act] funds from the state." (Rihl, 2023).

Supporting more punitive measures is showcased primarily by aiming for Government-run tent cities on inexpensive, government land, staffed with medical assistance, and if someone is camping elsewhere they will get arrested (Sonier, Kamisar. 2023). One of the driving forces behind these set tent cities is the belief that homeless people lead to an increased criminal action "Republican state senator Justin Ready said Ruth's bill would "encourage vagrancy like they have in places like San Francisco," worsening crime in Baltimore and other poverty-stricken areas in the state." (Hauf & Foldi, 2022) and view homelessness as a threat to public safety "A Cicero Institute poll found that seven in ten Georgia voters think that homeless camps threaten public safety. This concern is one reason why an even higher percentage of voters want the state legislature to ban street camping" (Meyer, 2023). What goes hand in hand with the ban on street camping is the extra push law enforcement gets to remove people from public property "Advocates say that they expect an executive order on homelessness to assign new resources to police departments to remove homeless encampments and even strip housing funds from cities that choose to tolerate these encampments" (Capps & Holder, 2019)

California is a prime example of punitive measures being pushed. Claiming that local intervention has shown "little evidence of success" (California Senate Republicans, 2022). This lack of success is also shown because the state that is under federal pressure is California. The federal government is going to "crackdown" on the homeless population, a "federal intervention in Los Angeles" (Capps & Holder, 2019).

Through my senior project, the aim is to explain that non-punitive efforts are more successful at getting and keeping homeless people off the street. Not only are the non-punitive efforts cheaper they also allow homeless people to get loans and jobs because the lack of police involvement leads to a decrease in criminal records. Solving homelessness will not be a short project, and there will need to be a mix of policies passed, however, the base of all those policies needs to be non-punitive to ensure homelessness can be prevented in the long run.

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