

Jeremy Frazee

Professor Biddle

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The Impact of a Homeless Bill of Rights: An Econometric Analysis

Introduction:

Policymakers have sought to reduce or eliminate homelessness for decades. Over years, states have experimented with ways to cut down the homelessness rate. An emerging trend at the has been to establish a “Homeless Bill of Rights” (HBOR). Generally, these laws affirm that homeless people have the right to privacy of property in public spaces, the right to vote, the right to feel safe, and the right to non-obstructively seek shelter, social services, legal aid, and education (Rankin 2015, Bowhay 2019 and Sheffield 2013). They have been enacted in three states—Illinois, Connecticut, and Rhode Island (Rankin 2015, Bowhay 2019 and Sheffield 2013). These laws seek to lower the rate of homelessness and should accordingly have a significant impact on decreasing homelessness related crime, including larceny and burglary. Policymakers and economists should be interested in this topic because it provides an innovative and relatively cost-effective way to reduce homelessness. If these laws are successful in curbing homelessness and decreasing homelessness related crimes, policymakers in other states may want to implement similar measures. If there is shown to be little or no impact from these laws, policymakers may want to implement differently crafted policies to solve this issue.

In this paper, I seek to assess the following: 1. Do homeless bill of rights have an impact on the homelessness population in the jurisdictions in which it was passed? 2. Do homeless bill

of rights have an impact on the larceny rate in the jurisdictions in which it was passed? 3. Do homeless bill of rights have an impact on the burglary rate in the jurisdictions in which it was passed?

Background:

A. Some homeless bills of rights have been implemented longer than others. Rhode Island implemented a homeless bill of rights in 2012, Illinois implemented a homeless bill of rights in 2013, and Connecticut implemented a homeless bill of rights in 2013 (Rankin 2015, Bowhay 2019 and Sheffield 2013). While all three of these laws generally follow the principles of affirming negative rights, there are some significant differences. For example, the Illinois bill allows homeless plaintiffs to recover monetary damages and attorney fees should their rights be found to be infringed on (Rankin 2015). The Connecticut bill differs in that it more broadly defines those who are afforded the rights from just the homeless to those that are on the verge of being homeless (Bowhay 2019). Before these bills were implemented, there had been a long history of trying to find policies to combat homelessness in these states and across the country. However, for all three states at the state level, there had been generally no laws that sought to affirm the negative rights of homeless people. Instead, many cities implemented laws and ordinances that criminalized many things that homeless people do. For example, Chicago did and still does design certain architecture so that homeless people are driven from sleeping in certain areas of the city (Holliday 2014). The city of New Haven, Connecticut is often criticized by homelessness reform advocates for giving tickets out to homeless people found sleeping in certain public buildings (Zahn 2018). At a federal level, there has been no major legislation passed in Congress affecting homeless people since Lyndon B. Johnson's war on poverty, which ended in the passage of

several bills such as The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Food Stamp Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the Social Security Act of 1965 (Library).

- B.** There are several arguments for and against HBORs. At the time of the passage of the Rhode Island Homeless bill of Rights, the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless argued, “The bill is both an educational tool to raise awareness of the ways in which people experiencing homelessness that have been discriminated against and a legal tool to enforce people’s rights.” The executive director of the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless emphasized that while the language of the bill was very simple, the impacts of the bill were very large on reducing homelessness in Rhode Island (Rhode Island first state to Pass Homeless Bill of rights). At the time of the passage of the Illinois homeless bill of rights, governor of Illinois Pat Quinn praised the law for protecting “fundamental” rights (Bowbay 2019). He along with members of the Illinois Senate argued that it would be a good step towards eradicating homelessness in Illinois. However, some might think that these approaches do not go far enough. For example, none of these laws put any concrete funding into combating homelessness. Furthermore, there are no punishment mechanisms for cities or municipalities that take actions to criminalize aspects of homelessness, such as penalizing a city for giving too many tickets to homeless people or building anti-homeless architecture. Critics would say that without such fundamental aspects, these bills are little more than window dressing. Other critics might argue that these types of bills incentivize criminal behavior among the homeless and that previous restrictions on homeless populations were necessary for curbing crime and ensuring public safety.

Literature Review:

There are several studies that have looked at similar outcomes to the ones that I look at in this paper. For example, a study of homelessness in Chicago, Palmer et al. (2018) found that access to emergency financial assistance reduced arrest rates for violent crime by 0.86 percentage points over the next three years, relative to a control group arrest rate of 3.7 percent (a 23 percent decrease) (Palmer, C., Phillips, D., & Sullivan, J. 2018). Evans et al. (2016) points out that access to financial assistance reduced the rate of shelter entry within three months from 1.6 to 1.4 percent (12.5% decrease), and that access to financial assistance reduced the time spent in a shelter over the next six months reduced from 3.1 days to 2.6 days (16% decrease) (Evans, W., Sullivan, J., & Wallskog, M. 2016). Other major studies have linked the role of affordable housing to homelessness in society. For example, policies that restrict the supply of housing may increase prices and crowd out low- income households (Glaeser, Gyourko, and Saks 2003, 2005; Gyourko et al. 2013). Thus, the number of homeless people would increase because of such a policy.

Additionally, there are some economists who argue that zoning ordinances may contribute to the homelessness problem. They argue that zoning ordinances reduce the flexibility of housing supply prices, limiting the ability of the housing prices to respond when demand for housing increases which then increases renters' costs (Glaeser, Gyourko, and Saks 2005). Other economists have argued that targeted subsidies for low-income people may reduce homelessness. For example, some found that greater federal funding for supportive housing had no effect on the unsheltered population and increased the number of people in sheltered housing (Lucas 2017). However, there has not been significant research into a negative rights-based approach to combatting homelessness.

Economic Theory:

For this analysis, I use Gary Becker's theory of crime. The model assumes that rational criminals compare the benefit of violating the law with the cost (Economic Theory of Criminal Behavior, 2018). Becker hypothesized that when planning to commit a crime, a potential criminal compares the probability of successfully committing the crime and its projected benefits vs. the probability of getting caught while committing the crime and its expected disbenefits (Economic Theory of Criminal Behavior, 2018). For example, the benefit of stealing a T.V. might be the price that it can be sold for and the disbenefit of getting caught could be a fine, jail time, and social stigma associated with criminal behavior. The would-be criminal would multiply the benefit and the disbenefit by the probability of successfully committing the crime or not. Then, we would use the calculated expected value to make a cost benefit choice. This model is an extension of the neoclassical economic model (Economic Theory of Criminal Behavior, 2018).

We can use this model to understand how homeless bills of rights may affect criminal behavior among homeless people. Specifically, if the HBOR works as theorized by its proponents, then it would impact the benefits of homeless people committing crimes and the probabilities that they would do so. The model would also assume that homelessness related crimes would increase. This is because HBORs decrease the probability that homeless persons would be arrested for homelessness related crimes, as many of the policies that criminalized homelessness behaviors would be gone or limited. It also decreases the disbenefits for committing said crimes. For example, if a homeless person no longer has a substantial punishment for property crimes, they might be more inclined to commit them. However, it is

important to keep in mind that proponents of HBORs would argue that the crimes that are targeted with HBORs should not be crimes in the first place and that they specifically target homeless people unfairly.

Empirical Strategy/Data:

- A.** To explore the relationship between homelessness and the homeless bill of rights, I construct three Ordinary Least Squares regressions. The independent variables are constructed identically, while the dependent variables differ. The independent variables are as follows: UnemploymentRate, which represents the yearly seasonally unadjusted unemployment rate for a given state or metropolitan area; hbor, a dummy variable represents the presence of a homeless bill of rights in the observed jurisdiction; jur1-jur6, which control for jurisdiction specific trends for the treatment and control jurisdictions that I will run the regression over; and yrdum1-yrdum13, dummy variables that account for year on year differences from 2007-2019. Jur1 represents Connecticut (treatment group), jur2 represents Chicago (treatment group), jur3 represents Rhode Island (treatment group), jur4 represents Detroit (control group), jur5 represents Indiana (control group), and jur6 represents Delaware (control group). The control jurisdictions were chosen based on comparability to size and population density as compared to their treatment counterparts. Dependent variables will represent the homelessness populations, the larceny rates, and the burglary rate in these jurisdictions.
- B.** The data that I have collected comes from three main sources. The homelessness estimates for cities and states comes from the Department of Housing and Human Development. Every year, HUD must collect and release homelessness totals for certain areas as part of their Continuum of Care (CoC) mission. HUD has hosted this collected

data on their website with records going back to 2007. For my analysis, I use the time periods of 2007-2019. I then log the homelessness data so that trends can be more easily observed in the analysis. The data is hosted here:

<https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hdx/>. The second data source I use are crime rates collected from the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). Every year, the FBI releases crime data for all 50 states in the United States. Crime is classified into several different subcategories, including violent crime, murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, property crime, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. For this regression, I also look at the outcome of larceny and burglary crime rates from the years 2007-2019. The FBI crime data is located at this link:

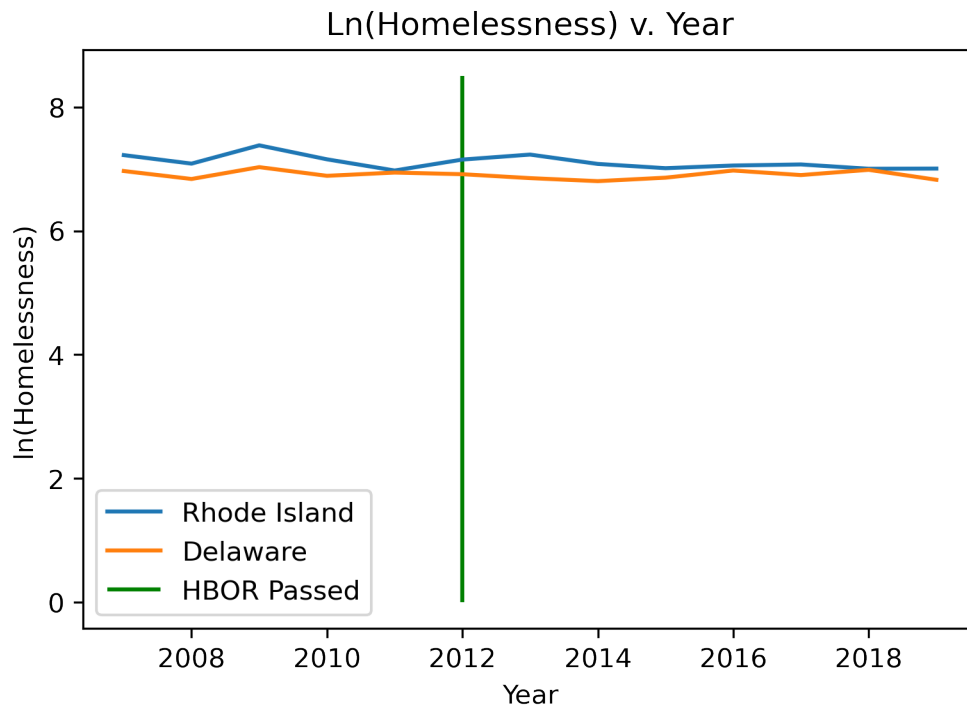
<https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr>. I also use annual, seasonally unadjusted unemployment rates for the various metropolitan areas or states observed in this investigation to account for potential fluctuations in the observed crime rates and homelessness rates. This data comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics

(<https://www.bls.gov>). The last variables included in the regressions are dummy variables for the presence of a homeless bill of rights, dummy variables for the observation years, and dummy variables for each observed jurisdiction. The variable for the presence of a homeless bill of rights is set to 0 for year in which it was not enacted and 1 for years in which it was enacted. If the bill was passed partway through a year, it is represented by a fraction of how long it was implemented in that year. The year dummies account for year over year trends that are not relevant to this analysis. The jurisdiction dummies account for jurisdiction specific trends that are not relevant to this analysis. The treatment jurisdictions are Connecticut, Chicago, and Rhode Island. Their

respective control jurisdictions are Indiana, Detroit, and Delaware. All measurements are from the 2007-2019 period. The generalized model is as follows:

$$\text{C. Outcome}_{jt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{HBOR}_{jt} + \beta_2 \text{Unemployment Rate}_{jt} + \text{<jurisdiction dummies>} + \text{<year dummies>}$$

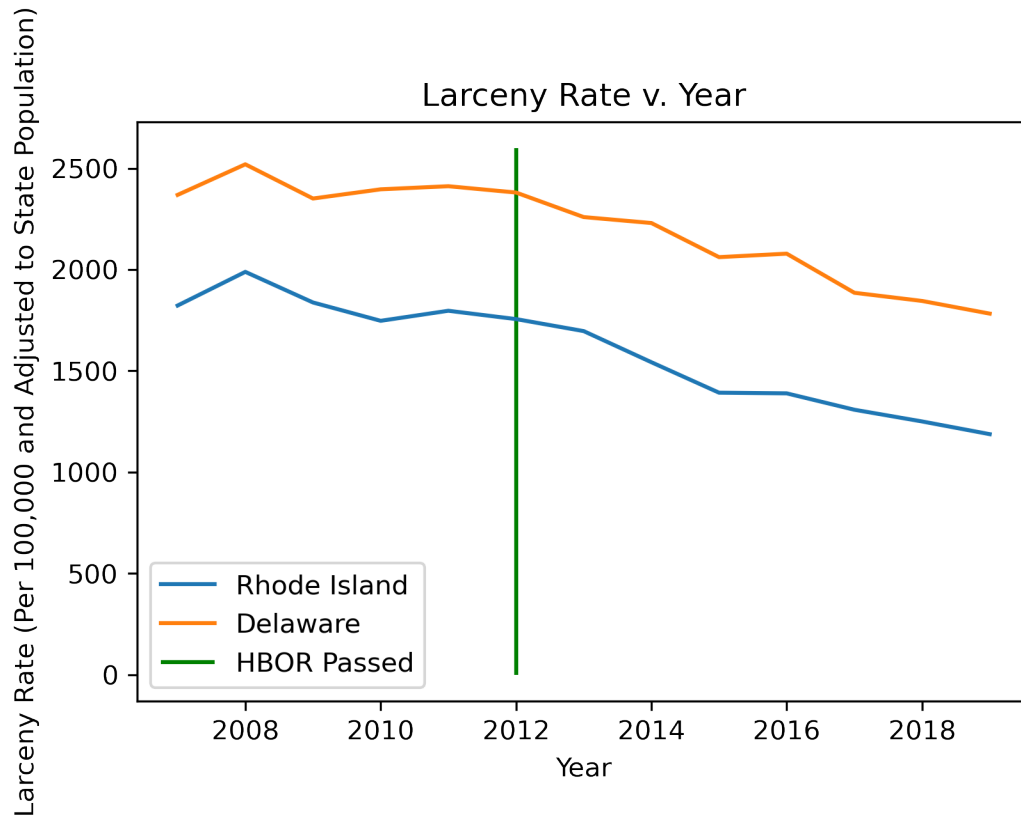
Descriptive Statistics/Graphs:



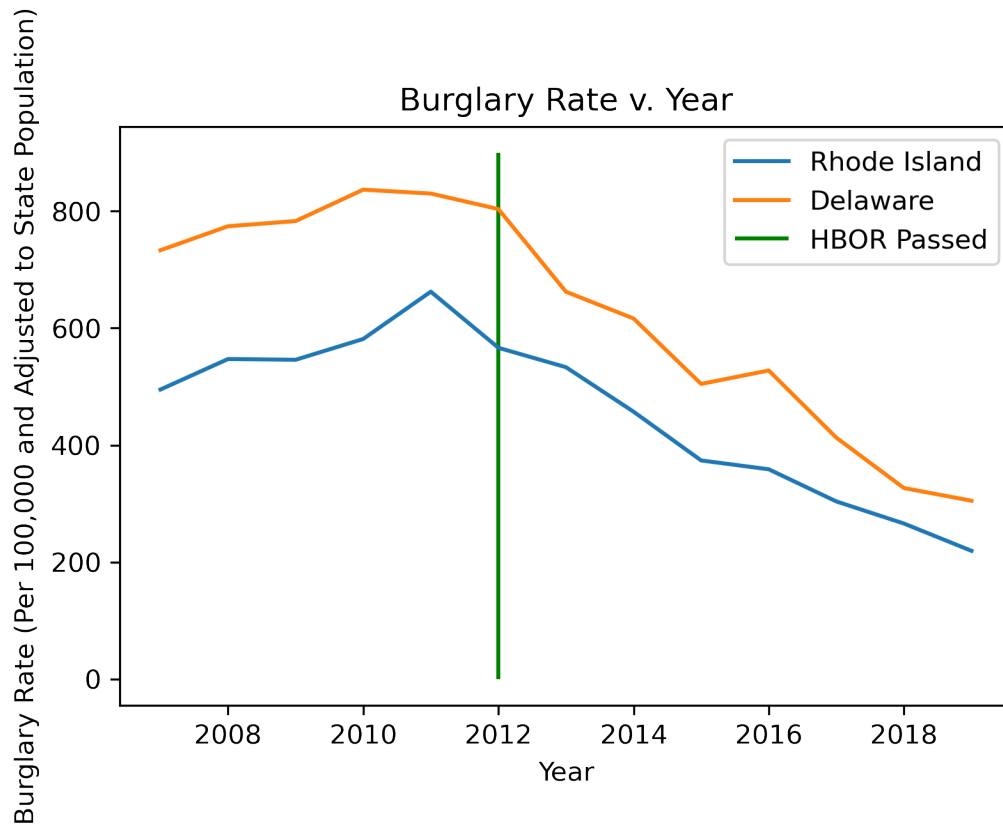
Here we see the effect of the homeless bill of rights after it was passed in Rhode Island vs. the same period in a control jurisdiction that did not implement HBOR (Delaware).

The x axis represents time. The y axis represents the natural log of the homelessness population in the selected jurisdictions of Rhode Island and Delaware. From this, we can discern that there was a slight jump in $\ln(\text{homelessness})$ in Rhode Island after the passage of the bill followed by a decline. In the control state, we see that there is a decline in

ln(homelessness) after 2012, followed by a slight increase that then converges to a ln(homelessness) similar level as compared to Rhode Island.



Here we see the effect of the homeless bill of rights after it was passed in Rhode Island vs. the same period in a control jurisdiction (Delaware) on the larceny rate. The x axis represents time. The y axis represents the larceny rate (adjusted to population) in the selected jurisdictions of Rhode Island and Delaware. From this, we can discern that there was a stark decline in the larceny rate in Rhode Island after the passage of the bill. In the control state, we see a similar trend.



Here we see the effect of the homeless bill of rights after it was passed in Rhode Island vs. the same period in a control jurisdiction (Delaware) on the burglary rate. The x axis represents time. The y axis represents the burglary rate (adjusted to population) in the selected jurisdictions of Rhode Island and Delaware. From this, we can discern that there was a steep decline in the burglary rate after the passage of the HBOR. In the control state, we see a similar overall trend after the year 2012.

Regression Results:

Regression #1 (ln(Homelessness) as Dependent Variable):

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	78
Model	35.2867844	19	1.85719918	F(19, 58)	=	32.02
Residual	3.36427227	58	.058004694	Prob > F	=	0.0000
				R-squared	=	0.9130
				Adj R-squared	=	0.8844
Total	38.6510567	77	.501961775	Root MSE	=	.24084

lnHomelessn~s	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Unemployment~e	.0854344	.0407802	2.09	0.041	.0038039	.1670648
hbor	.2213295	.1120621	1.98	0.053	-.0029872	.4456462
jurdum1	.9995038	.1102243	9.07	0.000	.7788658	1.220142
jurdum2	1.566233	.1224834	12.79	0.000	1.321056	1.811411
jurdum3	-.0908912	.1335597	-0.68	0.499	-.35824	.1764575
jurdum4	.8368601	.1431814	5.84	0.000	.5502515	1.123469
jurdum5	1.377716	.0983291	14.01	0.000	1.180888	1.574543
jurdum6	0 (omitted)					
yrdum1	.7753117	.1609684	4.82	0.000	.4530985	1.097525
yrdum2	.3617738	.1916908	1.89	0.064	-.021937	.7454847
yrdum3	.0604399	.3164599	0.19	0.849	-.5730234	.6939032
yrdum4	-.0338063	.3224647	-0.10	0.917	-.6792896	.6116769
yrdum5	.0266882	.288708	0.09	0.927	-.5512236	.6046
yrdum6	.0653004	.2633843	0.25	0.805	-.4619206	.5925213
yrdum7	.0559528	.2387779	0.23	0.816	-.422013	.5339186
yrdum8	.0759113	.1893046	0.40	0.690	-.3030231	.4548457
yrdum9	.178591	.1569196	1.14	0.260	-.1355178	.4926998
yrdum10	.196201	.1488133	1.32	0.193	-.1016812	.4940833
yrdum11	.1704688	.1414283	1.21	0.233	-.1126307	.4535682
yrdum12	.2403578	.139289	1.73	0.090	-.0384594	.519175
yrdum13	0 (omitted)					
_cons	6.265062	.1529658	40.96	0.000	5.958868	6.571256

Regression #2 (LarcenyRate as Dependent Variable):

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	78
Model	9546125.74	19	502427.671	F(19, 58)	=	144.17
Residual	202121.191	58	3484.84813	Prob > F	=	0.0000
				R-squared	=	0.9793
				Adj R-squared	=	0.9725
Total	9748246.93	77	126600.61	Root MSE	=	59.033

LarcenyRate	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
UnemploymentRate	13.53137	9.995615	1.35	0.181	-6.477026	33.53977
hbor	39.05639	27.4675	1.42	0.160	-15.92579	94.03857
jurdum1	-761.734	27.01704	-28.19	0.000	-815.8145	-707.6535
jurdum2	-525.9571	30.02187	-17.52	0.000	-586.0524	-465.8618
jurdum3	-653.4518	32.73677	-19.96	0.000	-718.9815	-587.922
jurdum4	-733.7559	35.09513	-20.91	0.000	-804.0064	-663.5053
jurdum5	-246.0633	24.10141	-10.21	0.000	-294.3075	-197.8191
jurdum6	0 (omitted)					
yrdum1	700.9228	39.4549	17.77	0.000	621.9453	779.9004
yrdum2	722.9513	46.98526	15.39	0.000	628.9001	817.0025
yrdum3	545.329	77.56737	7.03	0.000	390.061	700.5969
yrdum4	487.1237	79.03921	6.16	0.000	328.9096	645.3379
yrdum5	500.4952	70.7651	7.07	0.000	358.8435	642.1469
yrdum6	475.7526	64.55803	7.37	0.000	346.5256	604.9795
yrdum7	364.3036	58.52675	6.22	0.000	247.1496	481.4576
yrdum8	285.2928	46.40039	6.15	0.000	192.4124	378.1733
yrdum9	218.3024	38.46251	5.68	0.000	141.3113	295.2935
yrdum10	221.7425	36.47558	6.08	0.000	148.7287	294.7564
yrdum11	151.4801	34.66543	4.37	0.000	82.08974	220.8705
yrdum12	83.04373	34.14107	2.43	0.018	14.70295	151.3845
yrdum13	0 (omitted)					
_cons	1756.815	37.49338	46.86	0.000	1681.764	1831.866

Regression #3 (BurglaryRate as Dependent Variable):

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	78
Model	2362885.27	19	124362.383	F(19, 58)	=	106.96
Residual	67438.103	58	1162.72591	Prob > F	=	0.0000
				R-squared	=	0.9723
				Adj R-squared	=	0.9632
Total	2430323.37	77	31562.6412	Root MSE	=	34.099

BurglaryRate	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
UnemploymentRate	7.204381	5.773727	1.25	0.217	-4.35299	18.76175
hbor	110.3494	15.86594	6.96	0.000	78.59024	142.1085
jurdum1	-338.5642	15.60575	-21.69	0.000	-369.8025	-307.3259
jurdum2	-226.7507	17.34141	-13.08	0.000	-261.4633	-192.038
jurdum3	-247.5717	18.90961	-13.09	0.000	-285.4234	-209.72
jurdum4	-92.17771	20.27186	-4.55	0.000	-132.7562	-51.59918
jurdum5	-21.95216	13.9216	-1.58	0.120	-49.81928	5.914956
jurdum6	0	(omitted)				
yrddum1	404.7893	22.79018	17.76	0.000	359.1698	450.4088
yrddum2	415.6861	27.13991	15.32	0.000	361.3597	470.0126
yrddum3	390.239	44.80493	8.71	0.000	300.5522	479.9258
yrddum4	392.7216	45.6551	8.60	0.000	301.333	484.1103
yrddum5	421.3325	40.87576	10.31	0.000	339.5107	503.1542
yrddum6	365.0695	37.2904	9.79	0.000	290.4247	439.7144
yrddum7	263.4712	33.80657	7.79	0.000	195.8	331.1424
yrddum8	179.5229	26.80207	6.70	0.000	125.8727	233.173
yrddum9	129.9189	22.21695	5.85	0.000	85.4468	174.3909
yrddum10	135.3676	21.06924	6.42	0.000	93.19296	177.5423
yrddum11	83.33723	20.02365	4.16	0.000	43.25553	123.4189
yrddum12	36.82579	19.72077	1.87	0.067	-2.649618	76.3012
yrddum13	0	(omitted)				
_cons	336.7817	21.65715	15.55	0.000	293.4302	380.1332

Discussion of Regression Results:

A. From regression result #1, which used $\ln(\text{homelessness})$ as the dependent variable, we can observe several findings. First, the coefficient on the Unemploymentrate variable is 0.0854344. The variable has a positive coefficient, so this that a one unit increase in the unemployment rate would result in a $100 \times (e^{(0.0854344)} - 1) = 8.92$ percent increase in the homelessness rate. To assess significance, this would mean in a population of 100,000 people, raising the unemployment rate by one unit would increase the amount of homeless people by nearly 9,000 people. This constitutes a massive impact. This variable has a p value of 0.041 and a t score of 2.09 indicating that the finding is statistically significant. The second variable we observe is the hbor variable. The variable has a positive coefficient of 0.2213294, so this would mean that every year is associated with an $100 \times (e^{(0.2213294)} - 1) = 24.77$ increase in the homelessness rate. To assess

significance, this would mean in a population of 100,000 there implementing this policy would increase the amount of homeless people by nearly 25,000 people. This constitutes a massive impact. This variable has a p value of 0.053 and a t score of 1.98 indicating that the finding is not statistically significant. Lastly, we can observe from the year dummy variables that there was a decrease in $\ln(\text{homelessness})$ from about 2007-2010, followed by an increase 2012 and onwards.

B. From regression result #2, which used *LarcenyRate* as the dependent variable, we can observe several findings. First, the coefficient on the *Unemploymentrate* variable is 13.53137. The variable has a positive coefficient, so this that a one unit increase in the unemployment rate would result in about a 13.5 unit increase in the larceny rate (per 100,000 people). This variable has a p value of 0.181 and a t score of 1.35 indicating that the finding is not statistically significant. The second variable we observe is the *hbor* variable. The variable has a positive coefficient of 39.05639, which means that an area that has implemented the HBOR with a population of 100,000 would have about 39 more crimes (per 100,000 people) which is about an $39/100,000 * 100 = 0.039\%$ increase. This constitutes a small, but measurable impact. This variable has a p value of 0.160 and a t score of 1.42 indicating that the finding is not statistically significant. Lastly, we can observe from the year dummy variables that there was a decrease in *LarcenyRate* from about 2007-2019.

C. From regression result #3, which used *BurglaryRate* as the dependent variable, we can observe several findings. First, the coefficient on the *UnemploymentRate* variable is 7.204381. The variable has a positive coefficient, so this that a one unit increase in the unemployment rate would result in about a 7.2 unit increase in burglary crime (per

100,000 people). This variable has a p value of 0.217 and a t score of 1.25 indicating that the finding is not statistically significant. The second variable we observe is the hbor variable. The variable has a positive coefficient of 110.3494, which means that an area that has implemented the HBOR with a population of 100,000 would have about a 110 more crimes which is about an $110/100,000 * 100 = 0.11\%$ increase. This constitutes a significant impact. This variable has a p value of 0.00 and a t score of 6.96 indicating that the finding is statistically significant. Lastly, we can observe from the year dummy variables that there was a decrease in BurglaryRate from about 2007-2019.

Conclusion:

I sought to answer the questions: 1. Do homeless bill of rights have an impact on the homelessness population in the jurisdictions in which it was passed? 2. Do homeless bill of rights have an impact on the larceny rate in the jurisdictions in which it was passed? 3. Do homeless bill of rights have an impact on the burglary rate in the jurisdictions in which it was passed? To do this, I used Becker's model of crime to construct three regressions that included the natural logarithm of the homelessness population, the burglary rate, and the larceny rate as the dependent variables. The models used the jurisdiction unemployment rates, as well as a dummy variable for the presence of a homeless bill of rights, dummy variables for the different jurisdictions measured, and year dummy variables.

After doing a regression analysis, I learned that the presence of HBORs in a jurisdiction is associated with a 24.77 percent increase in the homelessness population. However, this result was statistically insignificant. I also found that the presence of a homeless bill of rights in a jurisdiction is associated with a 39.05639 larceny crime increase (per 100,000 people). This finding was not statistically significant. Lastly, I found that the presence of a homeless bill of

rights in a jurisdiction is associated with 110.3494 more burglary crimes (per 100,000 people). This finding was statistically significant.

If I had more time to do this project, I would want to make my regression more precise by adding more variables to potentially catch more of the omitted variable bias found in my model. For example, I would want to add a variable to represent the housing costs in a certain area because this is a significant factor in the homelessness rate in a specific area. I would also want to add a variable for the unemployment rate in the specific areas measured for similar reasons. However, I was happy to find a statistically significant impact.

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