

Organizing for the National Coalition for the Homeless. "We have six times as many animal shelters in the United States as we do homeless shelters," Stoops said. "Last year the federal government spent one billion [to combat homelessness] — which is a drop in the bucket."

Stoops commented about the NCH report, "Illegal to Be Homeless." "This is the largest survey ever done on the criminalization of homelessness in the United States. Things are not getting better for homeless people. More cities are criminalizing homelessness. We've all heard of racial profiling in America. What we have here is economic profiling. It's 'walking while homeless.' If you look like you are homeless anywhere in America, you will be cited, arrested, or run out of town.

"The release of our report has received tremendous media coverage, especially in those cities in which they gave the 'mean' designation. Many cities are in denial. 'How can we be a mean city? We are providing so much shelter and food!' They have no clue as to what is happening to the unsheltered homeless people in their cities.

"When we say mean, we are not saying that everyone in [one of the top 20 meanest cities] is mean. There are lots of good people who are doing good things to help the homeless. It's that while they are doing those good things, they are making it illegal to be homeless. You cannot be a good city if you are arresting people for being homeless. There is no city in this country that has enough shelter beds for all of their homeless. If we do not have enough beds, we should not be arresting people for sleeping, camping, or living on a sidewalk.

"By having a law on the books, it means you're going to get cited. You're going to get arrested, you're going to be jailed, you're going to get a criminal record, even if it's a misdemeanor record... It's going to make it more difficult for that homeless person to break out of poverty, to get a job. It's going to make it more difficult to get into subsidized housing. It ends up costing more: the police officer's time, the DA's time, the public defender's time, the court's time, the probation officer's time. We estimate it's about \$1000 nationwide to put forward a quality of life case through the system.

"One of the solutions is proposed legislation, that if [a city] criminalizes homelessness, they would not be eligible for federal dollars to run the shelters. This would turn shelter providers into civil rights activists overnight as they would have to say, 'We can't arrest people for sleeping or we will lose our federal dollars.' Conyers in Michigan is leading this effort."

The Democrats

by Teddy Bakersfield

**I walk the streets of america
and see homeless men, women and children
see schools with no books
see teachers laid off
see libraries closed
see an infrastructure broken**

i see no faith in america

i see over two million people in prison in america

i see the privatization of america

i see the militarization of america

i see a world that no longer trusts america

i see the unspoken anxiety in the people of america

i see an america i have never seen before

i hear liberals say america can be "fixed"

they say all we have to do

is put their white man

into that white house

i decline a flyer

from a well-intentioned

smartly dressed white woman

and see the rejection hurts her feelings

and i don't feel good about that

but am honestly at a loss

for i am astonished by these people

who believe

that someone who thinks

like they think

and has the same "need"

to own what they own

can do anything about the meanness i see in america

A four-page appendix detailing "Prohibited Conduct" in the 147 cities surveyed has much useful information (although it's not clear how many of the laws and bad practices are new). There readers can find where spitting, "creating odor," "charging for a car wash," "washing cars," and "bringing paupers/insane persons into the city" is a prosecuted crime targeted at homeless people.

The report cites feeding programs under recent attack in Clearwater (FL), Corona (CA), Dallas (TX), Dayton (OH), Ft. Lauderdale (FL), Gainesville (FL), Milwaukee (WI), Orlando (FL), West Palm Beach (FL), Portland (OR), and Santa Monica (CA).

The encouraging signs are few but real. Brevard County, Florida, even as it moves to ban sleeping on beaches, stops arrests if shelter beds are not available. Judge Clyde Atkin's historic Pottinger decision in Miami in 1998 — which banned arrests for 'life-sustaining misdemeanors' unless a shelter bed was available — still sends out its healing and hopeful ripples.

Similar protections can be found in Key West, even as authorities intrusively video homeless people, ban all panhandling from three tourist spots, close public beaches to camping, and evict "Houseboat Row."

In several cities, homeless advocates are fighting back with lawsuits. The Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless in Cleveland has gotten a consent decree barring arrests or threats to arrest for sitting, sleeping, standing or eating on the sidewalk.

Then there are the heroes. New York City patrolman Eduardo de la Cruz refused to arrest a homeless man for sleeping in a parking garage last winter in the midst of Mayor Bloomberg's "Operation Clean Sweep" (a program encouraging New Yorkers to snitch on "quality of life" violators) and "Operation Spotlight" (a crackdown that imposes harsher jail time to those with three-plus arrests and one conviction in a year). Cruz was not only docked pay, but now goes to trial on charges of "refusal to arrest," with the Latino Officers Association collecting \$3000 on his behalf, according to the NCH report.

The report contains forms and weblinks that encourage readers to add to the growing data base and send in new information to document the struggle (in English and Spanish). Appendix III tells readers the nearest regional field site to contact.

California activists have tried for years to form a statewide organization that would document and respond to anti-homeless legislation and policies — the latest muted effort being CHCROP (California Homeless Civil Rights Organizing Project). This study is part of that continuing struggle. The information it provides should give new impetus and determination to local activists who need both specifics of the struggle on the ground and a broader picture of what is happening across the country.

To contact the National Coalition for the Homeless, or read the full report, go to www.nationalhomeless.org