



SWEPT AWAY

Reporting on the Encampment Closure Crisis



Bringing America Home

A publication of the National Coalition for the Homeless

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Introduction

Across the United States -- from Washington, D.C., in the east to Honolulu, Hawaii, in the west; from as far north as Anchorage, Alaska, all the way down to Key West, Florida -- the existence of homeless encampments, colloquially known as “tent cities,” has seen a sharp increase. The rise is particularly visible in larger towns and cities, where people experiencing homelessness tend to cluster in order to find employment and/or to access services necessary for their survival, though such makeshift communities are by no means simply, or even primarily, an urban phenomenon.

Larger-scale homeless encampments first drew attention on the Pacific coast. One of the earliest to gain media attention was Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon, where what began as a camp of just eight men and women in 2000 has grown nearly eightfold in size (and gained the tacit support of the community) today. Toward the end of the last decade, particularly after the Great Recession devastated the national economy, tent cities began to pepper western states and slowly spread to every corner of the country.

The demographics of who resides in these encampments has also seen a shift. While hard numbers are difficult to come by due to the nature of these communities, homelessness in general among families has been the fastest-increasing segment of the overall unhoused population in recent years. The number of school-age children experiencing homelessness has doubled since before the Great Recession hit the U.S. in 2007. Consequently, the faces seen in many tent cities are more likely than ever to be those of minors.

Unfortunately for those who have found themselves living in such communities, the reception of homeless encampments by the wider population has been less than compassionate. More than one in three U.S. cities have bans on camping throughout their jurisdictions, and municipalities have taken action against encampments by citing other concerns of varying legitimacy, such as the health and safety of camp residents and the wider population.

Increasingly, campsites are being forcibly removed, and these evictions often involve the destruction of people’s property, including valuables, personal documents, and sometimes even medications. Proponents of these sweeps have often stated that residents would be better off taking refuge in city-sanctioned homeless shelters, and have suggested that allowing the existence of such camps somehow enables homelessness -- a notion unsupported by evidence. Such “tough love” tactics also ignore the causes that have brought about these encampments in the first place.

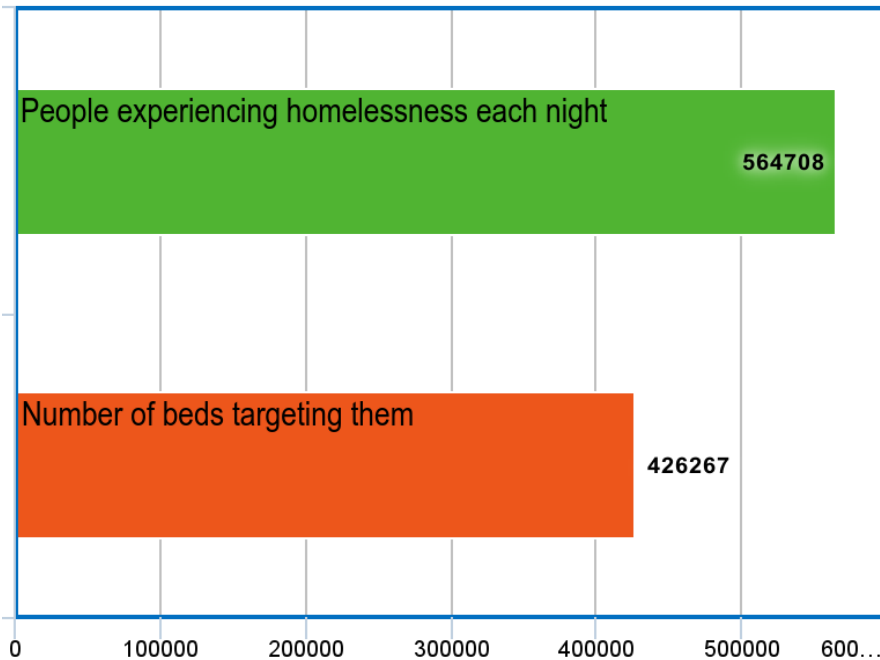
The National Coalition for the Homeless was founded not only to pursue an end to homelessness in the United States, but also to address the immediate needs and protect the civil rights of men, women, and children experiencing homelessness. We recognize that tent cities and other encampments do not constitute the type of housing that human beings deserve. However, we believe that the proper solution to the problem of their existence is to address the housing necessities of their residents, rather than to persecute them for seeking a short-term solution to their immediate needs while waiting for the help they require.

This NCH report examines the disturbing trend of encampment sweeps from a number of angles, including the causes behind the rise of encampments, the way various communities have chosen to confront the issue, and our own recommendations for how our unhoused neighbors deserve to be treated in their own communities.

I. Why Encampments Exist

First and foremost, it must be acknowledged that many residents of encampments are there for the simple reason that there is no other place for them to find shelter in their communities. This is particularly true of smaller towns and rural areas, where there are a general lack of social services. However, there is no city in the United States that has enough year-round shelter capacity for its entire unhoused population of men, women, families, and unaccompanied youth. For example, in 2016 in New York, New York, there are, according to the latest point-in-time count, a total of 75,323 people

experiencing homelessness¹ on any given night, and only 60,410 shelter beds².



The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report put the number of people experiencing homelessness each night (564,708) significantly higher than the number of emergency and transitional beds

afforded to them (426,267).

The current focus on rapidly rehousing homeless individuals has led to a shift in funding priorities by HUD, which is prioritizing permanent supportive housing over emergency shelters and transitional housing. This turn of events has led to shelter closings, leaving more and more families and individuals waiting for assistance through housing programs with no recourse but the street.

¹ The 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. (2015, November). Retrieved May 16, 2016, from <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2015-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

² Facts about Homelessness - Coalition For The Homeless. (n.d.). Retrieved May 16, 2016, from <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/the-catastrophe-of-homelessness/facts-about-homelessness/>

In communities where sufficient shelter capacity does exist for even part of the calendar year, there are logistical concerns which serve as barriers for prospective residents. Often, emergency shelters are only accessible at night, which may not correspond to the needs of individuals who work late or irregular hours. The location of a shelter can also serve as a barrier when it is placed far enough away from vital services and transportation is not provided.

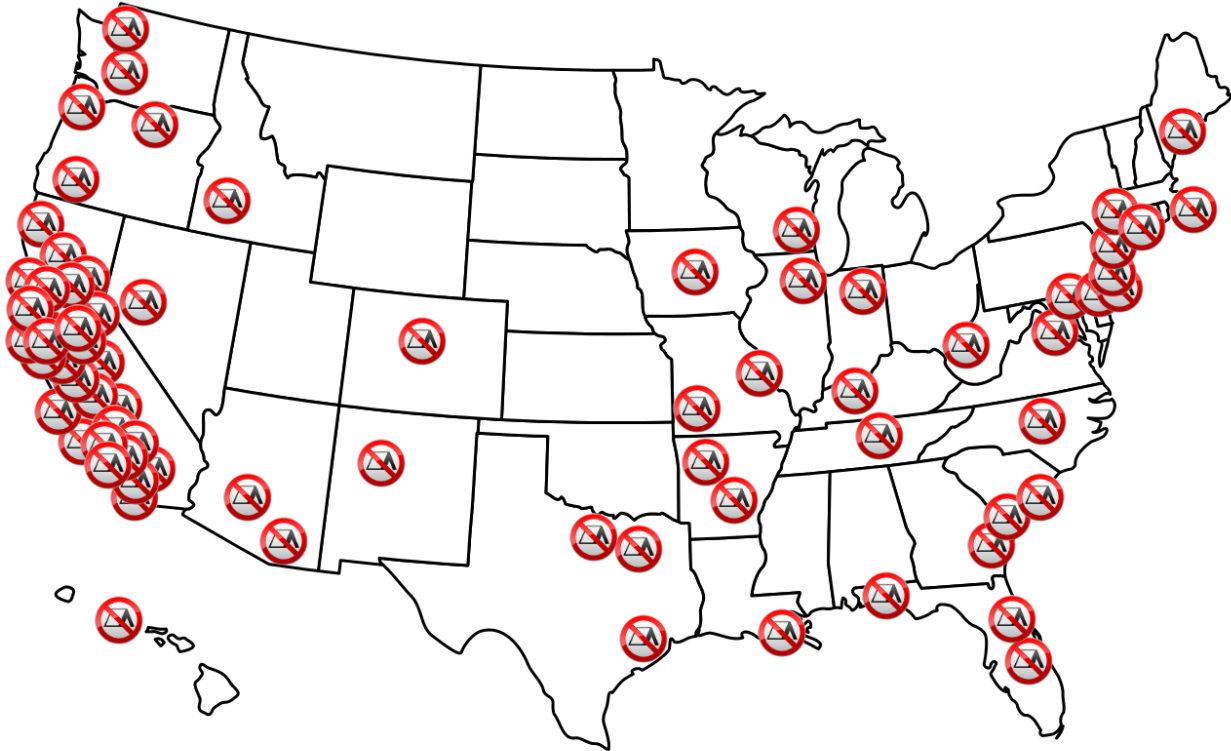
Many locales require families to be split up in order to gain access to shelter, meaning parents must go to individual men's and women's shelters, while children are placed into foster care. Rules against the admittance of pets is another reason often cited by individuals and families as a barrier to shelter access. Other rules that end up driving away those in need include a restriction on the number of items a person is allowed to bring into a shelter, and, for those who are struggling with addiction issues, sobriety restrictions.

Health and safety concerns can be another significant barrier to access. Worries about unsanitary conditions or the transmission of communicable diseases lead many to avoid certain shelters. Sam, a man experiencing homelessness in Denver, Colorado, stated, "I would rather sleep outside in the air than sleep next to somebody on a mat that close. ... I'd rather roll up as many times as I can in a blanket than sleep next to somebody that's got hepatitis, tuberculosis, or what have you."³ There are other personal reasons that lead people to "tent cities," such as a desire for independence or a sense of community provided by encampments.

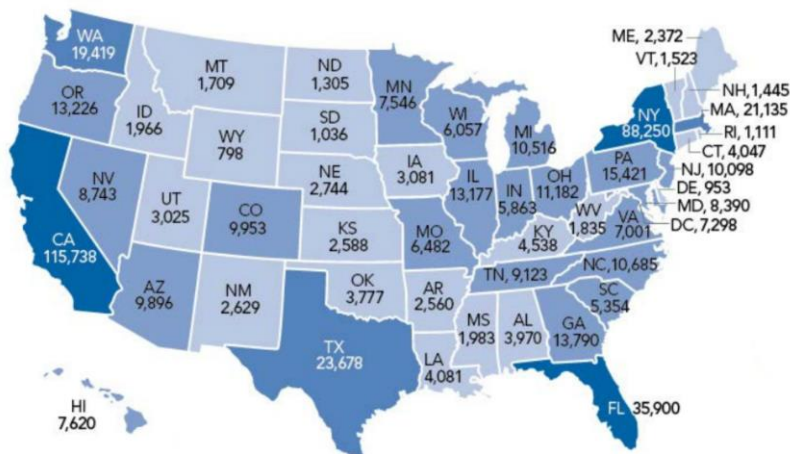
II. Encampment Sweeps

For all of the above reasons and more, the last 10 years have seen a rapid growth in the number of encampments in cities, suburbs, and rural areas across the country. This has led to massive encampment sweeps (closing "tent cities"), encouraged by the complaints of housed neighbors as well as by local ordinances that prohibit camping on public land. Other reasons cited by officials and the media for encampment sweeps include encroachment on private property and construction sites, alleged environmental damage to local ecosystems, and reports of violence within individual camps.

³ Homeless Camps Cleared Out After Threat From City. (2016, March/April). Retrieved May 17, 2016, from <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/homeless-camps-cleared-out-after-threat-city>



The above map plots the locations of the most widely reported individual and ongoing sweeps of homeless encampments across the nation. It cannot be ignored that, as the data demonstrate, California has become a hotbed of activity on this front. This isn't surprising: In California, of the estimated 115,738 people experiencing homelessness each night, 73,699, or 63.7%, are unsheltered -- more than twice the national average.



However, the data also reveal that this is hardly an issue in California alone. Comparing the above map with HUD's own estimates of the concentration of people experiencing homelessness by state reveals a significant correlation.⁴

⁴ The 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. (2015, November). Retrieved May 16, 2016, from <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2015-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

As stated, officials have offered a number of reasons why they are pushing encampment sweeps across the country, although advocates for the unhoused point to other motivations. In March 2016, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council released a list of talking points on homeless encampments and sweeps, beginning with the following statement: “Encampments are painful reminders of the persistence of dire poverty in the midst of plenty.”⁵

Local and national advocates have condemned sweeps as evidence that the primary concern of municipalities where homelessness is concerned is optics. “Unfortunately, too many local governments are focused on ending the visibility of homelessness rather than on ending homelessness itself,” writes Samir Junejo in the Seattle University Homeless Rights Advocacy Project publication “No Rest for the Weary: Why Cities Should Embrace Homeless Encampments.”⁶

The problematic nature of encampment sweeps goes far beyond a question of fairness. Encampment closures disrupt the lives of their residents in a number of ways. Apart from the obvious burden of having to regularly relocate, those displaced by encampment sweeps often lose personal belongings including vital documents, necessary medications, and objects of sentimental value. Bonds of community which help people living on the street to cope with their situation are broken.

Along with other forms of the criminalization of homelessness, encampment sweeps can also further erode the trust between people experiencing homelessness and the system allegedly set up to assist them. Indeed, Seattle’s Human Services Department admitted that the majority of campers displaced in sweeps did not end up in city shelters⁷, and a Honolulu survey revealed that more encampment residents stated that sweeps made them less likely or able to seek shelter than the reverse.⁸

⁵ Talking Points on Homeless Encampments & Sweeps (2016, March). Retrieved May 26, 2016, from <https://www.nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/talking-points-on-encampments.pdf>

⁶ No Rest for the Weary: Why cities should embrace homeless encampments (2016, May 9). Retrieved May 26, 2016, from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2776425

⁷ Groover, H (2016, January 19). City Officials Admit Homeless Encampment Sweeps Fail to Get Most People Into Shelter. Retrieved May 26, 2016, from <http://www.thestranger.com/blogs/slog/2016/01/19/23446636/city-officials-admit-homeless-encampment-sweeps-fail-to-get-most-people-into-shelter>

⁸ No Rest for the Weary: Why cities should embrace homeless encampments (2016, May 9). Retrieved May 26, 2016, from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2776425

III. Individual case studies

In this section of the report, we examine six cities spread across the U.S. where individual and ongoing sweeps have been documented. The recurring themes of a shortage of shelter beds and an unfeasible cost of housing relative to the minimum wage are even more apparent when the issue is examined at the local level.

(Note: The Federal Poverty Level for 2016 is as follows: \$11,880/yr for individuals, \$16,020/yr for couples, and \$24,300/yr for households with four or more members.⁹)

District of Columbia

<i>Est. Total Population:</i>	<i>672,228¹⁰</i>	<i>Pop. Below Poverty Line:</i>	<i>18.9%</i>
<i>Est. Homeless Population:</i>	<i>7,298¹¹</i>	<i>Median Rent (2-bedroom):</i>	<i>\$3,000/month¹²</i>
<i>Emergency Shelter Beds:</i>	<i>3,551¹³</i>	<i>Minimum Wage (full-time):</i>	<i>\$1,993/month¹⁴</i>

Between October 2015 and March 2016, the District spent more than \$172,000 sweeping up camps, with more than \$130,000 of that money going to shutting down and eventually fencing out a single encampment in late fall. Those dollars could have been used to find housing for more of the men and women on the site, 12 of whom were simply displaced.¹⁵

Another significant encampment, located alongside D.C.'s Union Station train and bus terminal, was removed in early March. While the city claimed that "life-sustaining items (including tents)" would be stored for up to 30 days, Public Works Department employees were observed disposing of whole tents of absent camp residents in

⁹ Federal Poverty Level Guidelines. (n.d.). Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <http://obamacarefacts.com/federal-poverty-level/>

¹⁰ United States Census Bureau. (2015, July/August). Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/11001,00>

¹¹ Homeless in Metropolitan Washington. (2015). Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <https://www.mwcog.org/uploads/pub-documents/v15bWik20150514094353.pdf>

¹² Rosett, L., & Woo, A. (2016, May 1). May 2016 National Apartment List Rent Report. Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <https://www.apartmentlist.com/rentonomics/national-rent-data/>

¹³ Homeless in Metropolitan Washington. (2015). Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <https://www.mwcog.org/uploads/pub-documents/v15bWik20150514094353.pdf>

¹⁴ Minimum Wage to Rise to \$11.50 by 2016 (03.15.2014). (n.d.). Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <http://dcwagelaw.com/dc-minimum-wage-to-increase-to-1150-by-2016/>

¹⁵ Hughes, S. A. (2016, February/March). D.C. Has Spent More Than \$172,000 on Homeless Encampment Cleanups Since October. Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/blog/13070511/d-c-has-spent-more-than-172000-on-homeless-encampment-cleanups-since-october>

garbage trucks. Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless staff attorney Ann Marie Staudenmaier told the Washington City Paper, “If someone is not there [when a sweep is conducted], no protections are in place” to protect their belongings.¹⁶

Some advocates for the homeless claim that these and other sweeps are aimed primarily at addressing the high visibility and poor optics of tent cities rather than at solving the underlying issues causing their rise, a sentiment that 64-year-old Bobbie Mascuch shared after her belongings were removed. “I was rained on, sleeted on, snowed on, and no one did anything,” Mascuch said. “Then, in December, we got tents and now they want us out. That started problems and that started people complaining.”

The Deputy Mayor’s office responded to inquiries about encampment sweeps by claiming the city was acting in the best interests of campers. “The District is obligated to act responsibly and responsively to address encampment issues-balancing the rights of individuals experiencing homelessness and other constituents. ... It is not safe for people to be outside when it gets dangerously cold, and we have a responsibility to bring them indoors.”¹⁷

There is, however, no evidence that campers who are simply removed instead of housed are more likely to end up in what space is available in city shelters that they were previously avoiding by choosing encampments. As a result, some displaced Washingtonians feel less, not more, safe after the sweeps. “It’s okay, as long as I’m close to the rest of the people. I don’t think anyone’s gonna bother us. But when I’m by myself, I feel unsafe, very unsafe,” said Leighland Nelson, another former resident of the Union Station camp.¹⁸

¹⁶ Hughes, S. A. (2016, March 11). DC Removes Homeless Campers From Near Union Station. Retrieved May 26, 2016, from <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/blog/13070584/d-c-removes-homeless-campers-from-near-union-station>

¹⁷ Hughes, S. A. (2016, February/March). D.C. Has Spent More Than \$172,000 on Homeless Encampment Cleanups Since October. Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/blog/13070511/d-c-has-spent-more-than-172000-on-homeless-encampment-cleanups-since-october>

¹⁸ Augenstein, N. (2016, March 10). Homeless camp near Union Station taken down. Retrieved from <http://wtop.com/dc/2016/03/homeless-camp-near-union-station-taken-down/slide/1/>

Dallas, Texas

Est. Total Population: 1,197,816¹⁹ *Pop. Below Poverty Line:* 24.4%
Est. Homeless Population: 3,141 *Median Rent (2-bedroom):* \$1,801/month²⁰
Emergency Shelter Beds: 1,748²¹ *Minimum Wage (full-time):* \$1,257/month²²

On May 3, 2016, Tent City, a large encampment located along Interstate 30 near downtown Dallas, was finally closed. The camp, which at one time provided shelter for up to 300 individuals, had been a longstanding target of citizens' groups. When the last 80 residents were removed, belongings were simply bulldozed rather than collected. Many individuals have moved on to a new encampment further south, in a less visible location. Former resident Vince Preston, who ran a makeshift convenience store of sorts within Tent City, predicts more expensive sweeps in the near future. "It's going to be a big old tent chase, that's all it's going to be, 'cause where do you go when you have nowhere to go?"²³

Concerns about sanitation and violence were cited by the city as factors that drove its choice to act against the encampment, but without adequate housing and services to address the recent 24% increase in local homeless numbers, these are problems that are simply being relocated rather than solved. Said one Dallas advocate, "If we just keep criminalizing their behavior, taking away resources, blaming them and kicking them while they're down, there's going to be more Tent Cities popping up and people living in squalor and despair."²⁴

Following Tent City's closure, the mayor of Dallas created a commission to examine more long-term solutions to the city's housing crisis, including adding proposals for more permanent supportive housing to the next bond election. However, Housing Director Bernadette Mitchell doesn't sound optimistic, noting that such proposals have

¹⁹ Current Dallas, Texas Population, Demographics and stats in 2016, 2015. (n.d.). Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <https://suburbanstats.org/population/texas/how-many-people-live-in-dallas>

²⁰ Find Apartments in Your Area. (n.d.). Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <https://www.rentjungle.com/average-rent-in-dallas-rent-trends/>

²¹ Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance. (2015, August 14). Retrieved from http://dallascityhall.com/government/Council Meeting Documents/2015/hou_2_metro-dallas-homeless-alliance_combined_081715.pdf

²² Minimum Wage, Federal, State and Cities - US Paywizard.org. (n.d.). Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <http://www.paywizard.org/main/salary/minimum-wage>

²³ Blackburn, B. (2016, May 3). Tent City closed down in Dallas. Retrieved May 18, 2016, from <http://www.wfaa.com/news/local/dallas-county/tent-city-closes-down-in-dallas/167786425>

²⁴ Kuo, S. (2016, April 22). Once Out Of Tent City, Dallas' Homeless Struggle To Find A Place To Live. Retrieved from <http://keranews.org/post/once-out-tent-city-dallas-homeless-struggle-find-place-live>

“been kicked around a lot, but it’s always been this NIMBY problem, and where do we put folks, and the stigma that goes along with the homeless. We heard a lot of that when we were going through the closure, and how do we get past that?”²⁵

Saint Louis, Missouri

<i>Est. Total Population:</i>	319,294 ²⁶	<i>Pop. Below Poverty Line:</i>	26.6%
<i>Est. Homeless Population:</i>	1,312	<i>Median Rent (2-bedroom):</i>	\$911/month ²⁷
<i>Emergency Shelter Beds:</i>	554 ²⁸	<i>Minimum Wage (full-time):</i>	\$1,326/month ²⁹

After tent fires in different encampments claimed the lives of two residents within a 10-week span during the winter of 2015, Saint Louis’s Human Services director declared that the city was “done with tent encampments,” claiming that, at least throughout the season, there was “ample emergency shelter space to provide for anyone who has been at the encampments.”³⁰ However, incidents such as Larry Rice’s downtown New Life Evangelistic Center Emergency Shelter being ruled a nuisance for operating at several times over permitted capacity earlier that winter meant the director’s statement was taken by locals with a grain of salt.³¹ Rice, who has been arrested in the past for protesting encampment sweeps, is fighting an uphill battle to keep his shelter open.³²

Nevertheless, encampments continue to spring up in and around the riverfront city. Jeremy Funk, a Marine veteran who resided with his spouse in a camp near the Musial Veterans’ Memorial Bridge in 2015 -- where the unofficial camp motto was “I don’t know

²⁵ Ura, A. (2016, May 17). Dallas Hopes Solutions Follow Closing of Tent City. Retrieved May 22, 2016 from <http://www.wfaa.com/news/local/dallas-county/dallas-hopes-solutions-follow-closing-of-tent-city/198825727>

²⁶ Current St Louis, Missouri Population, Demographics and stats in 2016, 2015. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <https://suburbanstats.org/population/missouri/how-many-people-live-in-st-louis>

²⁷ Find Apartments in Your Area. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <https://www.rentjungle.com/average-rent-in-st-louis-rent-trends/>

²⁸ HUD 2015 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations. (2015, October/November). Retrieved May 19, 2016.

²⁹ Minimum Wage. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <http://labor.mo.gov/DLS/MinimumWage>

³⁰ Leiser, K., & Pistor, N. J. (2015, February 27). Fire death at St. Louis homeless camp was needless, city official says. Retrieved May 19, 2016, from http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/fire-death-at-st-louis-homeless-camp-was-needless-city/article_6fc7ef48-4e57-521d-ba63-0bfd9db51bc4.html

³¹ Pistor, N.J. (2014, December 14). St. Louis rules Larry Rice’s homeless shelter a nuisance. Retrieved on May 22, 2016, from http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/st-louis-rules-larry-rice-s-homeless-shelter-a-nuisance/article_09d6b918-4766-5110-b913-ee75e04c4a15.html

³² Bogan, J (2012, May 16). Rice arrested as St. Louis homeless camp dismantled. Retrieved on May 22, 2016, from http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/rice-arrested-as-st-louis-homeless-camp-dismantled/article_24c979b6-9f78-11e1-afad-001a4bcf6878.html

you, but I love you” -- explained why. “It’s beautiful. ... My wife and I are starting all new. It’s a good little place, right here. ... If it wasn’t for this...my wife and I would be doing God knows what to survive. [The encampment] gave us a chance to do it the right way.”³³

Seattle, Washington

<i>Est. Total Population:</i>	608,660 ³⁴	<i>Pop. Below Poverty Line:</i>	14.2%
<i>Est. Homeless Population:</i>	10,122	<i>Median Rent (2-bedroom):</i>	\$2,125/month ³⁵
<i>Emergency Shelter Beds:</i>	6,319 ³⁶	<i>Minimum Wage (full-time):</i>	\$2,600/month ³⁷

With the fourth-largest recognized population of people experiencing homelessness in the country, Seattle has been a hotbed of activity when it comes to encampments and their closures for longer than most metropolitan areas. It has several long-standing, semi-formal encampments, some of which are constantly on the move to avoid closure.³⁸ It also has three city-sanctioned and funded encampments, one of which is located next door to the Low Income Housing Institute. LIHI Director Sharon Lee explained in a letter to concerned neighbors that these encampments are an emergency response to the city’s overwhelming housing crisis. “Seattle’s emergency shelters are full and there is not enough affordable housing,” she wrote. “It is not safe for homeless families and individuals to live unsheltered and unprotected on the streets of Seattle.”³⁹

³³ Bogan, J. (2015, March 28). With a great view of the St. Louis skyline, homeless camp digs in deeper. Retrieved from http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/with-a-great-view-of-the-st-louis-skyline-homeless/article_8254f99d-7dbb-5447-ad5c-316893c444fc.html

³⁴ Current Seattle, Washington Population, Demographics and stats in 2016, 2015. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <https://suburbanstats.org/population/washington/how-many-people-live-in-seattle>

³⁵ Find Apartments in Your Area. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <https://www.rentjungle.com/average-rent-in-seattle-rent-trends/>

³⁶ Washington State Point in Time Count of Homeless Persons - January 2015. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Documents/PIT_2015_Rollup_Summary.pdf

³⁷ Kelley, P. (2016, April 19). Effect on prices minimal one year after Seattle’s \$15 minimum wage law implementation. Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <http://phys.org/news/2016-04-effect-prices-minimal-year-seattle.html>

³⁸ Bernard, S. (2015, June 10). Tent Cities: Seattle’s Unique Approach to Homelessness. Retrieved May 22, 2016, from <http://grist.org/cities/tent-cities-seattles-unique-approach-to-homelessness/>

³⁹ Groover, H. (2016, February 12). New City-Sanctioned Homeless Encampment Coming to Othello. Retrieved on May 22, 2016, from <http://www.thestranger.com/blogs/slog/2016/02/12/23562182/new-city-sanctioned-homeless-encampment-coming-to-othello>

Yet Seattle is no stranger to encampment sweeps. More than 1,000 unauthorized camps have been closed down by the city since 2012.⁴⁰ It is an activity that is so common that it is being privatized, contracted out to a company created specifically for the task. Cascadia Cleaning and Removal, which advertises “homeless encampment abatement and removal” services on its website, is being paid \$80 per hour for each of its workers who are instructed, according to one employee, to “toss everything” when they find unoccupied encampments. Far from being relocated into housing, officials admit that only 40% of campers even find their way into city shelters. The rest are simply displaced.⁴¹

By far the most notorious homeless encampment in King County is the one located at East Duwamish Greenbelt, though it is more commonly referred to as “The Jungle,” a 160 acre strip of land beneath Interstate 5 that has served as shelter for up to 400 men and women at any given time since at least the 1990’s. In May 2016, the city pledged \$1 million to close “The Jungle” after a well-publicized shooting targeting several residents earlier in the year brought renewed attention to the site. Outreach workers from Union Gospel Mission were brought in to help the residents locate shelter beds and housing “where we can find it,” according to Jeff Lilley, the organization’s president.⁴²

Seattle University law professor Sara Rankin, director of the university’s Homeless Rights Advocacy Project, is skeptical of the city’s plan. “What are they going to do with these 300 to 400 people? What are they going to do with their belongings? What are they going to do with their pets, partners, friends, other people they consider to be parts of their households?” She points out that there simply aren’t enough beds to shelter them without displacing others, even assuming that they are willing to enter that environment. “We’re not suggesting that encampments are a good solution,” Rankin said. “We’re saying that cities should not disrupt encampments...unless they have got

⁴⁰ Beekman, D. (2015, December 20). Seattle officials say more sweeps of homeless camps in the works. Retrieved on May 22, 2016, from <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-officials-say-more-sweeps-of-homeless-camps-in-the-works/>

⁴¹ Herz, A. (2016, May 4). Privatizing the Clearing of Homeless Encampments. Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <http://www.thestranger.com/news/2016/05/04/24038273/privatizing-the-clearing-of-homeless-encampments>

⁴² O’Sullivan, J. & Clarridge, C. (2016, May 17). Seattle aims to clear out The Jungle homeless camp. Retrieved May 22, 2016, from <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-to-shut-down-the-jungle-homeless-camp/>

some place to send people, something to offer people in exchange.”⁴³ Echoing Rankin’s concerns is Tsukina Blessing of Seattle’s Real Change News, who notes that the city’s concerns about sanitation in “The Jungle” aren’t solved simply by clearing it out. “People don’t stop pooping when you move them out into the neighborhood,” says Blessing.⁴⁴

San Francisco, California

<i>Est. Total Population:</i>	805,235 ⁴⁵	<i>Pop. Below Poverty Line:</i>	13.8%
<i>Est. Homeless Population:</i>	7,539 ⁴⁶	<i>Median Rent (2-bedroom):</i>	\$4,126/month ⁴⁷
<i>Emergency Shelter Beds:</i>	1,733 ⁴⁸	<i>Minimum Wage (full-time):</i>	\$2,253/month ⁴⁹

Homeless encampments and the city’s attempts to remove them have been an ongoing issue in California’s fourth-largest city, but the conflict was significantly exacerbated by preparations for 2016’s Super Bowl. While city officials maintained that they were not attempting to conceal San Francisco’s homeless population during the prominent sporting event, unsheltered homeless individuals, local advocates, and media outlets often told a different story, noting that citations passed out to people experiencing homelessness in the city were up over 20% from the previous year. Concerning one encampment beneath the 101 freeway, a local network news report quoted a resident named Adam as saying, “They told us that we have to be outta here within the next 20 minutes or the cops were going to start arresting people.”⁵⁰

However, sweeps have not ended with the Super Bowl. In the early hours of March 1, 2016, the city removed what remained of a sizable encampment beneath San

⁴³ Large, Jerry (2016, May 22). Fear of our own desperation gets in the way of homelessness solutions. Retrieved on May 22, 2016, from <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/fear-of-our-own-desperation-gets-in-the-way-of-homelessness-solutions/>

⁴⁴ Homeless Encampment Sweeps [Telephone Interview] (2016, June 22)

⁴⁵ Current San Francisco, California Population, Demographics and stats in 2016, 2015. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <https://suburbanstats.org/population/california/how-many-people-live-in-san-francisco>

⁴⁶ Rivecca, C. (2015, July/August). San Francisco’s 2015 Homeless Count & Survey | St. Anthony’s. Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <https://www.stanthonyof.org/san-franciscos-2015-homeless-count-survey/>

⁴⁷ Find Apartments in Your Area. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <https://www.rentjungle.com/average-rent-in-san-francisco-rent-trends>

⁴⁸ San Francisco adds 500 beds for homeless: El Niño or Super Bowl? (2016, January 21). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/San-Francisco-adds-hundreds-of-beds-for-homeless-6773570.php>

⁴⁹ Office of Labor Standards Enforcement. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <http://sfgov.org/olse/minimum-wage-ordinance-mwo>

⁵⁰ Noyes, D. (2016, February 2). I-Team: Super Bowl Puts Strain On Homeless In San Francisco. Retrieved on May 23, 2016, from <http://abc7news.com/sports/i-team-super-bowl-puts-strain-on-homeless-in-san-francisco/1184577/>

Francisco's Central Freeway, citing health concerns and complaints from housed neighbors. Dozens of the camp's residents initially refused to leave, like Ashante Jones, a longtime resident who stated, "I'm not going to be bullied. If I have to go, I'll get arrested for these people." Mr. Jones described the experience as being treated like "a secondary citizen and that's not right. Where else are the police going to go to somebody's door and start banging on it with a billy club at 4:30 in the morning?"

Fortunately, no arrests were made when campers were finally moved on, some to the city's 180-bed temporary shelter at Pier 80. However, a number of residents were reluctant to relocate to the tented facility, such as Benjamin Headrick, who said, "It's too much of a FEMA camp. They started with 80 [beds] and bumped it up to [then] 150, but how quickly is that going to fill up? The only way they are going to solve this problem is by building something permanent that doesn't look like a concentration camp."⁵¹ The shelter on Pier 80 is slated to close in July 2016.

In April 2016, San Francisco's mayor pledged to rid the city of its approximately 100 tent encampments through an aggressive closure plan. Jennifer Friedenbach, head of the San Francisco Coalition for the Homeless, was hesitant to embrace the proposal, stating that the city shouldn't be taking away "that little bit of shelter" unless displaced persons can be permanently housed.

City Supervisor John Avalos agreed, presenting his own plan to address the issue, including requiring a 15-day notice to evict homeless people from encampments, and that the city partner with those living in the tents along with housed residents and businesses in the vicinity to create a relocation plan. The city would also be required to identify permanent housing or temporary housing with a plan to transition the person into permanent housing "within a reasonable time period," among other provisions.

The mayor's spokesperson has called Avalos's plan "a formula for near-permanent encampments and their unhealthy, unsafe conditions in neighborhoods across the city."⁵²

⁵¹ Williams, K., & Senoffsky, E. (2016, March 2). Homeless encampment on SF's Division Street cleared by city. Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/City-begins-sweeping-out-homeless-encampment-on-6862853.php>

⁵² Sabatini, J. (2016, April 12). Supervisor Avalos proposes rules for sweeps of homeless tents. Retrieved May 23, 2016, from <http://www.sfexaminer.com/supervisor-avalos-proposes-rules-sweeps-homeless-tents/>

In June of 2016, Supervisors Mark Farrell and Aaron Peskin introduced opposing ballot measures to deal with homeless encampments. Farrell's would empower the city to sweep encampments 24 hours after offering shelter to residents, though it would add some protections for people's belongings, causing them to be stored for up to 90 days. Alternatively, Peskin's would mandate 72 hours of notice and require that the city create a plan to relocate former camp residents from shelter to housing within 30 days.⁵³

Los Angeles, California

Est. Total Population: 9,818,605⁵⁴ *Pop. Below Poverty Line:* 23.0%
Est. Homeless Population: 28,464 *Median Rent (2-bedroom):* \$2,443/month⁵⁵
Emergency Shelter Beds: 7,126⁵⁶ *Minimum Wage (full-time):* \$1,820/month⁵⁷

Los Angeles, already home to one of the largest unhoused populations in the nation, saw the number of people experiencing homelessness increased by 12% between 2013 and 2015, and with the city's already overburdened emergency service system, the number of those who have turned to tents, vehicles, and other makeshift shelters grew by a whopping 85% during the same time period. In late 2015, the city's mayor pledged a one-time infusion of \$100 million to bolster services and offer housing vouchers targeted at veterans, among other groups, but Alice Callaghan of Familias del Pueblo, located in L.A.'s Skid Row, was doubtful that the increase would be enough to turn the tide. "One hundred million is laughable," she said. "This is a catastrophic housing crisis. There's no sense of emergency."⁵⁸

L.A.'s 2016 point-in-time count showed the problem has continued to increase, with a 5.7% rise in the overall homeless population offsetting whatever gains were made

⁵³ Sabatini, J. (2016, June 28). Dueling SF ballot measures emerge over homeless encampments. Retrieved June 29, 2016, from <http://www.sfexaminer.com/dueling-sf-ballot-measures-emerge-homeless-tent-encampments/>

⁵⁴ Current Los Angeles County, California Population, Demographics and stats in 2016, 2015. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <https://suburbanstats.org/population/california/how-many-people-live-in-los-angeles-county>

⁵⁵ Find Apartments in Your Area. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <https://www.rentjungle.com/average-rent-in-los-angeles-rent-trends/>

⁵⁶ Count Results. (n.d.). Retrieved May 20, 2016, from <https://www.lahsa.org/homeless-count/results>

⁵⁷ Los Angeles County Approves Gradual Increases in Minimum Wage Starting 2016 -. (2015). Retrieved May 20, 2016, from <http://www.tbowleslaw.com/los-angeles-county-approves-gradual-increases-in-minimum-wage-starting-2016/>

⁵⁸ Romero, S. (2015, September 23). City vows to throw \$100 million at Los Angeles homeless emergency. Retrieved May 25, 2016, from <http://www.laweekly.com/news/city-hall-vows-to-throw-100-million-at-las-homeless-emergency-6075638>

through the city's investment in housing for particular groups. Inner City Law Center Policy Director Jerry Jones noted, "Homelessness is responsive to targeted housing subsidies, which is why we saw fewer veterans on the streets." But he added, "The overall problem continues to get worse in the absence of those resources." The increase in the number of people resorting to encampments and vehicles was an again disproportionate 20%.⁵⁹

The city's reaction to encampments in particular has been one of the harshest in the country, with regulations passed in the summer of 2015 which cut the necessary warning time for residents before a camp was swept to a mere 24 hours.⁶⁰ Over the course of that year, the city conducted the sweeping of 961 separate encampments, removing 1,355 tons of material. City officials said they were trying to balance the needs of homeless people while also ensuring that the city is "habitable."

Advocates responded in March 2016 with a federal civil rights lawsuit, but that hasn't slowed the the aggressive sweeps policy. Just days after the filing, police were out in force, removing encampments along the 101 freeway, wrapping campers' personal belongings behind crime scene tape, searching pockets and making arrests for various misdemeanors. Fifty-eight-year-old Alvir Gavorkain asked, "Where are we going to go? I'm sick and old. I can't keep doing this every time they ask me to move," adding that emergency shelters weren't a very good option for her. "They only let you bring two items," she said. "Sometimes I can't get in." Los Angeles released a \$2 billion plan earlier this year to combat the homelessness crisis, but the city admitted it did not have the money to fund it.⁶¹

IV. Policy Recommendations

As has been outlined in this report, the spread of encampments sheltering people experiencing homelessness in recent years has, like the homeless themselves, been met largely with antipathy. The effort by many cities to combat the most visible kind of homelessness in America through criminalization and displacement drains significant

⁵⁹ Nagourney, A. (2016, May 4). Homelessness Rises in Los Angeles, Except for Veterans and Families. Retrieved May 25, 2016, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/05/us/los-angeles-homelessness-veterans-families.html>

⁶⁰ Romero, D. (2015, June 23). LA plans to knock down homeless encampments with greater speed. Retrieved May 25, 2016, from <http://www.laweekly.com/news/la-plans-to-knock-down-homeless-encampments-with-greater-speed-5723010>

⁶¹ Vives, R. & Holland, G. (2016, March 15). "Where are we going to go?" Los Angeles sweeps continue despite lawsuit. Retrieved May 25, 2016, from <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-l-a-homeless-sweep-freeway-overpass-20160315-story.html>

time and monetary resources from communities while doing little to resolve the immediate problem and nothing to address the underlying issues that cause it. A smaller number of communities are finally acknowledging the futility of routinely disrupting the lives of their unhoused neighbors and are moving in a different direction.

For example, in Indianapolis, Indiana, a bill requiring officials to provide 15 days' notice to encampment residents before a sweep may be conducted passed the City-County Council by an overwhelming 23-2 margin. That is a significant lead time compared to other cities. The city cannot destroy campers' personal belongings without first storing them for at least 60 days. Most importantly, under the new law, encampments aren't to be removed at all unless there are enough open housing units and sufficient resources for social services organizations to immediately absorb all their residents. (This provision may be suspended in certain circumstances.)

Maria Foscarnis, executive director of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, spoke positively of the new law. "This ordinance reaffirms what we've known for many years: by approaching homelessness with social systems, not criminal justice systems, both communities and homeless individuals win...ensuring housing, as well as any needed services, will be critical to the successful implementation of any strategy to address encampments."⁶²

The National Coalition for the Homeless agrees. In this time, when affordable housing simply doesn't exist in large portions of the country and shelter beds are not meeting the standards and necessities of the homeless population, cities should accept encampments in the interim while focusing their efforts on providing a long-term solution by working to create an abundance of affordable and low-income housing along with transitional emergency shelter relief to meet the needs of our homeless population. Our recommended policy consists of a three-pronged approach regarding cities' responses, sanitation provisions, and outreach.

A city's response should follow in the footsteps of the ordinance passed by Indianapolis. Encampments should not be closed until every resident is afforded secure housing. We recommend that cities provide a 15 day notice to residents of an encampment before the tent city is removed. Residents' belongings should not be destroyed without storing them for at least 60 days, and efforts are made to notify owners of their whereabouts and how to retrieve them.

⁶² Pyke, A. (2016, March 4). City Takes A Stand Against Treating Homeless Camps Like Crime Rings. Retrieved May 25, 2016, from <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2016/03/04/3756638/indianapolis-homelessness-federal-funding/>

One of the most common claims used by cities when closing encampments is to address the health and safety of camp residents and the greater community. When it comes to sanitation, a city should provide waste management and clean-up for encampments including trash cans and recycling bins emptied by the city each week. When it comes to larger encampments, a dumpster should be provided and emptied on a regular basis. Having trash removal will help mitigate the infestation of rodents and other vermin. Cities should also provide access to adequate restroom facilities where accommodations are otherwise unavailable.

Lastly, cities should allocate an appropriate number of social workers to focus strictly on encampments. This work can be done directly by the city, or contracted out to private organizations and nonprofits. Outreach teams should visit encampments daily to build trust and relationships with residents. This type of intensive outreach is necessary in order to engage segments of the population that have become disillusioned by previous interactions with homeless services and will provide valuable information when it comes to the needs and goals of each individual. It is also useful in identifying shortcomings within the system designed to assist them. Finally, consistent outreach helps to bring health and safety concerns within an encampment to the attention of those who are in a position to address them before they rise to a level that causes a negative reaction.

These and other measures that integrate encampments into service systems and the wider community will help to humanize the housing crisis and bring about an eventual end to homelessness in this country.

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