



**NATIONAL
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THE
HOMELESS**



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Violence and Hate Against Unhoused Americans: 2020-2022

May 2024

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At the National Coalition For the Homeless, we envision a world where everyone has a safe, decent, affordable and accessible home. Our mission is to prevent and end homelessness while ensuring the immediate needs of those experiencing homelessness are met and their civil rights protected. We believe that safe, decent, and affordable housing is a human right [as written in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article Twenty-Five, Section One].

Thank you to the millions who have experienced housing instability. Your ongoing strength, determination, and kindness, in the face of hate for your situation, inspire us daily. If you have experienced violence because of your housing status, and your story is not printed, please know you are not forgotten. Your health and safety are our top concerns. Please consider reporting violence to local law enforcement.



Homelessness is not a moral failure of a person, it is a moral failure of society. It is immoral to choose displacement and eviction over safety and equality.

Donald H. Whitehead, Jr.
NCH Executive Director

SUMMARY

Criminalization has Consequences

Over the past 23 years, the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) has documented nearly 2000 incidents of violence against people who were homeless. At least 588 of unhoused victims lost their lives in violent attacks during this period.

These crimes appear to have been motivated by a perpetrator's bias against people experiencing homelessness, and to have been facilitated by a perpetrator's ability to target homeless people with relative ease. The crimes are a litany of atrocities: beatings, rapes, mutilations, and murders. The murder victims died in unfathomable ways: not only shot or stabbed to death, but also set on fire, drowned – even beheaded.

This year, we've documented shocking levels of law enforcement involvement in attacks against people experiencing homelessness, as well as serial attacks on people experiencing homelessness. And while NCH has compelling data on the number and severity of attacks in general, many of these acts remain underreported (in part because people experiencing homelessness tend to live on the outskirts of communities). The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that in 2019 "less than half (44%) of violent victimizations (of people experiencing homelessness) are reported to police." Furthermore, many attacks were likely even more gruesome than available reports imply.

Why do these attacks occur?

Since the 1980s, the homeless community—and poor people in general—have been ostracized and dehumanized. According to the [National Homelessness Law Center](#), at least 187 cities and 48 states have enacted laws over the past three decades to criminalize life-sustaining acts such as camping, sleeping, and panhandling. Most recently, a new law in Kentucky legalizes violence against people experiencing homelessness under the infamous stand-your-ground defense. In the proposed legislation, force up to and including deadly force can legally be used to remove people experiencing homelessness from private property.

In addition, the United States Supreme Court is set to rule on a case – [Grants Pass v Johnson](#) – that could endorse a city’s ability to prohibit people experiencing homelessness from sleeping in public. Such a ruling could open the door to mass criminalization of people experiencing homelessness, which in turn could lead to more lost lives.

We believe there’s a direct link between these growing criminalization efforts and the increase in violence and vitriol toward people experiencing homelessness. Included in this report is a case study on Oregon, which saw the highest levels of violence against people who were unhoused we have ever documented.

Elected officials must recognize the impact of the decision to criminalize homelessness in their communities. Criminalizing homelessness not only villainizes people experiencing homelessness; it also forces them into isolation, making them easy targets for those intent on causing harm to them. Homeless people are already far more likely than the general population to be victims of violent crime; criminalizing and isolating them only makes it more likely that they’ll be attacked.

Anti-homeless violence lays bare the structural and economic injustice suffered by those who live unsheltered on the streets of America. The severity of these attacks necessitates immediate policy changes, enhanced services, and legislative reforms.



Image: Kevin Wolf, Associated Press

KEY FINDINGS

1999–2022: Over this 23-year period, NCH documented **1,923** reported acts of violence towards people experiencing homelessness. (Throughout this report, “people experiencing homelessness” and “unhoused people” are used interchangeably.) **Seventy-one percent** of these acts were non-lethal, while **29%** were fatal acts of violence.

2020–2022: Over this three-year period, since our December 2020 report “20 Years of Hate” —which included data up through 2019 — NCH documented **97** reported acts of violence towards people experiencing homelessness.

- Almost **half** of these acts of violence (**48%**) were fatal.
- **2022** was the **most violent** of the three years, with **60%** of fatal acts reported during the 3-year period occurring in 2022.

Geography

- Acts of violence occurred in 24 states and the District of Columbia, with 45.3% occurring in just three states: California (19.5%), Oregon (15.5%), and Florida (10.3%).
- Of the 47 fatal acts of violence, almost half (48.9%) occurred in just two states: Oregon (29.8%) and California (19.1%).

Types of Violence

- **Serial violence:** There were five serial acts of violence over the three-year period, of which four were fatal.
- Non-fatal beatings and **law enforcement:** Of the non-lethal acts of violence, 53.3% were beatings — of which more than a third (37.5%) came at the hands of law enforcement.
- **Fatal:** Four in five (81.9%) of the fatal acts of violence fell into one of three categories: shootings (45.5%); beatings (21.2%); and stabbings (15.2%).



KEY FINDINGS (cont.)

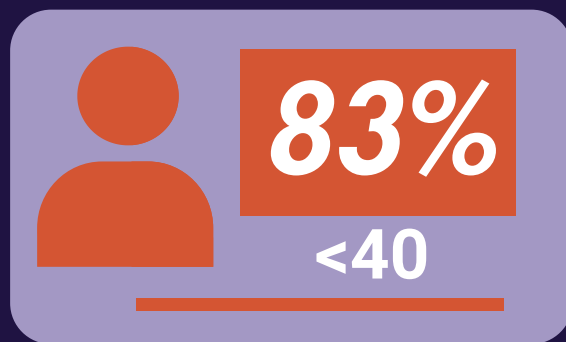
Victims

- **Age:** Half of the victims of non-fatal acts were between the ages of 21 and 40. A little more than four in five (80.5%) of the victims of fatal acts were between the ages of 21 and 60, with half of them between the ages of 21 and 40.
- **Gender:** A significant majority of the victims of both non-lethal (66%) and fatal (87.2%) acts were male.

Perpetrators

- **Age:** Nearly four in five (79.5%) of the perpetrators of non-fatal acts were 40 years old or younger; more than four in five (82.3%) of the perpetrators of fatal acts were 40 years old or younger.
- **Gender:** To even a higher degree than with the gender of the victims, a significant percentage of the perpetrators of both non-lethal (80.7%) and fatal (87.5%) acts of violence were male.

Since 1999, the **OVERWHELMING MAJORITY** of known perpetrators have been males under the age of 40.



Background

Since 1980, the United States has endured more than 40 years of sustained mass homelessness, the longest such period in our nation’s history.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report, an estimated 653,000 people experienced homelessness on any given night. For purposes of comparison, this is about half the population of Hawaii, or about 20 of every 10,000 people in the entire country.

The 2023 estimate represents an increase of more than 70,000 people since 2019. The HUD report also estimates about 40% of those experiencing homelessness, or 256,000 people, were unsheltered on any given night in 2023. For purposes of comparison is about half the population of Wyoming.

This human tragedy has been buttressed by public policies that have created an epidemic of income inequality and racial injustice that sustains the homelessness crisis.

Homelessness is not an intractable social crisis. Rather, widespread homelessness is manufactured by failed policies at every level of government. Our country continues to choose NOT to address the lack of affordable and accessible housing; lack of access to health and behavioral health care; and an absence of living wages. Over the last 40 years, our public policy responses have focused on managing homelessness — including by criminalizing unhoused people — as opposed to ending and preventing it.

This report looks at a *tragic byproduct* of the homelessness crisis: *the violence, sometimes deadly, directed at people experiencing homelessness.*

Life expectancy for someone who is homeless can be 20-30 years younger than the general population

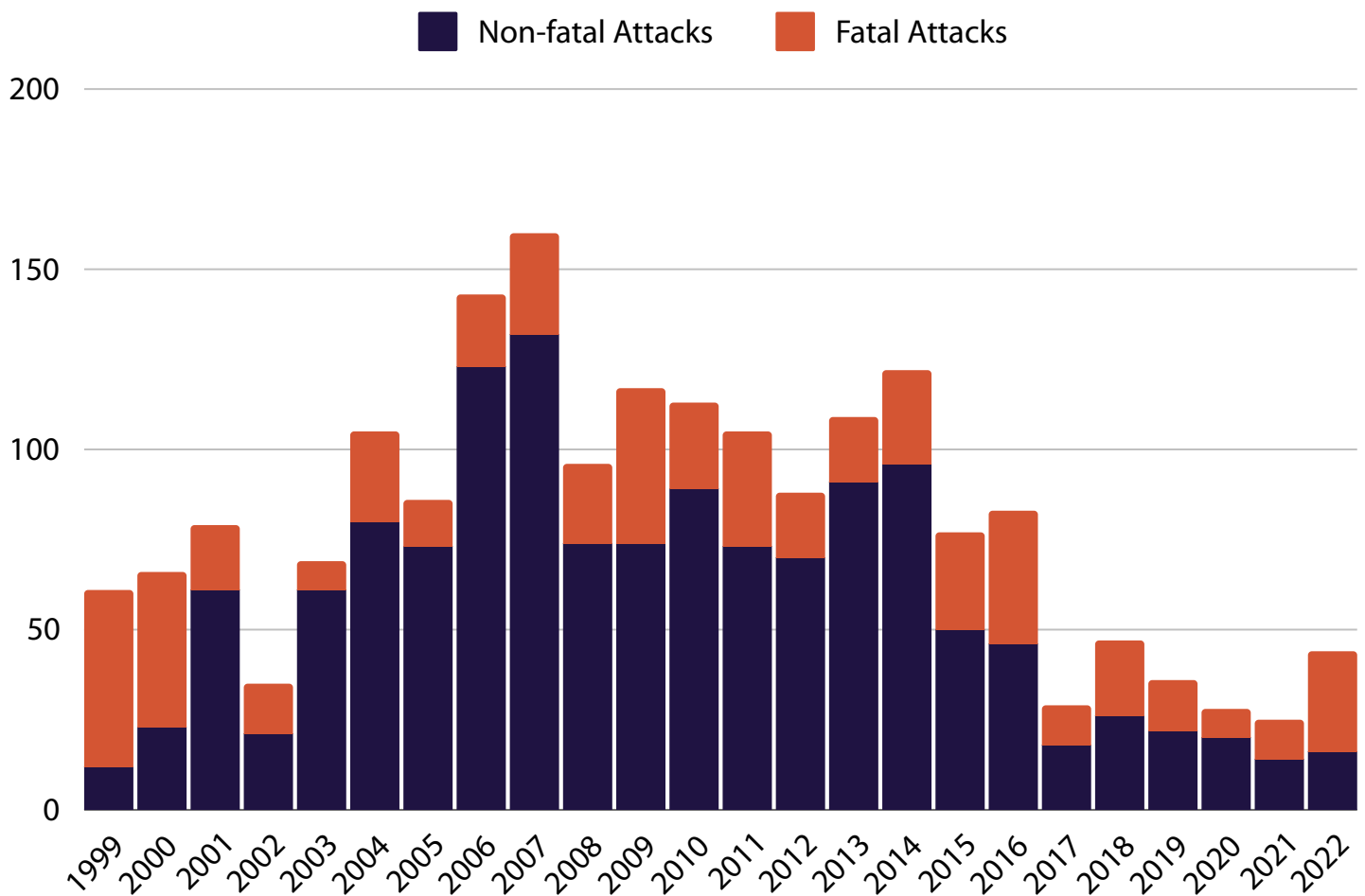
Two landmark studies, published 24 years apart, documented the same violence that NCH has documented during this same period:

- ***Homelessness: Programs and People who Serve Them: Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients [1999]:***
This study, based on surveys performed in 1996 — including 76 sampling areas in the nation, more than 6,300 phone surveys of service providers, and 5,700 mail surveys — found that 22% of people experiencing homelessness had been physically assaulted or beaten up, and 7% had been sexually assaulted.

- ***Toward a New Understanding: The California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness [2023]:***
This study, based on 3,200 surveys of people experiencing homelessness in California, found that “homelessness increases the risk of violence”:
 - 38% of unhoused people experienced physical or sexual violence:
 - 42% of those unsheltered
 - 39% of those sheltered in vehicles
 - 26% of those who spent time in other sheltered locations
 - Of those who experienced **physical violence**, almost half (49%) reported that the perpetrators were strangers while 21% of the violence was committed by an intimate partner.
 - Of those who reported experiencing **sexual violence**, 54% said the perpetrator was a stranger and 22% said it was committed by an intimate partner.

Findings 1999 - 2022

Over this 24-year period, NCH has documented **1,923** reported acts of violence towards people experiencing homelessness. Seventy-one percent of these acts were non-lethal, while 29% were fatal acts of violence.



Please note: This report makes the distinction between attacks that ended in the death of a person experiencing homelessness (fatal or lethal), versus those attacks where the victim survived (non-fatal or non-lethal).

Geography of All Acts of Violence

Acts of violence towards unhoused people have occurred in 48 states; the District of Columbia; and Puerto Rico. Three states accounted for 40% of these acts of violence: California (19%); Florida (14%); and Texas (6%).

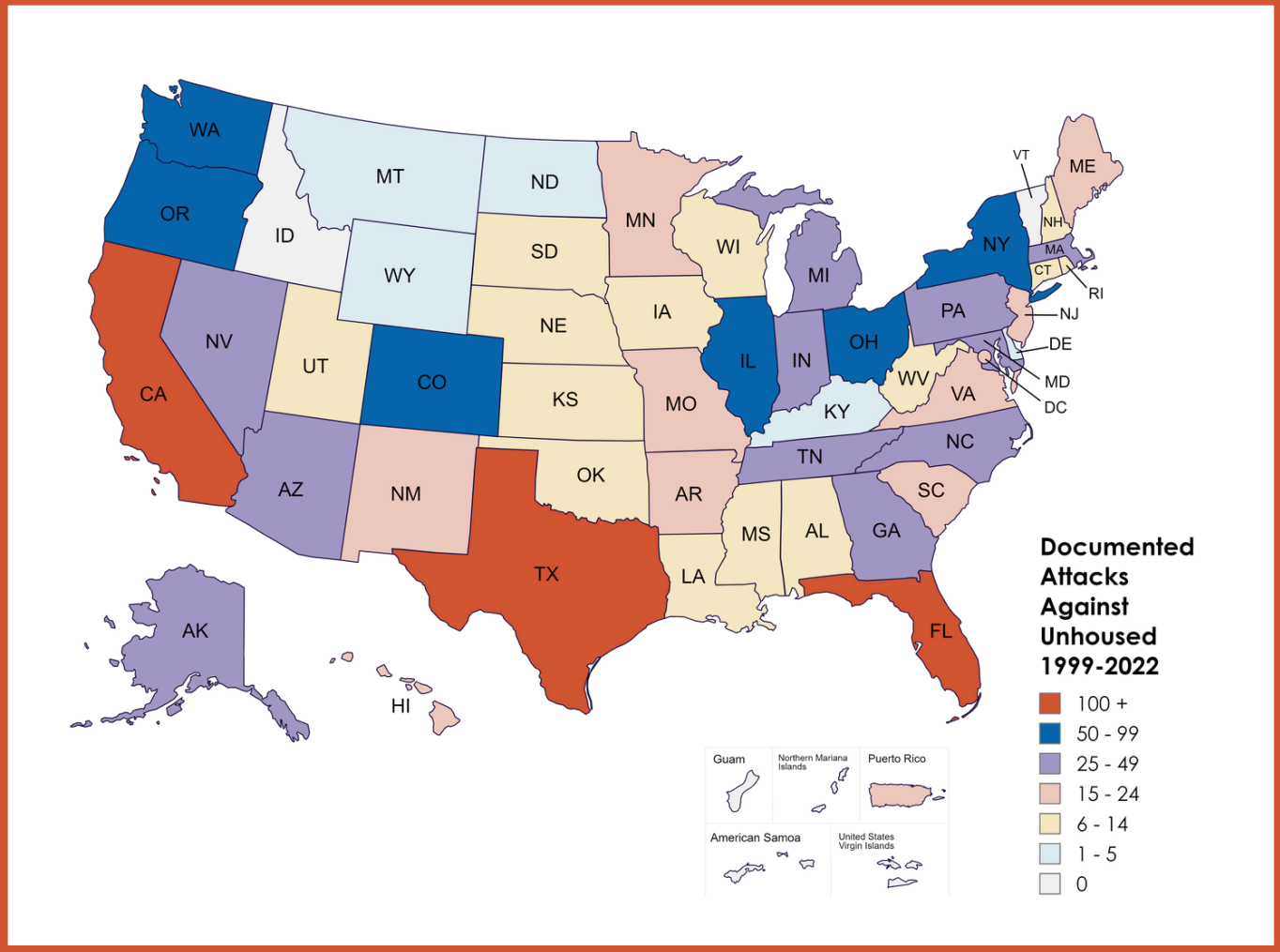


Image: Camp Resolution, Sacramento

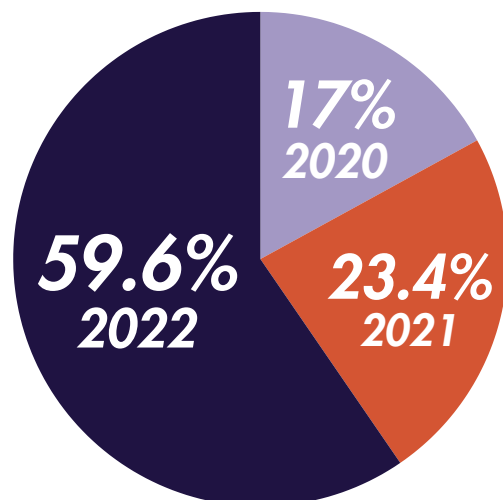
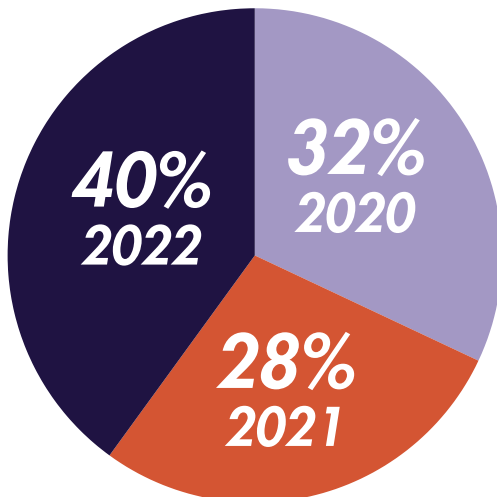
Findings 2020 - 2022

Over this three-year period, NCH documented **97** acts of violence towards people experiencing homelessness, almost half of which (48%) resulted in a fatality and 52% of which were non-lethal. After a drop during the pandemic, violence against people who were unhoused was higher in 2022.



Non-Lethal Acts of Violence: Between 2020 and 2022 there were 50 non-lethal acts of violence, with 40% occurring in 2022 alone.

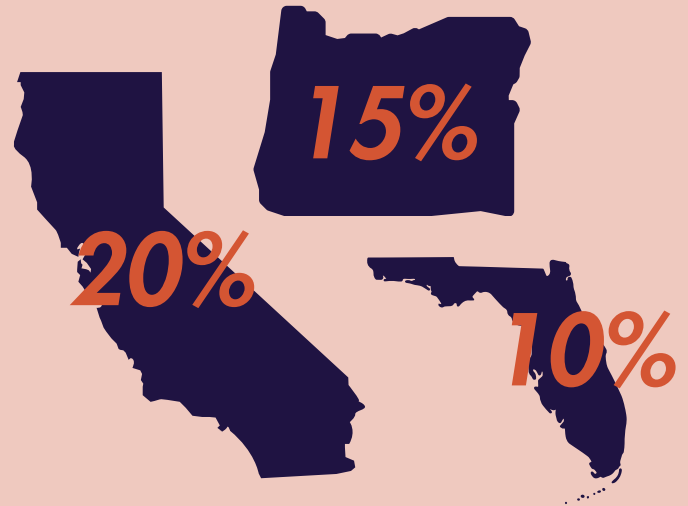
Fatal Acts of Violence: Between 2020 and 2022 there were 47 fatal acts of violence, 59.6% of which occurred in 2022 alone.



Geography of All Acts of Violence 2020-2022



Three states accounted for 45% of these acts of violence



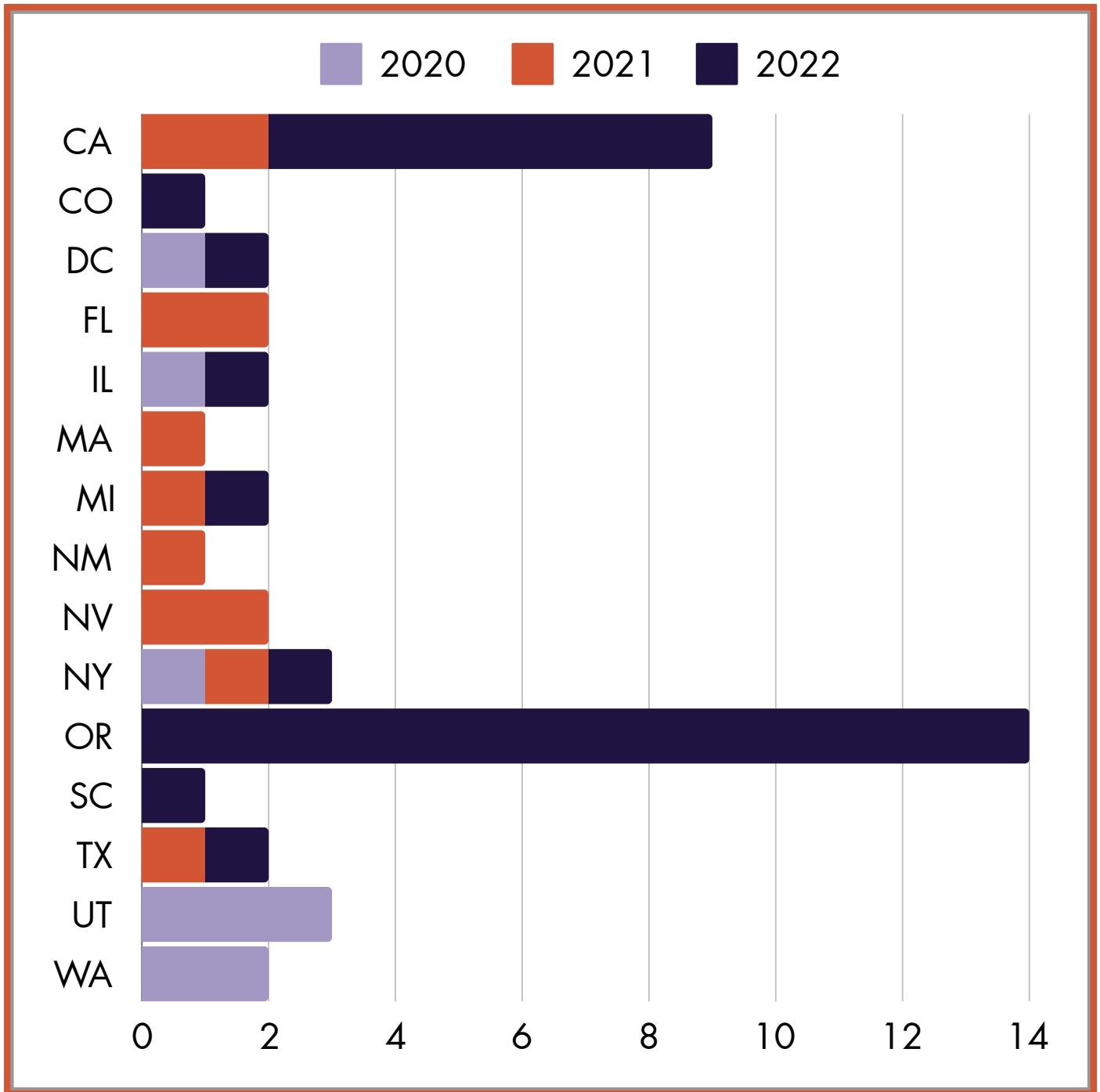
08 **2020:** Eight fatal acts of violence in four states plus the District of Columbia.

11 **2021:** Eleven fatal acts of violence in eight states.

28 **2022:** Twenty-eight fatal acts of violence in eight states plus the District of Columbia — half of them in Oregon alone.

KEY POINTS

- Of the fatal acts of violence in 2020, 2021, and 2022, six in ten (60%) occurred in 2022 alone.
- Two states — Oregon (30%) and California (19%) — accounted for 49% of the total fatal acts of violence between 2020 and 2022.



TYPES OF VIOLENCE

Of all the meaningless violence committed against people who were unhoused, most terrifying might be five serial acts of violence recorded. For this report’s purpose, serial violence refers to crimes of a repetitive nature, where similar crimes were committed against more than one victim or at more than one time and place.

Another notably large number of assaults on Americans experiencing homelessness came at the hands of law enforcement, seemingly just because of the victim’s housing status. More than one-third (35%) of non-fatal beatings were perpetrated by members of law enforcement.

Following is an examination of the types of violent crimes committed, as well as demographic information of victims and perpetrators.

NON-FATAL ATTACKS

During the reporting years, 2020 - 2022, violent incidents were determined to fall into eight different types of attacks. Beatings and assaults accounted for 54% of these acts of non-lethal violence, many committed with a baseball bat. Additionally, there were 19 incidents determined to be harassment in nature.

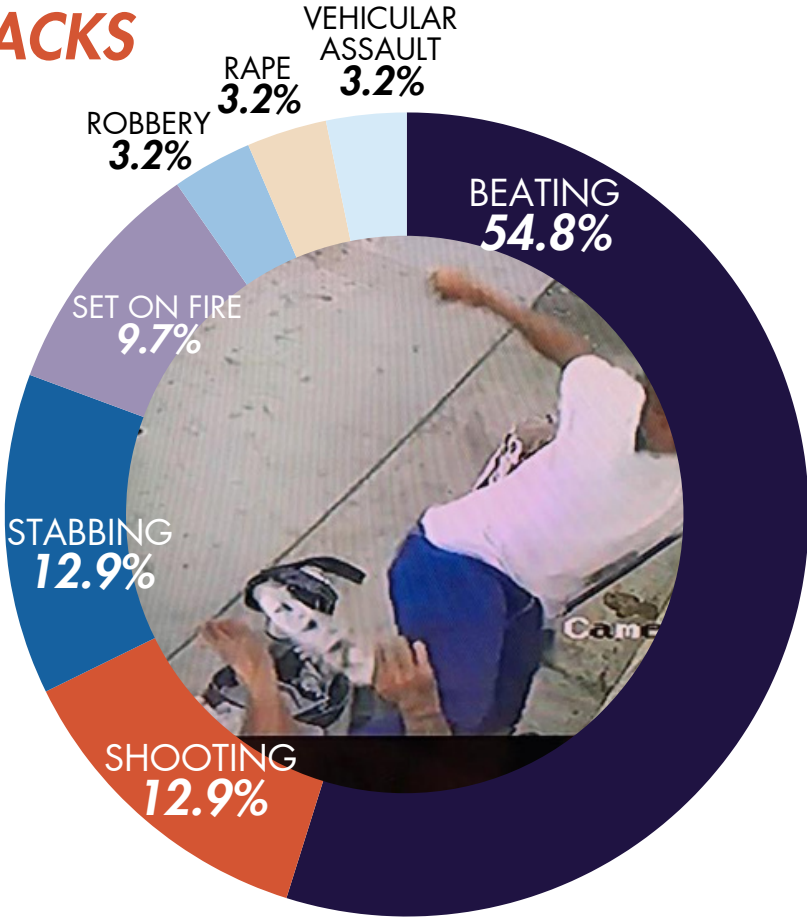


Image: Security camera footage of a random attack on a man resting on the sidewalk in Twentynine Palms, CA

FATAL ATTACKS

During the reporting years, 2020 - 2022, almost half of the incidents recorded led to the deaths of victims who were unhoused. Almost half of the fatalities of people experiencing homelessness were due to gunshots (45.5%), reflecting growing vigilantism.

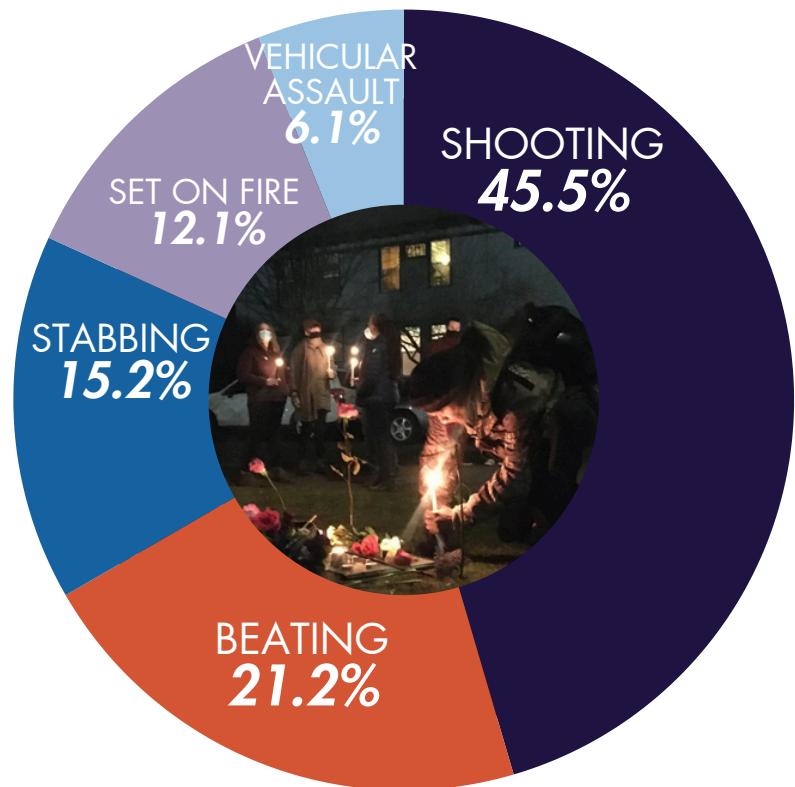


Image: Will James, KNKX - Memorial for suspected vigilante shooting victim in Takoma, WA

Despite their lack of training and authority, civilians feel entitled to harass and remove homeless people and their shelters from public space under authority of laws that treat them as offenders simply for existing.

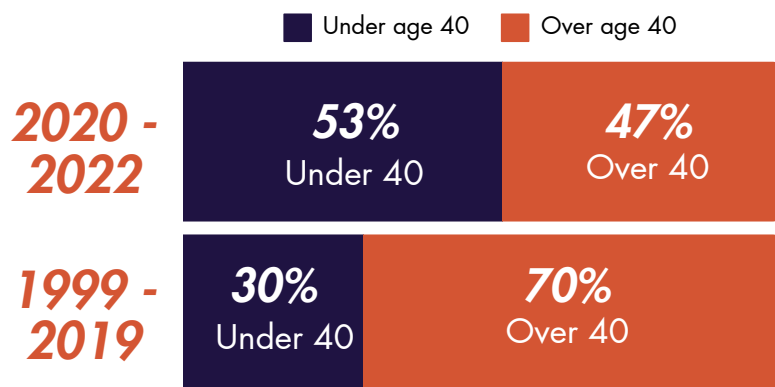
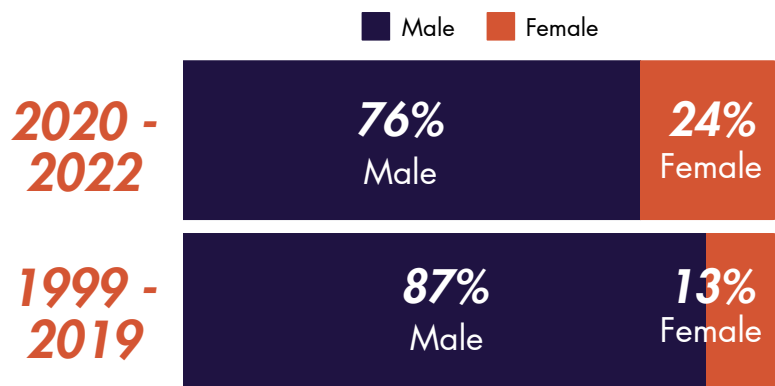
While some acts of violence are intended to cause serious bodily harm, others are aimed at humiliating and excluding homeless people from places where they are unwanted.

-National Homelessness Law Center,
Housing Not Handcuffs 2019

PROFILE OF *UNHOUSED* VICTIMS

The victims of crimes during the 2020-2022 reporting years were overwhelmingly male, consistent with data from earlier reports.

The age of victims in recent years has tended younger than previously tracked. Although, our communities are consistently seeing more and more people across the demographic spectrum fall on hard times as the cost of living rises, but wages have remained stagnant.

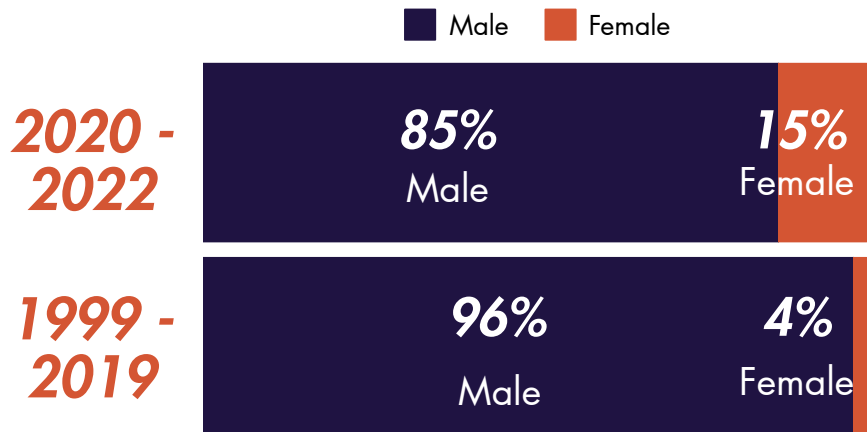


[In response to gruesome stabbings of several homeless women in Las Vegas] Dr. Timothy Jeider, a psychiatrist, says people experiencing homelessness are often easier targets. "They're often targeted and victimized, just because of the nature of how they live and where they are in their circumstances," Jeider explained.

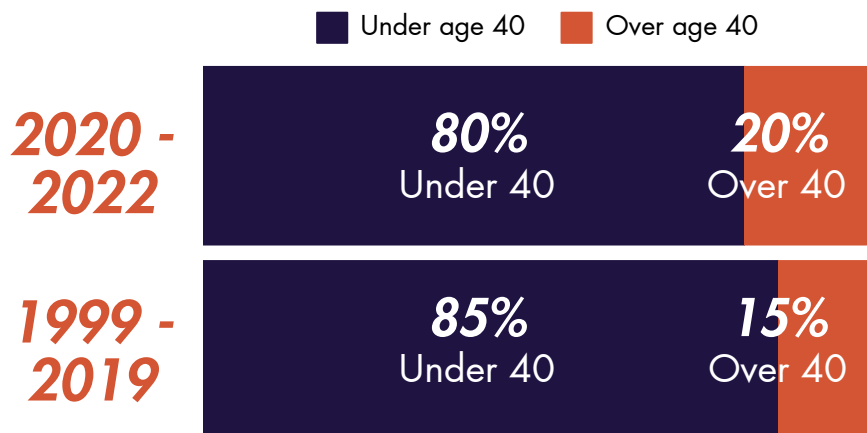
Psychiatrist offers insight into stabbing attacks on homeless in Las Vegas, KTNV News, September 27, 2022

PROFILE OF *PERPETRATORS*

The reported perpetrators of the crimes tracked during the 2020-2022 reporting years were overwhelmingly male, consistent with data from earlier reports.



The age of perpetrators in recent years has tended slightly older than previously tracked. This could be due to increased incidents of vigilantism, often from nearby home or business owners who are often older adults.



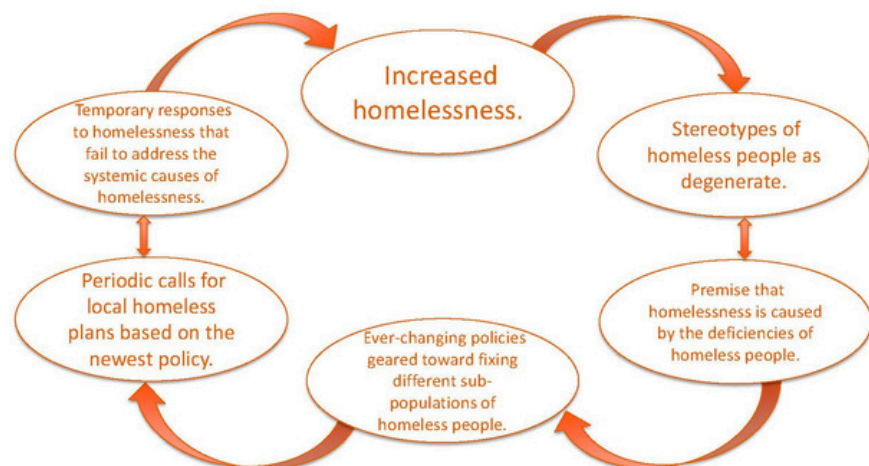
DISCUSSION

The National Homelessness Law Center, in its 2019 report, *Housing Not Handcuffs*, analyzed ordinances in 187 communities that criminalize daily acts of survival for people forced to live outside due to lack of shelter, including sleeping and camping in all or some public spaces as well as panhandling in public spaces.

Despite guidance both from HUD and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness to “collaborate, don’t criminalize,” communities across the nation continue to brand the unhoused as criminals, enacting legislation that dehumanizes them to such an extent that they are no longer seen as fellow human beings but instead become easy targets of hate crimes.

These laws (ordinances like bans on “camping” in public, limits on sitting or lying down, prohibitions on panhandling or even feeding people in public) push a political cycle of structural violence, depicted below, that not only leads to negative perceptions of people who are homeless but also creates a lack of compassion and political will to invest in affordable housing and other proven solutions to endemic homelessness.

The Vicious Cycle of Homeless Policy



WESTERN REGIONAL ADVOCACY PROJECT: WITHOUT HOUSING

CRIMINALIZATION AND VIOLENCE: TOP STATES **CALIFORNIA AND FLORIDA**

This political cycle of violence towards people experiencing homelessness is illustrated by California and Florida – two states that between them accounted for 35.1% of the 1,923 acts of violence documented by NCH against people experiencing homelessness between 1999 and 2022, California with 21.3% and Florida with 14.1%.

	Camping in public – statewide	Camping in particular locations	Sitting or lying in particular locations	Loitering in particular locations	Standing in Roadway	Panhandling in particular locations-statewide
California	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Florida	✓			✓	✓	✓

CRIMINALIZATION HAS **CONSEQUENCES**

Both California and Florida have warm climates that attract visitors and make sleeping outdoors marginally safer or more comfortable year-round.

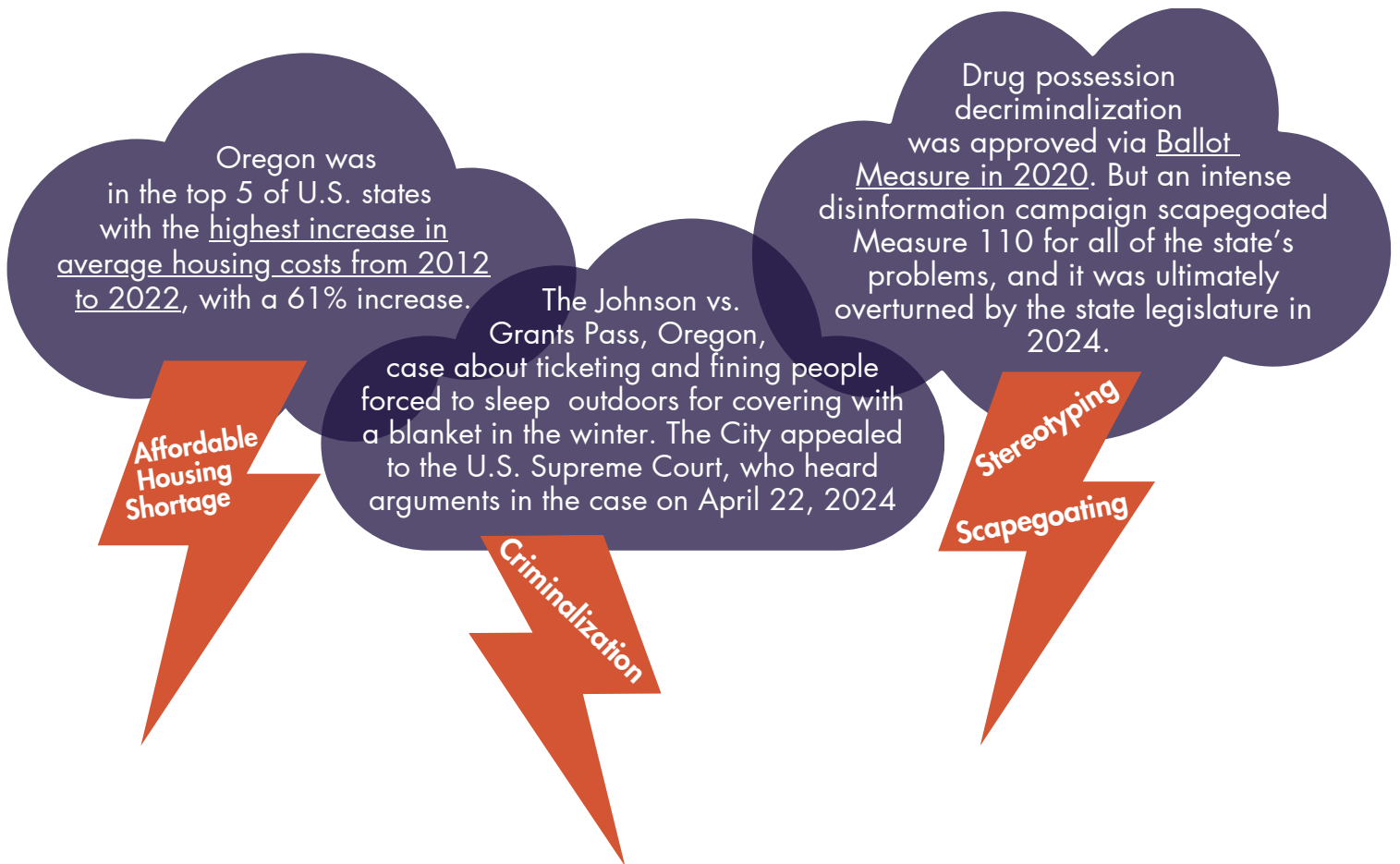
As homelessness tends to be more visible in these states, those who are forced to live outdoors are even more vulnerable to crimes of opportunity.

As a result of more visible homelessness, instead of increasing housing resources, these two states have implemented a plethora of state and municipal ordinances that criminalize people experiencing homelessness.

This public response of punishing residents for being unhoused directly relates to higher levels of violence against people experiencing homelessness.

CASE STUDY: OREGON

Attacks tracked in Oregon in 2022 further exemplifies the connection between, and consequence of, criminalizing the human necessities of humans who are unhoused. Several factors have combined to create a perfect storm of dehumanization of people on the margins:



The U.S. Supreme Court decided in January of 2024 to take up the case of City of Grants Pass, Oregon vs. Gloria Johnson, to determine if a local government can make it a crime for people to involuntarily live outside and unsheltered when adequate shelter is not available. The high court is reviewing a ruling of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals that states are in violation of the Constitution's 8th Amendment clause prohibiting "cruel and unusual punishment" when they enact laws criminalizing the act of sleeping outside when there is no other space available.

CASE STUDY: **OREGON** (cont.)

In the words of the National Homelessness Law Center, *Johnson vs. Grants Pass* “sets the stage for the most significant Supreme Court case about homelessness criminalization and the rights of homeless people in decades. At its core, this case will decide whether cities are allowed to punish people for things like sleeping outside with a pillow or blanket, even when there are no safe shelter options.”



Image: National Homelessness Law Center



Image: National Homelessness Law Center

NCH is hopeful that the Supreme Court upholds the 9th Circuit’s ruling, which would mean that jurisdictions around the nation would no longer be able to criminalize people experiencing homelessness with fines or jail. States and communities would then have to focus on creating affordable and accessible housing.

However, if the Supreme Court rules in favor of Grants Pass, communities around the nation would have legal permission to further criminalize unhoused people, which NCH fears would dramatically increase the violence against people experiencing homelessness that is documented in this report.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure that housing is a human right for all people

The core solution to ending and preventing homelessness is the funding of safe, decent, affordable, and accessible housing by all levels of government. Policymakers must embrace housing as a human right regardless of ethnicity, age, gender identify, sexual orientation, or ability.

Reverse ordinances and municipal practices that criminalize people experiencing homelessness

Communities across the nation have passed a range of anti-homeless ordinances that create an environment that allows harassment of — and potential violence against — people experiencing homelessness on the part of both law enforcement and the general public. An initial major step for communities is to repeal these mean-spirited and counter-productive ordinances and focus their resources instead on affordable and accessible housing, supportive services, and other systemic solutions to end and prevent homelessness.

Add housing status to protected class statutes

Because of the bias-motivated violence documented for the past 24 years, people experiencing homelessness must be included as a protected class under Federal, state and local statutes. Suggested implementation of vulnerable victims sentencing guidelines included in Appendix II.

Collect data on victimization of people experiencing homelessness

Government and law enforcement agencies should collect data on violence against people experiencing homelessness, with all arrest reports and death certificates noting if the victim or deceased was unhoused at the time of incident. We also encourage service providers to regularly survey their clients to understand levels and severity of victimization.

METHODOLOGY

Our methodology for researching and determining possible hate crimes committed against people experiencing homelessness because of their housing status has remained similar over the past 23 years.

TO: Donald H. Whitehead Jr.
FROM: Adam C. Sloane
RE: Hate Crimes Research Jan 1, 2020 - December 31, 2022

Attached please find news accounts—primarily from Westlaw—about hate crimes committed against persons experiencing homelessness on the probable basis of housing status. The research covers the period from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2022. Most of the pages are printed double-sided.

Although I typically have included only one news report about each incident, there are some instances in which I have provided multiple reports, so that you can see information not available in a single report or information about context or subsequent developments. Where there are multiple reports about the same incident(s), I have styled or clipped the reports together.

I have generally included only incidents in which it is pretty clear that the perpetrators were not homeless. There are a small number of instances, however, where I note that I am uncertain about the status of the perpetrators. Three incidents struck me as sufficiently noteworthy that they should be included in case you have additional information to confirm the status of the perpetrators.

In addition, I am including a couple news stories involving homeless suspects who clearly were using one of our homeless lists. One involves serial killer Gerald Brentard III, who murdered and assaulted homeless men in Washington, DC, and New York City. Brentard has been charged with hate crimes. Another instance involves a North Las Vegas man, Tristan Telford, who killed three homeless people (and a dog) and told police that “everything without a home gets terminated.”

I have not included stories about incidents that occurred outside the U.S. Because of the substantial time involved in selecting stories about U.S. incidents from the nearly 4,000 stories that my search hit on, it wasn't practical to include incidents from outside the U.S.

Adam Sloane, of Mayer Brown LLP, engaged in a rigorous Westlaw database search looking for examples of attacks or violence involving people experiencing homelessness. Mr. Sloane examined 4,000 entries to the housing status of victims and perpetrators of crimes.

The data presented on violent acts committed against unhoused persons was also gathered from a variety of other sources:

- National and local news reports;
- Homeless advocates and service providers from around the nation;
- Community death reports;
- Most importantly, the voices of homeless and formerly homeless people who self-reported incidents they have experienced.



Every reported incident was subject to a rigorous fact-checking process designed to evaluate and verify accuracy. A series of staff, Board and outside researchers and editors reviewed data before this and past reports were published.

NCH acknowledges the limited nature of the methodology used to determine the bias-motivated crimes in this report. The examples of attacks listed should be seen as a sample, and undercount even, especially because people who are unhoused are so often mistreated by members of our law enforcement and other municipal agencies.

Resources cited and for further reading

- [2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report \(AHAR\) to Congress](#), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, December 2023
- [Exploring the Experiences of Violence Among Individuals Who Are Homeless Using a Consumer-Led Approach](#), National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2014
- [FBI Hate Crimes Statistics](#), U.S. Department of Justice
- [HOMELESSNESS: Programs and the People They Serve](#), Urban Institute, August 1999
- [Housing Not Handcuffs 2019](#), National Homelessness Law Center, December 2019
- [Johnson vs. Grants Pass case website](#)
- [National Crime Victimization Survey](#), Bureau of Justice Statistics
- [Oregon has one of the highest increase in house prices, new research says](#), KOIN News, September 5, 2023
- [Oregon's Measure 110, What Really Happened](#), Drug Policy Alliance, February 28, 2024
- [Protecting the Unprotected: A Survey of Violence Experienced While Homeless](#), National Health Care for the Homeless Council, August 2019
- [Toward a New Understanding: The California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness](#), Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, June 2023
- [Without Housing Organizing Toolkit](#), Western Regional Advocacy Project, January 2016



NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

National Coalition for the Homeless advocates for increased public investment in affordable housing, services, and resources for housing stability. We are creating lasting systems change by developing leaders with lived experience who know how to permanently solve homelessness. We all want the same thing - a safe place to call home.

We thank you for your contribution to larger changes in the way people experiencing homelessness are seen and treated in our society.

Contact

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