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Social Welfare Policy and Services

Policy Position Paper

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Why the United States Government Should Guarantee Housing to the Homeless

“We proclaim that each person being created in the image and likeness of God possesses an inherent dignity from which stems a basic human right to shelter.”

--A December 1987 resolution from the General Board of American Baptist Church

On the base of the Statue of Liberty is a tablet that lie the words, “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to be breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.” What do these words mean? Are they mere rhetoric, or do they represent the meaning of this great nation whose ideals are rooted in the fundamental belief as highlighted in the Declaration oof Independence which state “We hold these truths to self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among them these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” If we are truly all created equal, then this means everyone: rich, poor, black, white, old, and young. However, while these words are quoted with ease, the reality is that this truth is not enjoyed by the people who are considered homeless in the United States. According to security.org, 582,462 individuals are experiencing homelessness in America, an increase of about 2,000 people since the last complete census conducted in 2020 (<https://www.security.org/resources/homeless-statistics/>).

These numbers reveal a disturbing reality namely that many Americans are experiencing homelessness at unprecedented numbers. Is this the America that the Founding Fathers envisioned? An America that is content with depriving its citizens of the rights to live in peace and tranquility. Who are we as a nation if we continue to allow homeless population to increase without us doing anything to stem the rising tide of this demographic? Housing is a critical part of the American experience. It embodies the true meaning of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” What if life without a place to lay your head? What is life without the liberty to live

in one's home in peace? What is life without being happy. I will tell you what it is. Homelessness is akin to death because it deprives you of the opportunity to enjoy the full panoply of "unalienable rights" that the Founding Fathers declared to be the true meaning of independence and freedom.

Americans Experiencing Homelessness

BY YEAR | 2012-2022



NOTE: 2021 census only included individuals living in sheltered situations.

security.org

From 2012-2022, the annual rate of Americans who experience homelessness has skyrocketed out of control. We are living in times where you cannot walk the streets and see homeless people sleeping on the streets. In some cities like New York, California, Portland, El Paso, Newark, among others, makeshift houses line the streets. Euphemistically known as "skid row," the homeless occupy these areas with a sense of pride, holding onto their precious belongings for dear life. It is a common practice to see women clutching the hands of their children in these homeless communities. For the indifferent, the homeless are a nuisance. They represent those

who have given up on life. Those who have “chosen” to live in squalor. However, statistics suggest that a significant percentage of people who are homeless live under deplorable conditions due a lack of affordable housing. According to the Family Getaway—a non-profit organization whose mission of is to provide stability and life-changing supportive services to children and families affected by homelessness—lack of affordable housing is a primary cause of homelessness in families. Many of these families have one or both parents working but are not making a livable and/or sustainable wages. In addition, a major myth surrounding homelessness is that people have chosen to live like this. Yet, evidence suggests that events like unemployment, illnesses, and accidents are some of the contributing causes of these circumstances.

The government has a moral obligation to guarantee housing to its citizens who are homeless (Hartman, 1975). With so many people living homeless lives in squalor, it can be argued that the American government has failed this population. No more is this true than with its veterans, the people who have sacrificed their lives for the American nation. In 2019, 67,000 of the more than 630,000 veterans were homeless according to the House of Warriors’ website (houseforwarriors.org). To exacerbate matters, statistics reveal not only that the homeless numbers for veterans is staggering, but that they also show the high rates of suicides amongst them as well. In fact, 40% of all veteran suicides experienced homelessness according to VA Suicide Prevention Roundtable Report of 2019 (<https://housesforwarriors.org/about-houses-for-warriors-mission-and-founder/>). Therefore, it is incumbent upon the American government to guarantee housing for people who are homeless because doing so reflects the essence of who America truly is, that Judeo-Christian democratic nation whose ideals rest upon the notion that tending to the poor and destitute is not only a moral responsibility, but an inherent right. In

support of this position, I leave by quoting the words of former President Abraham Lincoln who once stated about the poor, “To the humblest and poorest amongst us are held out the highest privileges and positions.”

Why the United States Government Should Not Guarantee Housing to the Homeless

America as the saying goes is the Land of Milk and Honey. Not sure who coined this phrase; however, it accurately depicts the sentiment of a sizable portion of the country who believes that no matter sex, race, or economic status, we are all born equal in this country. As children, we all start off on equal footing. It is individual choice that separates us as we continue to embark on our respective journeys in life. The ability to execute that individual choice is rooted in the fundamental principle of freedom as highlighted in the Declaration of Independence which states in relevant part, “We hold these truths to self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among them these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

What does this mean? In layman terms it simply means that neither of us has the right to deprive anyone of our fellow human beings to live freely without intruding upon our rights. It also means that none of us has the right to take the liberties of another. Finally, it means that we have possess the right to live out lives free and happy. Yet, these core principles say nothing about making sure you are happy at my expense. Let me say that again. If making you happy means depriving me of my happiness then I no longer am enjoying freedom that is inherent within the constructs of the American ideal. As an American taxpayer, I am not happy if I have to fund the governments endeavors centered around guaranteeing housing to the homeless. If the government can guarantee housing to the homeless would they be willing to do the same for me

tomorrow? If not, then how is this equality? Yes, I admit that everything I own is a result of hard work that was put in. I sacrificed my blood, sweat and tears to get me to this point of my career. Why should I have to fund an endeavor which supports people who choose to remain in the predicament that they are in. Like I have a choice to get up and go to work every day, so do homeless people. Therefore, the fact that they choose to remain homeless is a choice they make, and if it affects me then I am not happy. This is not freedom, at least how the Founding Fathers envisioned it.

References

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