

Stop the Sweeps Background Info

- **Eugene has the highest per capita rate of homelessness in the entire country** (based on 2019 Point in Time Count). There are at least 9,600 people experiencing homelessness in Lane County, and 14 out of 1,000 people in Eugene are unhoused. These numbers are double or triple the national averages, depending on the statistics used. 80% of our unhoused population is unsheltered (living in places not meant for human habitation) compared to 35% nationally.
- National attacks on affordable and public housing over the past 40 years (driven by racist, neoliberal pro-corporate forces), land use zoning restrictions, college town gentrification, not-in-my-backyard liberal classism and racism, and climate induced wildfires have all contributed to the housing crisis that we are seeing here in Eugene.
- The sweeps during the pandemic are a continuation of the City's historical approach to the unhoused population and reactionary form of governance. The **City has reacted to society's discomfort with visible poverty by criminalizing homelessness**, i.e., enacting and enforcing laws, rules, and policies that make life-sustaining activities illegal, ignoring the fact that there is no alternative shelter or housing available.

Eugene Municipal Court Data Analysis

Quality of Life Citations January 1, 2018 – May 31, 2019

Violation	Unhoused	Housed	Total
4.815 Prohibited Camping	298 (100%)	0 (0%)	298
4.190 Open Container	419 (80%)	105 (20%)	524
2.019 Violation of Park Rules	657 (88%)	87 (12%)	747
4.807 Criminal Trespass II	1,759 (80%)	439 (20%)	2,198 ⁹⁰
Total	3,133 (83%)	631 (17%)	3,767

- This chart is from a Feb. 2020 report on decriminalizing homelessness in Eugene. The report was endorsed by the Eugene Human Rights Commission and sent to the City. It includes recommendations for the City, which have not been acted upon.
- This chart summarizes the violations of 4 most common “quality of life” laws in Eugene that not only target, but disproportionately affect and discriminate against people experiencing homelessness, a significant percentage of whom are disabled and/or seniors.
 - Prohibited camping for resting in public places
 - Criminal trespass II for resting on private property
 - Violation of park rules for resting anywhere in the thousands of acres of park land throughout Eugene, and
 - Open container for not having a home in which they can drink
- Unhoused people are **14 times more likely** to receive these 4 “quality of life” citations than housed people.
- Over **one-quarter** of the violations heard in Eugene Municipal Court (which has a \$9.3 million budget) are for violations of just these 4 laws.

- Other laws criminalizing the unhoused include: disorderly conduct, pedestrian violations, and **impoundment of vehicles that are many household's only form of shelter.**
- According to the report, because of the laws in Eugene that punish people for their unhoused status, "there is ***literally no square inch in Eugene where***" **unsheltered individuals in unsanctioned camps "are legally allowed to exist."** This is unacceptable, inhumane, and unconstitutional. According to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the U.S. Department of Justice (under the Obama administration), if a person literally has nowhere else to go, then enforcement of an anti-camping ordinance against that person is a violation of the Eighth Amendment prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment.
- These punitive measures against unhoused people **do nothing to address the underlying problems of homelessness.** In reality, they **perpetuate cycles of homelessness** by creating additional, often insurmountable barriers for people to access housing and employment. For example, civil citations require appearances in court, can lead to arrest warrants for failure to appear, incarceration, and a criminal record. Unpaid civil citations can impact a person's credit history and be a direct bar to housing access in competitive rental markets.
- And the **criminalization approach makes no sense from a cost perspective** either. Studies have shown that it's **much cheaper to give people full housing and health services** than it is to pay for the incarceration, adjudication, and medical costs of the unhoused. Of course, the City isn't tracking the costs of its criminalization of homelessness, but the decriminalization report includes a rough, conservative cost analysis demonstrating that the **City of Eugene is spending millions of taxpayer dollars annually to maintain the current system of criminalization.** This is consistent with studies done in other cities, which also demonstrate that **significant savings of taxpayer dollars could be had if money currently spent on enforcing laws that criminalize homelessness was redirected toward low-barrier affordable housing.**

SO...this was the context before COVID.

- The CDC and Oregon Health Authority have strong guidelines for governments to **allow unsheltered people living in camps to remain in place if individual housing options are not available.** These guidelines have been endorsed by Lane County Public Health.
- However, we have seen the city, in the midst of the pandemic, continue its inhumane practice of destroying people's possessions and forcibly dispersing encampments without any alternative place for people to go.
- Most recently, in December, we saw over 120 people moved from Washington Jefferson park, without any place to go.
- The City's policy analyst Jason Detrick stated on January 13th (10 months into the pandemic) that the city's #1 goal was to allow people to remain in place.
- Yet, we know of at least 2 sweeps that are planned in the next week. One camp living near railroad tracks is under EPD threat of criminal trespass, again with no alternative place given for people to go.
- And as early as next Tuesday, January 26 in Washington Jefferson park, the city is threatening another **forced eviction from public land**, with no place for people to go. There were 76 tents in WJ park the last time we counted, with at least 100 residents. A significant

portion of the residents have disabilities and are being denied reasonable accommodations as required by the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

- **This was all preventable!** This summer, the City's very own housing strategist put together a comprehensive report on Homeless Winter Strategies and Winter Coordination, predicting where we're at now with the pandemic and reduced shelter availability and providing comprehensive recommendations for giving everyone a legal place to sleep. The recommendations were not adopted by the City.
- Why is the City government **choosing to ignore federal, state, and county government health guidelines**? Why is the City **continuing the eviction and destruction of encampments** that actively harms people, jeopardizes public health, removes people from the outreach services they access and trust, and perpetuates the vicious cycles of homelessness?
- The City is presumably **making these decisions in the same reactionary manner** and for the same reasons as the other large sweeps during the pandemic. Our City government is again **choosing to prioritize the concerns and complaints of housed residents over public health and the health and safety of the unhoused residents in the camps. But this is a false choice.** As the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness stated in 2015: "The solution is not about prioritizing one perspective over another; the focus on the goal of ending homelessness requires that communities implement strategies that will link all people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing opportunities."
- **We desperately need strong leadership in Eugene—City Councilors who will direct City staff to invest and reallocate the resources necessary to match the scale of the challenge.**
- Across the country, communities are facing unprecedented public health, economic and housing crises. Decades of public health data demonstrates that access to stable, safe and affordable housing is critical for health and well-being.