

NASW-NYS and NYC Stance on Supreme Court Decision to Criminalize Unhoused Individuals

The National Association of Social Workers in New York State and New York City vehemently rejects the Supreme Court's decision that it is constitutionally acceptable to criminalize unhoused women, men, and children. Embracing the punishment of unhoused individuals who may be struggling with mental illness, trauma, poverty, and other behavioral health challenges is indefensible.

It is estimated that more than 350,000 people, or one in every 83 New Yorkers, were without homes in April 2024. This is despite the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance spending \$3.4 billion as of February 2024 on emergency rental assistance for our most vulnerable New Yorkers. The solution undoubtedly isn't more jails. The solution is more affordable housing opportunities, especially as more and more New Yorkers are falling behind.

Social workers possess unique training to support vulnerable populations, but we need adequate resources to help our community members succeed. As a profession, we must remain vigilant. We need to support social workers who hold office, encourage our peers to run for office, and use our collective voices to advocate for policies that ensure sufficient support, housing, and services for those in need.

Criminalizing homelessness is not a solution; it exacerbates the issue and further marginalizes vulnerable populations. We urgently call on policymakers to focus on compassionate, evidence-based approaches that address the root causes of homelessness and provide and fund sustainable solutions.

Together, we can drive change while upholding the values of social justice, dignity, and respect for every individual.



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