

Denver Right to Survive Initiative

Ballot Title: A law securing and enforcing basic rights for all people within the City and County of Denver, including the right to rest and shelter oneself from the elements in a non-obstructive manner in public spaces, to eat, share, accept or give food in any public space where food is not prohibited, to occupy one's own legally parked motor vehicle, or occupy a legally parked motor vehicle belonging to another, with the owner's permission, and to have a right and expectation of privacy and safety of or in one's person and property.

<https://denverhomelessoutloud.org/2018/04/05/the-denver-right-to-survive-initiative/>



We are being pushed out of our homes, our neighborhoods, our communities, and even public space where we rest on the streets. Denver can be better than this. We can be a Denver that values all people, regardless of wealth or poverty, and respects basic human need and right to sleep, sit, use cover, survive.

Who are the people experiencing homelessness residing in Denver?

Nearly 3 of 4 homeless individuals are working. Surveys show that the majority people who are homeless in Denver are from here. People experiencing homelessness in Denver have been priced out of housing. Anyone can become homeless.

Seniors on Social Security
People with disabilities
Veterans with PTSD
People working temp jobs
Minimum wage workers
People injured at work causing disability

People with a health emergency putting them deep into debt
Single parent with children
People fleeing an abusive marriage
People victim to steep increase in rent
People victim to federal housing benefits being cut or eliminated
Youth coming out as LGBTQ kicked out of their home
People of color forced out of neighborhoods by racists

Every homeless person's story is unique.

You may ask, Why don't they just get a house?

Denver city officials state there is a shortage of at least 38,000 "affordable" housing units and this number does not even count the thousands of people without any housing in Denver. The average rent in Denver right now for a one bedroom apartment is \$14,000.

We have not always had mass homelessness. In 1978 federal funding for low income housing was cut 77% leading to a surge in homelessness that has just continued as funding for low income housing has never returned.

Homeless people did not cause mass homelessness.

What are cities doing about this?

Cities have responded to mass homelessness around the county by passing laws to try and move homeless people out of sight and out of mind. These laws make it a crime for anyone to sit, sleep, cover yourself in public spaces. These laws are against all people, but obviously they have a disproportionate effect of people who are homeless.

The Denver Camping Ban makes it illegal to “use any form of protection from the elements other than your clothing.” This means right now it is illegal to sit on a blanket, cover oneself with a tarp, lay down with your head on a backpack.

These laws are enforced selectively against homeless people. Enforcement of these laws is akin to a game of “homeless whack-a-mole” forcing people from here to there around the city and surrounding cities. Homeless people are told to “move along” but with no answer to the question “move along to where...?”

In 2017 alone 4,647 individuals were contacted by police for violating the Denver Camping Ban - using a blanket, tarp, some sort of cover from the cold - and told their survival was a crime so they needed to move along, given a ticket, or taken to jail.

These laws are not only unnecessary, they compound the situation of homelessness, through the negative health effects [e.g. sleep deprivation, hypothermia, ect.], losing one’s personal documents, or resulting in a criminal record for merely surviving.

Criminalization of homelessness is ineffective, inhumane, unconstitutional, and expensive.

<http://www.law.du.edu/documents/homeless-advocacy-policy-project/2-16-16-Final-Report.pdf>

What can we do?

The Right to Survive Initiative will protect the following rights for all people in Denver:

- (1) The right to rest in a non-obstructive manner in public spaces.
- (2) The right to shelter oneself from the elements in a non-obstructive manner in outdoor public spaces.
- (3) The right to eat, share, accept, or give free food in any public space where food is not prohibited.
- (4) The right to occupy one’s own legally parked motor vehicle or occupy a legally parked motor vehicle belonging to another, with the owner’s permission.
- (5) The right and expectation of safety and privacy of or in one’s person and belongings while occupying public spaces.

To read the full text of the Denver Right to Survive ballot initiative, go to:

<https://denverhomelessoutloud.org/2018/04/05/the-denver-right-to-survive-initiative/>

The struggle for freedom from oppression for poor people and people of color is as real today as it was 50 years ago when MLK was assassinated fighting for this freedom. Sign this ballot measure and end Sun Down Towns, Jim Crow, Anti-Okie Laws once and for all.

Be human. Act for Justice!

Vote for the Denver Right to Survive Initiative in May, 2019

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