



NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS OUTREACH
FACT SHEET NOVEMBER 2012



Since September 2010, the Western Regional Advocacy Project and allies in eight other cities across the US started compiling information from homeless people about their daily interactions with local police, private security guards, and the criminal justice system.



Phase 1 of this outreach effort focused on speaking with **336** homeless people self-identified as mentally ill. In phase 2, we spoke with an additional **479** homeless people, who did not necessarily identify as having a mental illness.

In all, we were able to document the experiences of **815** homeless people, all answering a consistent set of questions. All did so only for the opportunity to speak “unfiltered” to the broader community about what is really

happening on our nation's streets to poor, disabled, and homeless community members. This is an important opportunity to lay the foundations for a national organizing campaign.

There can be no more denying that “Broken Windows,” “Quality of Life,” “Civil Sidewalks,” “Public Commons for Everyone,” and “Safer Cities” initiatives are anything less than a reincarnation of “Ugly Laws,” “Anti-Okie laws,” “Sundown Towns,” “Bracero Treaty,” and “Jim Crow” when you hear directly the voices of those who are the targets of today’s laws and campaigns.

The main “illegal offenses” that homeless people are being targeted with:

- **82%** for sleeping, with **45%** of these people cited and **25%** arrested
- **78%** for loitering or hanging out, with **39%** of these people cited and **20%** arrested
- **77%** for sitting or lying down, with **40%** of these people cited and **22%** arrested
- **52%** for panhandling, with **52%** of these people cited and **29%** arrested

Other findings include:

- **60%** reported that their harassment, citation or arrest was because they “appeared homeless.”
- **47%** reported having bench warrants issued for their arrest.
- **22%** reported having outstanding warrants at the time of the survey.

- **31%** reported being incarcerated while only **5%** reported being referred to a program when brought before the court.
- **30%** reported losing their housing or being discharged from a program due to incarceration.
- Only **29** people **6%** felt that police respect their rights

We then asked:

- Do you know of places where it is safe and legal for you to sleep outside?
 - **83%** No
 - **17%** Yes

We also spoke to people about what the harassment and profiling looked like:

- Do you think that you have been ticketed because of your...
 - **48%** economic status
 - **23%** race
 - **14%** gender
 - **15%** disability
- Do police sometimes harass you without using the law?
 - **74%** Yes
 - **20%** No
 - **6%** Don't Know
- Have you ever seen or encountered private security guards hassling people, ordering people away, or otherwise policing public sidewalks or parks?
 - **80%** Yes
 - **14%** No
 - **5%** Don't Know



WESTERN REGIONAL ADVOCACY PROJECT

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