

From Crisis to Action: Combatting the Criminalization of Youth Homelessness After Grants Pass

Tuesday, September 30, 2025



Welcome!

Webinar Overview

- Introduce yourself in chat: Name, pronouns, organization, location, and an emoji of how your day is going so far. 😊 😄 😞 😟 😡 🙌
- Ask questions in chat throughout the presentation.
- The webinar slides and a recording will be available on our website.
- Please complete the survey following the webinar so we can improve for next time.

About National Network for Youth

**NN4Y is on a mission to
transform systems so that no
young person in America
experiences homelessness.**



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<http://nn4youth.org/>

NN4Y works with youth who have experienced homelessness and youth service providers from across the country to prevent and end youth, young adult, and young parent family homelessness and human trafficking. Together, we envision a future in which all young people have a safe place to call home, with endless opportunities to achieve their fullest potential.

Our Programs

- Federal Policy Advocacy
- Youth + Youth Adult Partnerships
- Community-Based Solutions

About the National Homelessness Law Center



NHLC is a 501(c)(3) national organization dedicated to fearlessly advancing federal, state and local policies to prevent and end homelessness while fiercely defending the rights of all unhoused persons.

Our currently issue areas include decriminalization of homelessness, housing justice, youth homelessness, and narrative change.

Our team includes attorneys and non-attorneys with lived experiences of homelessness, poverty, racism, and other forms of oppression and discrimination.

Our Speakers

Webinar Overview



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Program Director
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she/her*



Dane Valentine
*National Youth Advisory Council
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Homelessness, OK
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Join the National Network to End Youth Homelessness

Strengthen Your Services

Expand Your Impact

Shape Policy

Share Power

**Become a
Member Today!**



I AM HERE: Vital Document Legal Hotline for Youth

A free, dedicated state-specific legal assistance hotline for **youth experiencing homelessness** to help obtain:

State ID cards and licenses

Social Security Cards

Birth certificates

Documents needed to obtain an ID and license

**Text or
Call!**

1-888-870-DOCS

*Voicemails and texts are welcome and will be returned.

Every Wednesday

12 to 8 PM Eastern | 11 AM to 7 PM Central

10 AM to 6 PM Mountain | 9 AM to 5 PM Pacific

**Baker
McKenzie.**

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Understanding Trends Toward Criminalization

Webinar Overview

Over the past year and a half, there have been a number of federal efforts to criminalize homelessness.

- ***City of Grants Pass v. Johnson***: Decided June 28, 2024, the [Supreme Court decided](#) that local governments can enforce laws against camping on public land, even if those laws include fines or jail time, and that this does not count as cruel and unusual punishment.
- ***Ending Crime And Disorder On America's Streets***: An [Executive Order](#) signed on July 24, 2025, it opens pathways for communities to use incarceration or involuntary treatment to keep unsheltered individuals off the streets, and directs agencies to prioritize funding for states and communities that do so.

Understanding Trends Toward Criminalization

Webinar Overview

The recent Continuum of Care (CoC) Builds Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is the first of what could be further financial incentives for states and communities to criminalize homelessness.

It is now imperative for youth homelessness providers to be aware of:

- Shifts happening at the federal level.
- How you can continue to provide comprehensive, affirming services while advocating for local systems change.



Understanding the Supreme Court Decision, Executive Order, and Legal Fallout

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How Did We Get Here?

Cicero > *Grants Pass* > Executive Order > DC Takeover > ?

- **Cicero Institute:** This organization's [model policies](#) started the path to *Grants Pass* and the challenge of *Martin*.
- ***Grants Pass*:** Found that it is not cruel and unusual punishment to criminalize using a tent, pillow, or other similar items to rest or sleep in a public place, even if there is no shelter available.
- **Executive Order (EO):** Ending Crime And Disorder On America's Streets to pressure federal agencies, states, and communities to engage in criminalization.
- **DC (and Other) Takeovers:** The Administration invoked powers in the DC Home Rule on August 11.
- **Intersection with ICE and Immigration Enforcement:** The Administration is pressuring (and attempting to mandate) states and communities to cooperate with immigration enforcement.

320+ bills that make it
a crime to be homeless

have been introduced since the Grants
Pass Supreme Court case last year.

WE NEED HOUSING
NOT HANDCUFFS.



The scope of the issue is far-reaching. Track criminalization efforts across the country [here](#).

What the Executive Order Does

- Makes it easier to put homeless people, people with mental health disorders, and people with substance use disorders behind bars and in institutions.
- Favors high-barrier homelessness and housing programs that require or force participation in “services,” and that end Housing First.
- Defunds and criminalizes harm-reduction programs.
- Requires data sharing with law enforcement and makes it easier to share sensitive health-related personally identifiable information with the federal government.
- Defunds programs in jurisdictions that don’t have camping bans or that otherwise don’t criminalize homelessness/survival.

What the Executive Order Does NOT Do

Legal Landscape

Executive Orders Do Not...

- Erase people.
- Change federal statutes or regulations.
- Change state law or policy.
- Change professional standards.
- Alter our obligation to treat youth and families with dignity and respect.

See NN4Y's [blog post](#) and [resource](#) on the limitations of Executive Orders.

Initial Impacts of Federal Shifts:

CoC Builds NOFO

Legal Landscape

HUD's most recent [CoC Builds NOFO](#) was issued last Friday with a one week deadline for completion.

It includes a number of harmful new provisions that could be included in future NOFOs, including CoC, YHDP, YHSI, and RHYA.

NAEH and NHLC have sued HUD, and there is a temporary enjoinder on the NOFO.

Initial Impacts of Federal Shifts:

CoC Builds NOFO

Legal Landscape

- The proposed project will require (or does require) program participants to participate in services by contract, occupancy agreement, or lease. (p. 24)
- The applicant does not operate (or will not operate) drug injection sites or “safe consumption sites,” knowingly distribute drug paraphernalia on or off of property under their control, permit the use or distribution of illicit drugs on property under their control, or conduct any of these activities under the pretext of “harm reduction.” (pp. 24-25)
- The city, county, or state in which the project is located:
 - Prohibits public illicit drug use & enforces such prohibition (p. 29)
 - Prohibits public camping or loitering & enforces such prohibition (p. 29)
 - Utilizes standards that address individuals who are a danger to themselves or others (pp. 29-30)
 - Substantially implements and complies with SORNA, particularly in the case of registered sex offenders with no fixed address, including by adequately mapping and checking the location of homeless sex offenders. (p. 30)
 - Cooperates with Federal immigration enforcement. (p. 30)23



Impacts and Insight from Youth with Lived Expertise

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Impacts and Insight

Youth with Expertise



Introductions & importance of this issue

We are going to share ways providers can address the harm youth are feeling from criminalization efforts.

We encourage you to try these new, or new-to-you, strategies!

Impacts and Insight

1. Find and make connections with non-traditional partners.

- Connect youth to mutual aid organizations, community organizers, grassroots legal aid, or other organizations and programs that are not dependent on federal funding.
- Create opportunities for collaboration, curiosity, and building collective power with other community organizations.

Impacts and Insight

2. Center youth in your decision making without putting the burden on youth.

- Acknowledge the tumultuous times that everyone, but *especially* youth, find themselves in right now.
- Ensure your organization is a place of relief and comfort, not another transactional institution.
- Recognize youth as advocates, not tools. “An advocate is a person, expertise is a skill.”

Impacts and Insight

3. Implement internal policies that prevent harm and promote inclusivity and stability.

- Ensure your programs practices and policies do not add to criminalization and punitive approaches.
- Implement policies to keep people in your program instead of kicking people out.
- Read the fine print - know what you can and can't do and be transparent about it! What are your funding restrictions? Where can you create more flexibility in actions and services?



What Providers and Allies Can Do Now

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What Providers and Allies Can Do



- Assemble and distribute know-your-rights materials for staff and youth.
- Build legal partnerships NOW.
- Strengthen documentation strategies and outreach efforts.
- Consider sample policies and messaging for communities.

What Providers and Allies Can Do

Assemble and distribute know-your-rights materials for staff and youth.

- [ICE Raid Resources](#)
- [TransEquality Know-Your-Rights](#)
- [Right to Stay in School](#)
- [Stopped by Police](#)

What Providers and Allies Can Do

Build legal partnerships NOW.

- Legal help for youth: ambar.org/HYLN (or contact Kelly.Russo@americanbar.org)
- Legal help for orgs: [In-Housing Counsel referral list](#) (or contact kmeyerscott@homelesslaw.org)

What Providers and Allies Can Do

Strengthen documentation strategies and outreach efforts.

- [Street Outreach Forms and Handouts](#)
- [Street Outreach Training](#)
- [Example of Great Documentation](#)

What Providers and Allies Can Do

Consider these sample policies and messaging for communities.

- [Housing Not Handcuffs Policy Solutions](#)
- [Gloria Johnson Template Legislation](#)
- [Communications Toolbox](#)
- [Model State Statutes and Policies](#)

What Providers and Allies Can Do

The National Youth Homelessness Partnership has created a brief survey for **youth homelessness providers** to increase understanding of the impacts of criminalization efforts.

Please consider taking a moment to complete this quick survey to help inform our national advocacy efforts!





Provider Discussion: On-the-Ground Responses to Criminalization

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*at youthworks we help
ensure that every youth has
a safe place to belong and
be heard.*

Serving Youth ages 12-24 in North Dakota and West Central Minnesota

Services provided:

- Transitional Housing
- Victim Services
- Emergency Shelter
- Prevention Services
- Cultural Programming
- Guardian Ad Litem
- Diversion Services

Urban Peak



Our mission: To ignite the potential in youth to exit homelessness and create self-determined, fulfilled lives.

Our programs:

(serving youth ages 12-24)

- Case Management
- Street Outreach
- Housing
- Day Services
- Shelter

On-the-Ground Responses to Criminalization

Provider Discussion

What trends are you seeing in your community around policing, ordinances, or criminalization of unhoused youth?

On-the-Ground Responses to Criminalization

Provider Discussion

What actions has your organization taken to push back against criminalization policies?

On-the-Ground Responses to Criminalization

Provider Discussion

How can organizations strengthen their advocacy while balancing direct service demands?

Questions and Discussion

Please put your questions in chat.



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National Summit on Youth Homelessness + Hill Day



March 12-13, 2026 | Washington DC, Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill



Together, we can
prevent and
**end youth
homelessness.**

