

Talking Points & Strategy
for engaging City Council members and other community
members regarding the anti-homelessness ordinance
offered by the
United Valley Interfaith Project

Please contact your City Council representatives (or all the City Council members) prior to June 15, and urge them to vote NO on the proposed ordinance.

There is still time to defeat this ordinance. Use phone calls, emails, social media, and personal conversations to help City Council members understand that the community opposes the ordinance, and that if they support it, they will not be representing their constituents.

If you are not a resident of Lebanon, please engage with Council members and others in the community as a concerned member of the Upper Valley Community. Making it illegal to camp in Lebanon will not resolve the housing problems in our region, and will drive people without housing into other communities and/or encourage other communities to consider similar, equally unjust, ordinances.

Please come to the June 15 City Council Public Hearing if at all possible.

City Council open hearing: 6/15, 7 pm at City Hall; arrive early for seating; no need to sign up to speak, but just raise your hand at the appropriate time. The more voices we have, representing the breadth of this community, the better. Consider going as a testifier: clergy, concerned residents, attorneys, people who are living without housing, and other “expert” testimony will be very helpful. However, you do not have to say anything! Being in solidarity by sitting silently in the room is also very supportive.

What We (the United Valley Interfaith Project & allies) Believe

We stand *with* people who are homeless. In the Moral Economy that we are working for (in UVIP, and with other community groups), people who are homeless would receive support, not condemnation. Homeless is not a crime and should not be made a crime in Lebanon, NH or anywhere else. It is against the teaching of all the faith traditions, and the examples of all great moral thinkers, to condemn or demonize people who are homeless.

What to Do when You Call or Write

Introduce yourself and your town (and if a resident of Lebanon, your Ward—see map), and state up front that you are calling/emailing to urge them to vote against the proposed ordinance. Then, you may use some or all of the talking points on the back of this sheet to make your case.

Talking Points

The Case for NOT Criminalizing People who are Homeless is Strong.

- a. **The moral case:** criminalizing homelessness is tantamount to criminalizing poverty. Most people who are homeless are not that way by choice but by circumstance. Poverty, job loss, mental illness, veteran status, and addiction are often factors. It is our moral obligation to care for all of the members of our community. All major faith traditions would have us *care* for people who are homeless, not turn them into criminals.
- b. **The legal case:** we have seen in other parts of the state and of the country that it is not legal to target a group of people who have not broken any laws, and not legal to criminalize a particular class of people. By making it unlawful to sleep in tents and vehicles outdoors, the City of Lebanon would be outlawing a definitional aspect of being homeless, and therefor criminalizing homeless persons themselves. There is significant concern that this will not pass legal scrutiny.
- c. **The case for better solutions:** it is true that our current economic model is unjust and creates situations where homelessness occurs. *This* is the problem we need to be addressing, not criminalizing people who are homeless. Our community has lots of resources, willing and able to assist in addressing these complex problems, and we should be working together to find and secure housing and to build a Moral Economy. Making homelessness illegal does not help address the problem, but merely pushes the visible representations of our unjust economy out of immediate sight. Give us the opportunity to work together for more just and sustainable solutions!
- d. **The numbers case:** Research into our region shows that the number of people without housing is relatively small. If housing people is doable, why outlaw them? Wouldn't it be better to allow camping as a temporary measure when individuals need it, and work directly with individuals to resolve their housing needs?
- e. **The timing case:** Why now? Why suddenly must we make homelessness a crime? Why can we not study – seriously – the situation in Lebanon and figure how to help, not criminalize?
- f. **The Good Neighbor case:** If Lebanon criminalizes homelessness, people who are homeless may leave Lebanon but go to Hanover, or Enfield, or White River Junction, or Hanover, or Plainfield. This doesn't make anyone any safer or better housed, and only pushes onto others our own responsibility to help our neighbors.
- g. **Does the ordinance solve anything?:** This ordinance states that the purpose is to protect the peace and preserve law, order, and public safety. But are the people camping actually disturbing the peace? And does forcing them to camp elsewhere make them or anyone else more safe? If not, then this ordinance really doesn't address the problems at hand, and we should focus on better solutions.