

# Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness

Empowering Communities  
Ending Homelessness

Building Michigan Communities Conference  
May 1, 2018



The Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness is dedicated to creating a sustainable statewide voice and the infrastructure and systemic change needed to empower communities to end homelessness.

*Our Vision:*

To prevent and end homelessness in Michigan.

Membership information: [bit.ly/MCAHMember](https://bit.ly/MCAHMember)

# MCAH's Legislative Action Committee

*Leading the way for better policy in Michigan*



# PURPOSE

MCAH's Legislative Action Committee was created as a vehicle for volunteers to help shape policy on issues of homelessness in Michigan. Together, we:

- Identify and work toward policy that better represents the needs of the homeless population throughout our state;
- Discuss and strategize with viewpoints from the field, urban and rural communities, and the state capitol;
- Train and educate ourselves and decision-makers about the impact of policy on individuals and families experiencing homelessness; and
- Engage and advocate with policymakers to enact change and improve the lives of our clients, friends, family, and fellow Michiganders.

# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

*Being homeless is not a crime*

## Problem Statement

Being homeless can make you a target. Individuals who are homeless are often victims of physical violence, subject to city ordinances that make it illegal to ask for money or sleep in public, and face additional scrutiny from the police and criminal justice system. Often, this vulnerable population doesn't have the necessary protection to stay safe while seeking new housing opportunities.

# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

Communities in the US are increasingly banning acts associated with homelessness:

- 50% prohibit camping in particular public places (48% increase since 2006)
- 27% prohibit sleeping in particular public places (11% decrease, but sleeping in public city-wide has increased by 31%)
- 47% prohibit sitting and lying down in public (52% increase)
- 32% prohibit loitering, loafing, and vagrancy citywide (88% increase)
- 27% prohibit panhandling city-wide (43% increase)

# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

## In Michigan, there's an unknown need

- HMIS doesn't consistently capture and report on engagement with criminal justice

## What we do know

- VI-SPDAT: Do you have any legal stuff going on right now that may result in your being locked up, having to pay fines or that make it more difficult to rent a place to live?
  - 20,356 responded 'No'
  - 7,212 responded 'Yes'
- In 2017, 8,265 Michigan homeless individuals had contact with police, resulting in jail time for 3,307 of these individuals

# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

## Agency Survey Findings

- MCAH conducted an agency survey from May 25 - June 2, 2017
- Average of 101 respondents from 70 unique agencies representing all 10 prosperity regions



# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

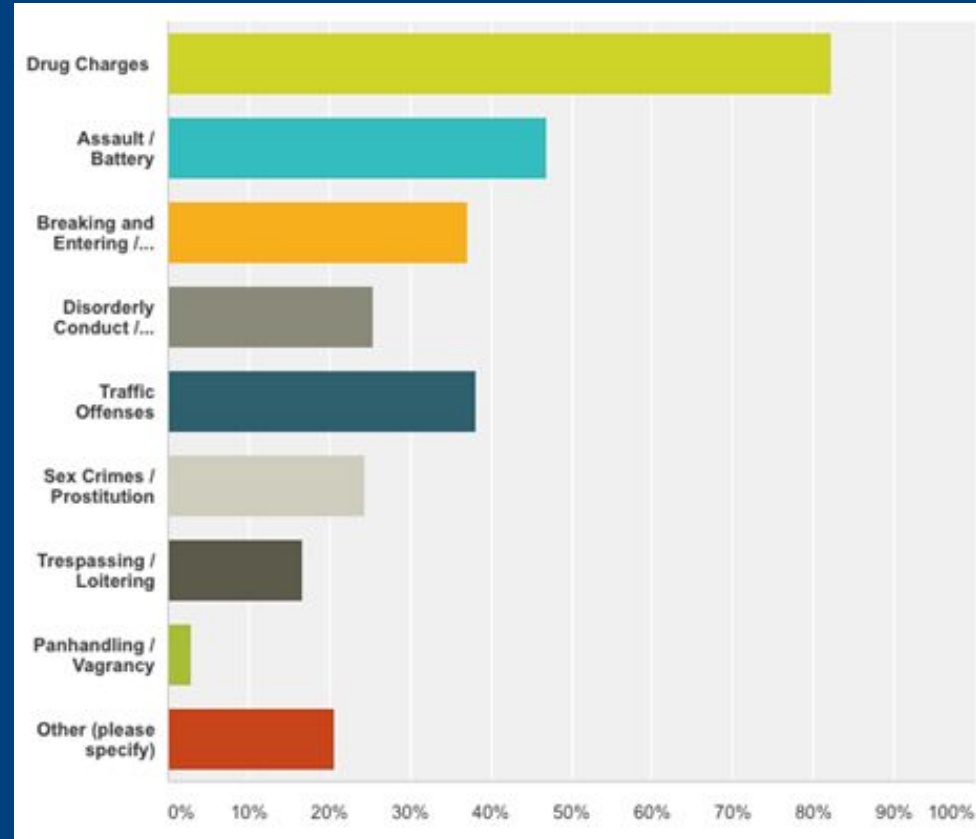
## Agency Survey Findings

- Priorities:
  - #1 - working with landlords to to increase available affordable housing for returning citizens
  - #2 - Providing better training and resources to local police and judicial systems about how to work with the homeless population
- Relationships with police:
  - Agencies reported slightly negative overall characterization of police relationships in the community.
  - Both positive and negative comments were recorded
    - “The police don't like the clients we serve.”
    - “The police support our agency in positive ways - attending community events, responding promptly to both emergency and non-emergency calls, clarifying laws/ordinances when asked”

# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

## Agency Survey Findings

- Criminal Records/Returning Citizens:
  - Drug charges were the most commonly reported charge on client records.
  - 39% of respondents reported knowing of a client that had purposely committed an “imprisonable offence” in order to spend a night in jail.



# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

## Agency Survey Findings

- Criminal Records and Returning Citizens:
  - The majority of respondents reported assisting over 20 individuals with a criminal background on a monthly basis
  - The majority of individual staff time dedicated to serving clients with a criminal record per month was 1-10 hours per month with nearly 50% of respondents falling in the 1-5 hours per month range
  - The two primary barriers for those with a criminal record identified were access to housing and employment. Other forms of discrimination, access to transportation and government assistance such as food assistance, and treatment for mental health were also identified.
  - Several respondents included comments that clients with old charges (20 years or more) also encountered these barriers.

# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

## Client Questionnaire Findings

- MCAH conducted a pilot study of questionnaire with 3 agencies in 2017
  - 78 respondents
- Client questionnaire was administered state-wide from February 1 - March 31, 2018
  - 109 respondents
- Questionnaire included 13 questions on police engagement, criminal records, and discrimination from the client perspective
- *Questionnaire online at: [bit.ly/DecriminalizingHomelessness](http://bit.ly/DecriminalizingHomelessness)*

# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

## Client Questionnaire Findings

- Relationships with Police:
  - Have you ever been harassed, cited, or arrested by the police while you have been homeless for any of these activities?

	Harassed	Cited	Arrested
<b>Sleeping</b>	14%	2%	4%
<b>Sitting/Lying Down</b>	15%	1%	1%
<b>Panhandling</b>	6%	1%	1%
<b>Receiving Free Food</b>	8%	1%	2%
<b>Loitering</b>	17%	3%	4%
<b>Sleeping in a vehicle</b>	11%	2%	2%
<b>Appearing “Homeless”</b>	12%	1%	0%
<b>Public Intoxication</b>	9%	2%	1%
<b>“Other”</b>	0%	1%	4%

# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

## Client Questionnaire Findings

- Relationships with Police:

- Do you feel your concerns and or safety are taken seriously by police officers?
  - 54% yes
  - 39% no
- Have the police ever taken or threatened to take your personal possessions?
  - 22% yes
- How would you describe relationships between the police and individuals who are homeless in your community

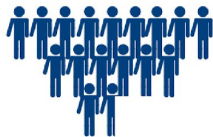
Excellent	Good	Neutral	Bad	Awful
5%	28.5%	36%	22%	8.5%

# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

## Client Questionnaire Findings

- Criminal Records and Returning Citizens:
  - Do you have a criminal record?
    - Misdemeanor: 35%
    - Felony: 34% - majority were drug offenses
    - Other conviction: 18%
  - If you have a criminal record, what is the largest difficulty you've experienced as a result of your criminal record?
    - #1 Housing
    - #2 Employment
    - #3 Services (low)
  - Do you feel that you have ever been discriminated against with regards to accessing employment, housing, or other services due to your criminal record?
    - Yes: 42%

## POLICE ENGAGEMENT



In 2017, 8,265 Michigan homeless individuals had contact with police, resulting in jail time for 3,307 of these individuals



39% of surveyed MI staff know a client who had committed an "imprisonable offense" in order to spend a night in jail



Crisis Intervention Training is proven to reduce costs - A study in Louisville, KY found over \$1M in annual cost savings

## HOUSING FOR RETURNING CITIZENS



**2X**  
as likely to  
recidivate without  
access to housing

In 2015, the MDOC reported that 23 percent of all parolees experienced medium- or high-risk housing instability upon release

## DRUG CHARGES

ASSAULT/BATTERY

TRAFFIC OFFENSES

BURGLARY

MI staff identify drug related charges - often a non-violent crime - as the most common offense for those seeking housing and services

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Support efforts to increase access to Crisis Intervention Training across the state
- Support HB 4798 allowing for the expungement of multiple crimes arising out of the same criminal transaction



# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

## State Level Policy

- Decriminalization
  - SB 84 - Homeless Bill of Rights
  - House C.A.R.E.S Report: Crisis Intervention Trainings - mandated and funded
- Returning Citizens
  - Landlord Incentivization
- Expungement
  - HB 4798 - Allows for expungement of multiple crimes arising out of the same criminal transaction

# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

## NEXT STEPS

- Awareness Raising: Capture personal stories and testimonials
- Work with state partners on expungement campaigns and testimony
- Engagement with police: encourage CIT and Homeless Outreach Teams
  - Initiating project for statewide warehouse of police practice and policy with regards to homelessness

# WHAT YOU CAN DO?

- Participate in LAC and Decriminalization subcommittee
  - Decriminalization subcommittee meets every other month via phone call
- Client questionnaire
- Testimonials

# Thank you

**Laurel Burchfield**

**Manager of Marketing, Growth, & Development**

**517-853-3894 // [lburchfield@mihomeless.org](mailto:lburchfield@mihomeless.org)**

