

WITHOUT HOUSING & A HOMELESS BILL OF RIGHTS CAMPAIGN Talking Points

Below are talking points for the presentation. Each slide has a main point and supporting points you can adapt for your audience. All of the talking points come from *Without Housing and Homeless Bill of Rights Campaign Manual* unless otherwise specified.

Slide 1: Report Cover

Main Point:

- WRAP first published *Without Housing* in 2006 to document the direct correlation between the cuts to federal low-income housing programs and the reemergence of mass homelessness in the 1980s.
- Our Homeless Bill of Rights Campaign (HBR) strives to ensure that ALL people have the basic right to live where they choose without fear of harassment and criminalization. Today, numerous laws infringe on poor people's equal protection under the law.

Supporting Point:

- We use it to educate our communities on the root causes of homelessness and to reframe the national debate toward real solutions.
- We have introduced legislation called the Right to Rest in California, Oregon & Colorado to overturn local laws targeted to remove certain people from public space.

Slide 2: Member Organizations

Main Point:

- WRAP member organizations came together to build a powerful movement that connects the grassroots organizing of poor and homeless people to a national policy agenda for ending homelessness.

Slide 3: Overview

Main Point:

- Give people a short explanation of the content and flow of the presentation. By the end of it, people will have a better understanding of the root causes of homelessness and what WRAP is doing and what individuals can be done about it.

Slide 4: A Tale of Two Acts

Main Point:

- This section compares two very different pieces of federal housing legislation and their impact on homelessness.

Slide 5: Act 1

Main Point:

- In response to the Great Depression and powerful social justice movements of the 1930s, the government took an active role in creating housing and jobs.

Supporting Points:

- The Housing Act of 1937 was part of the New Deal and established a federal commitment to low-income housing, establishing the nation's first public housing program.
- The government increased its role in regulating the economy and providing safety net programs to protect citizens against market failures.
- The New Deal had many shortcomings – especially when it came to addressing racial and gender inequality – but it still demonstrated that the federal government could effectively alleviate systemic poverty.

Slide 6: Act II

Main Point:

- In response to the growing conservative movement of the 1970s, the government decreased its role in providing housing and safety net programs.

Supporting Points:

- The Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998 (QHWRA) reversed the federal government's sixty-year commitment to providing a decent home for low-income families and individuals.
- QHWRA also deregulated housing finance, making privatization and risky financing legislatively possible (e.g. HOPE VI, Choice Neighborhoods, and Transforming Rental Assistance) and formally repealed "one-for-one" replacement of units lost to disposition and demolition.
- Neoliberal policymakers believed that cutting taxes for wealthy individuals and corporations, privatizing public services, and freeing the market from regulation would create greater economic growth, individual initiative, and more efficient social services.

Slide 7: Housing as Commodity

Main Point:

- Since the 1970s, housing policies have favored strategies that rely on the private market.

Supporting Points:

- Rent subsidies on the private market (Housing Choice Vouchers) and tax breaks (Low Income Housing Tax Credits for developers and Mortgage Interest Deductions for homeowners) have taken priority over producing and subsidizing public housing.
- Another 900,000 Project-based Section 8 units have contracts set to expire before 2014.
- The volatile housing market has increased homelessness, housing costs, gentrification, privatization, and racial inequality.

Sources:

<http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/NLIHC-Preservation-Guide2010.pdf>

<http://www.housingwire.com/news/corelogic-foreclosures-drop-24-2011>

<http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-07.pdf>

Slide 8: Rural Housing Cuts

Main Point:

- Drastic federal cuts to rural low-income housing created under USDA's Section 515 program followed suit in the mid-1980s.

Supporting Points:

- Rural homelessness is a growing crisis largely ignored by policymakers.
- Homelessness in rural Ohio increased 300% from 1985 to 1990.

Slide 9: Starving Public Housing

Main Point:

- Public housing is the nation's most permanent form of federal low-income housing; of HUD's major programs, it has been hit the hardest by cuts.

Supporting Points:

- No new public housing units have been developed since 1996 (excluding HOPE VI).
- Since the mid-1990s, the federal government has starved public housing's capital and operating funds resulting in huge maintenance backlogs.
- HOPE VI was launched to revitalize "severely distressed" public housing into mixed-income developments; it has resulted in the forced displacement of tens of thousands of families and the loss of large amounts of guaranteed low-income housing.
- Congress also repealed "one-for-one" replacement for any public housing units lost to demolition or sale in 1998.
- HUD now says that public housing is at a "tipping point" and the only way to save it is to open it up to private investment.
- In 2012, HUD launched the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) – as part of its Transforming Rental Assistance plan – allowing 60,000 public housing units to convert Section 8 and leverage private capital through mortgage financing.
- Under RAD, units could be lost through expired contracts, foreclosure, or bankruptcy, and tenants' rights could be endangered.

- HUD proposes attracting private capital with Low Income Housing Tax Credits, which are not conducive to delivering low-income housing to those making below 30% of area median income.
- Congress and the Obama administration are proposing raising rent in public housing and other HUD programs by up to 200% in 2013.
- Public housing is the last defense against homelessness for over 1 million households and should be staunchly defended.

Sources:

<http://waters.house.gov/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=225779>

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-boden/something-for-nothing-the-b-814310.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HOPE_VI

Slide 10: Cause and Effect

Main Point:

- The lack of low-income housing has severe human consequences for vulnerable individuals and communities.
- The co-relation of The Growing Enactment and Enforcement of Anti-Homeless Laws since 1983 across California (and across the country) through local laws mimicking shameful vagrancy laws of past eras that targeted people of color, migrants, and people with disabilities.

Supporting Points:

- At least 1,065,794 homeless children were enrolled in public schools in 2010-2011. A 13% increase from the previous school year.
- According to HUD, 241,621 people in families were homeless the night of the 2010 point-in-time count; this excludes people doubled up or living in motels.
- Clinic students from the law school and the school of public policy analyzed municipal codes in 58 California cities, where three-quarters of California's homeless people reside. They also gathered public records and interviewed key stakeholders in a sample of cities to study enforcement practices across the state.

Sources:

http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/ehcy_profile.pdf

http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/press/press_releases_media_advisories/2011/HUDNo.11-121

<http://wraphome.org/organizing/legalresearch/#sthash.k43Zrqod.dpuf>

Slide 11: Comparison Federal Funding Priorities

Main Point:

- Federal government budget outlays have doubled in the last 30 years, while federal funding for low-income housing programs has plummeted. This section highlights how the money needed to resolve homelessness is available, but the federal government decides to spend it elsewhere.

Slide 12: Mortgage Interest Deduction

Main Point:

- The federal government spends a lot more money on homeownership than on low-income rental assistance.

Supporting Points:

- In 2008, 75% of mortgage interest deductions benefited those making over \$100,000 a year.
- In 2011, the federal government authorized \$38.5 billion in HUD spending and expended \$102.7 billion on homeownership (2004 constant dollars).
- The IMF said that tax distortions like mortgage interest deductions “encouraged excessive leveraging and other financial market problems evident in the crisis.”
- These regressive taxes encourage speculation and make housing a volatile commodity, resulting in more expensive basic shelter.
- Replacing the Mortgage Interest Deduction with a tax credit could save \$400 billion over the next 8 years, which could be used to fully fund and expand public and Section 8 housing.

Sources:

<http://www.jct.gov/publications.html?func=startdown&id=4386>

<http://www.imf.org/external/np/pp/eng/2009/061209.pdf>

<http://restorehousingrights.org/our-work/social-housing/>

Slide 13: Vicious Cycle of Homeless Policy

Main Point:

- Since passage of the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987, the federal government has created several homeless plans but they continue to fail because they lack political will, adequate funding for actual housing, and implementation.

Supporting Points:

- It has replaced tens of billions of HUD housing dollars with a few billion homeless assistance dollars.
- There are 355 ten-year plans to end homelessness that cover 860 cities, yet homelessness continues to grow.
- The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 (HEARTH) continues McKinney's limited strategies and funding.
- One bright spot of HEARTH is that it allows communities applying for funding to prioritize the needs of rural homeless families with a broader range of services, including rental subsidies.

Slide 14: Race and Homelessness

Main Point:

- The “war on the poor” mentioned earlier has been most aggressively directed at poor people of color. This has created extreme racial disparities in the homeless population.

Supporting Points:

- Structural inequalities like income disparity, unemployment and underemployment, cuts to safety net programs, unequal school systems, criminalization, and predatory lending create the conditions for mass homelessness in poor communities of color.

- The percentage of African Americans who are homeless is 3.5 times the percentage of the general population. There is a similar statistical overrepresentation for Native Americans.
- It's important to keep in mind that official figures undercount homeless people living on the street, under bridges, in cars, and doubled-up.

Source:

David Wagner and Pete White (2012). *Why the Silence? Homelessness and Race. Freedom Now! Struggles for the Human Right to Housing in LA and Beyond.* Freedom Now Books.

Slide 15: Criminalization of Homelessness / Poverty

Main Point:

- Jails cannot address the lack of housing that put millions of people on the streets in the first place.

Supporting Points:

- Since the 1980s, there has been a dramatic rise in anti-homeless laws and enforcement programs.
- These laws are used to harass, displace, and remove poor people from public space and involve gross civil and human rights violations.
- Criminalization has been driven by the concerns of business people and residents uncomfortable with the unsightliness of extreme poverty.
- Criminal records limit access to housing and services.
- "Quality of life" laws revive the discrimination, racism, and classism that underwrote past vagrancy laws and removal programs.

Source:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-boden/the-quality-of-whose-life_1_b_785714.html

Slide 16: Historical Criminalization

Main Point:

This campaign is not a response to an isolated set of discriminatory policies against those who are disenfranchised. Instead, it speaks against a history of society using the law in its opposite intention. Law can be used to coerce, to humiliate, to dehumanize, but that is not the intention of law. There is a reason why there is an enduring image of justice being blind, it is blind to power dynamics. Law is only meaningful when it protects all.

Supporting Points:

- One thing about the discriminatory laws of the past and the anti-homeless laws we see today is that if the goal is to decrease the area of certain people, they unfortunately work!! When one side has 24-hour policing, private security guards, arcane laws and the blessing to enforce the laws in a discriminatory fashion, you can focus your efforts on specific neighborhoods (or what today are called Business Improvement Districts) and in a short time the people being targeted will, in fact, leave. To be replaced by others and the process goes on and on.
- Our campaign says to local governments “you have abused your power and therefore you can no longer pass/enforce laws to criminalize a person for the acts of resting, eating, sleeping.”
- 1936 poster was put out by Mayor and Housing Authority Director as public education and support for new deal era programs. In 1937 what we today call HUD was created by the Federal Government, Mayor’s have an alternative to criminalization.

Slide 17: Right to Rest Model Legislation

Main Point:

The Right to Rest Model Legislation will ensure the right to sit, lie down, sleep, pray, and share food in public space without the threat of citation or arrest. The Right to Rest will protect these rights for all people and prohibit the enforcement of laws that violate these rights and/or discriminate against

homeless people:

1. The right to move freely without the fear of discrimination based on housing or economic status.
2. The right to rest, sit and/or sleep and protect oneself from the elements in a non-obtrusive manner.
3. The right to eat and share food in public.
4. The right to seek civil action if you have been ticketed, harassed, arrested or discriminated against for enacting any of these rights.

Source:

<http://wraphome.org/civil-rights-campaign/#bill-of-rights>
<http://wraphome.org/california-right-to-rest-act/>

Slide 18: Homeless Bill of Rights Campaign

Main Point:

Our campaign priorities were identified through our community forums and street outreach. The strategies that guide our campaign are;

1. Develop a campaign structure model which can be easily adapted to specific states in which a need to introduce a HBR campaign arises.
2. Increase the number and quality of organizational endorsements and legislative support for our HBR Campaign.
3. Work with organizational supporters of our efforts to increase visibility and publicity for the HBR Campaign in local communities. This can be achieved by conducting presentations, hosting webinars or conducting street outreach to local residents.
4. Create consistent and ongoing messaging which corresponds to our campaign goals.
5. Work with groups possessing different talents and skills to effectively develop the various components of a national campaign.

Supporting Points:

While WRAP organizations primarily come from communities of homeless people, we also recognize that the solution to homelessness lies in creating a just society and our campaign strives to ensure that ALL people have the basic right to live where they choose without fear of harassment and criminalization.

Slide 19: Organizational Endorsers

Main Point:

- This section highlights that it will take a social justice movement to change federal priorities and ensure social policies and programs that benefit the majority of people.

Slide 20: Organize Around People

Main Point:

We must organize around people and build a movement that can tear down the walls of neglect and oppression that prevent everyone from having a home.

Knowledge is power when it is put into action.

Supporting Points:

- Talk about the organizing your group and WRAP are currently doing and invite people to join.
- Call on elected officials to support low-income housing programs.
- Challenge the scapegoating of poor people by policymakers and media.
- Do street outreach to document your community's experience with homelessness and criminalization.
- Join or form a community group to challenge "quality of life" enforcement programs.
- Use the toolkit to organize your community and advocate for systemic change in federal housing policies.

Slide 21: Download *Without Housing & A Homeless Bill of Rights Campaign Presentation*

Main Point:

- Encourage people to visit the WRAP website and download the report.