

Senate Study Bill 1195 and House Study Bill 286 put the interests of national think tanks before the interests of Iowans.

Proposed by the Cicero Institute, the think tank started by tech billionaire Joe Lonsdale, most notably known as the owner of privatized jails and prisons. This legislation criminalizes being poor.

This legislation, as written, would be costly and would drive up property taxes. Arresting and jailing homeless people under laws that criminalize homelessness often cost 2-3 times the cost of housing and services according to the Seattle University School of Law and several studies.

- City budgets are already stretched thin and would have to increase property taxes to be able to finance the additional officers required to enforce camping bans.
- County taxes would be driven up as property taxes would need to be increased to house individuals cited for simply not having a place to live.
- This proposal would set up a cycle between the street and jail while not addressing the underlying causes of homelessness.

So, the question is, “Who is benefiting financially from arresting unsheltered individuals?”

Much needed services would be eliminated under this proposal.

- This legislation would punish homeless service providers, requiring them to monitor others’ private property of which they have no right to enter, monitor, or control.
- Providers and facilities would be held liable for behaviors that they have no way of knowing are occurring, thereby denying resources to communities for up to three years.
- Signage requirements are a violation of Iowa law and endanger domestic violence survivors.
- Eliminating safe and stable homeless service providers ultimately make it considerably more difficult to stabilize individuals with behavioral and mental health concerns. Currently, these service delivery systems are being re-designed. Adding one more variable into the re-design only creates more challenges in this fragile system. Since the majority of these individuals are served by Medicaid, this would increase the state’s financial burden as individuals are de-stabilized and moved from system to system.

So, again, “Who is financially benefiting from arresting people experiencing homelessness?”

This proposal creates more barriers for individuals and churches led by God to help the poor.

- Churches will shy away from the intense reporting barriers required when they serve the poor or unhoused. This will eliminate local congregate meals.

- The language, as written, holds “facilities” and “operators” liable for activities that happen 300 ft beyond their building walls. There is no clarity in how these are defined, leaving church members financially liable for the actions of others beyond their church buildings.

What could be done legislatively to help those who are homeless?

- Housing choice vouchers could be prioritize serving homeless families first.
- Property tax relief for seniors would help seniors who struggle to pay their property taxes stay housed.
- Eviction expungement would help eliminate denial of rental applications based on past evictions.
- Homelessness is caused by high rents and low wages. Increase financial incentives to build housing at the 30% Area Median Income level and provide supportive services by providing additional resources to IFA.
- Increase the percentage of the Real Estate Transfer Tax to help fund additional homeless services.
- Encouraging our congressional representatives to release HUD-approved funding to support evidence-based homeless services will allow homeless services to continue to provide stable housing to those most in need.

As written, this bill disregards more than a decade of research on – and IFA’s strong a principled commitment to – the most effective ways to end homelessness via low-barrier housing with wrap-around services. To pass this legislation would be a vote for higher property taxes, disastrous outcomes for individuals struggling to make ends meet, and for a condemnation of service providers and faith-based entities who work to help people get back on their feet.

This legislation would set up ad hoc internment camps, remove individual freedoms, and guarantee individuals will never be able to improve their conditions while those who have privatized jails and prisons are financially supported on the backs of lowan taxpayers. This legislation is not right for Iowa.