The study found that 74% of homeless respondents had been approached by police in public spaces during the last year. 20% reported having been approached at least once a week during the month the survey was taken. For those surveyed who identified as currently unsheltered, police interactions were much more common, with 90% reporting having been approached at least once in the past year and 40% having interactions with police on a weekly basis.

Most of these police interactions involved officers forcing homeless people to move from sitting, resting, or standing in public spaces. 70% of respondents reported that they were forced to move at least once in the past year, with fully 90% of unsHELtered respondents reporting being forced to move at some point. These findings make clear that anti-homeless laws are not simply “tools” used to target or move along a select group of homeless persons behaving in an “uncivil manner,” but instead affect the vast majority of homeless persons who have no other choice but to rest, sit, sleep, stand, and simply exist in public spaces.

When homeless people are instructed to move for sitting on the sidewalk, sleeping in parks, and loitering, where do they go? The study asked respondents where they had moved after their most recent displacement and found that in nearly every case (91%), people did not end up moving out of public space. Only 5% moved indoors, and many of these moves were only temporary.

Most reported moving to drop-in centers or the public library, or riding a city bus. They likely ended up on the street again when drop-in centers or the library closed for the day. 22% of respondents who were forced to move by the SFPD reported moving to public space in a different neighborhood. The remainder was a unidirectional movement into a single neighborhood, but rather a constant churning between neighborhoods and across police districts. The result is that receive. Creating housing I can afford and I’ll stop sleeping on the sidewalk.

1. Any solution must be peer-based
While the City/County spends significant money on homeless services, little of it is peer-based. This has been proven time and time again to be counterproductive. Every shelter either in existence now or in the future must:
   a. Set aside at least 20% of paid staff positions for clients.
   b. Be required to hold community meetings where clients make decisions on shelter policy.
   c. Increase the access that Shelter Client Advocates have to the shelters, and allow them to visit unannounced to make contact with shelter residents directly.
By employing these three simple points the powers that be can immediately reduce the homeless population of our city. Providing homeless people a vehicle to voice their expert opinion results in service delivery that is targeted at the most vulnerable. What must happen immediately is a change of attitude towards homeless people. We are homeless not helpless. We are not immediately a change of attitude towards homeless people. We are homeless not helpless. We are not beggars. We are asking for a hand up not a hand out.

 occasional to chase me around, kick me awake, have DPW spray me with unknown chemicals, I don’t. What I do find funny is your attitude you actually think me and mine are going to magically disappear. Before that happens priests will fly and birds will say mass.

From the streets of San Francisco

Homeless Not Helpless

A Hand Up Not A Hand Out
Felt all they do is pick on home-less people because we’re an easy target instead of— I’ll say it—catch ing real criminals.

The forced removal of homeless people from a given area may prove temporarily satisfying to a particular shop owner or resident at the time of their complaint. However, the long-term effect is that it shifts homeless people to other public spaces, where other business owners or residents might complain. Furthermore, the prevention of sleep and rest due to constant displacement and the entanglements with the criminal justice system through citation and arrest that often result prolongs homelessness. The findings suggest that the long-term result of this continual policing is more homeless people in public space, not less.

THE MYTH OF SFPD’S “HOMELESS OUTREACH”

In 2004, Greg Suhr (current Chief of Police) launched “Operation Outreach,” a key component of which was SFPD “homeless outreach units”—24 officers who responded to nearly 911 calls regarding complaints involving homelessness during their daily shifts. According to the SFPD’s website dedicated to homelessness, “The mission of Operation Outreach is to provide the public homeless wherever they might be and to determine their needs, to provide targeted services for those in need while addressing quality of life concerns in the communities we serve.”

It may leave the impression that Homeless Outreach Units are some sort of hybrid of police and social work force, with special training or resources to address the needs of the homeless. However, the study found that servic es were rarely even mentioned during police interactions and that punitive treatments such as displacement, search and seizure of property, and cita-

even as in— 911 calls are driven from one neighborhood to another, the overall numbers of homeless people in each district remain relatively constant.

In a recent report issued by the US Department of Justice and Department of Housing and Urban Development, the agencies found such laws to likely be in violation of a number of amendments and may “violate international human rights law, specifically the Convention Against Torture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.” When asked to respond to the report’s findings, SFPD Homeless Outreach Coordinator Lt. Nevin’s expressed frustration about the directive to enforce anti-homeless laws and explained that many police officers would prefer not to enforce “quality of life” laws, and would rather focus on serious crimes. However, he said, police must enforce laws that are on the books, regardless of whether they agree that policing is an appropriate response: “If Mrs. Smith continues to call 911 because some guy’s sleeping on her door step, we are duty-bound to respond!”

Respondents reported having their prescribed medication, blankets, tents and sleeping bags confiscated or destroyed by SFPD or DPW, all of which threaten an individual’s health, well being, and ability to survive on the streets. Many reported having destroyed various forms of identification such as birth certificates, social security cards, and welfare cards, which create significant barriers to accessing government benefits such as employment and housing.

CRIMINALIZING FOR EXISTING

Homeless people are not in public space by choice. They are in public space because they cannot afford rent and have nowhere else to go. San Francisco has a total of 1,500 shelter beds for single adults with an official count of homeless population hovering at over 6,400 at any given time. This amounts to roughly one bed for every five homeless people. On any given day, over 500 people are on the 31 shelter wait list, and on any given night, there are between 20 and 500 people who sleep in chairs because they were unable to access a shelter bed for the evening. During the day, the vast majority of shelters are closed. The city only has a handful of drop-in centers, leaving the parks, lib- rary, and pews of St. Boniface Church where poor people are indeed not welcome at 3 a.m. p.m. as the only truly public spaces—although if one falls asleep at the library, a guard will promptly wake them up.

Amid these highly limit ing and continual policing faced by homeless people due to anti-home less laws is not only costly and could be considered unconstitutional. In a recent report issued by the US Department of Justice and Department of Housing and Urban Development, the agencies found such laws to likely be in violation of a number of amendments and may “violate international human rights law, specifically the Convention Against Torture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”

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