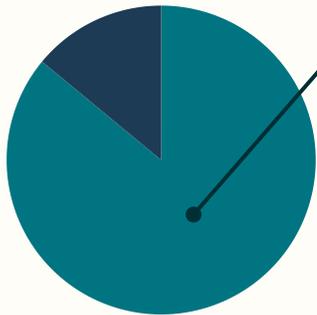


# 2 out of every 3 North Carolinians experiencing homelessness last year were homeless for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

There is increasing public awareness of the economic drivers for homelessness – including housing costs, inflation, and low wages. Four in ten of renters in Wilkes paid more than 30% of their income on housing and utilities.<sup>2</sup>

It takes an hourly wage of \$16.46 to afford a home at the fair market rent in Wilkes Counties. Problem is, the average wage for renter households in Wilkes is less than \$12.24 an hour. It would take an 11% raise to be able to afford a fair market 2 bedroom.<sup>3</sup>

North Carolina does not have enough affordable housing. For example, there are only 66 affordable housing units for every 100 households making below half of the area median wage.<sup>4</sup>



**86% of voters believe that homelessness cannot be resolved by using law enforcement resources to ticket, fine, and arrest people for being without housing – especially when there is not enough affordable housing to go around.<sup>5</sup>**

In one report, taxpayers forked over \$31,065 a year to criminalize a single unhoused person – three times the cost of providing that person with housing and supportive services (\$10,051).<sup>6</sup>

There is also a cyclical churn between homelessness and incarceration at an estimated cost to taxpayers of \$83,000 per person per year. In North Carolina, one-in-six people (about 3,000) released from prison in 2023 went directly into unsheltered homelessness.<sup>7</sup>



## HOUSING FIRST WORKS ✓

Even after prioritizing the most chronic cases, the Housing First model implemented across the state documented returns-to-homelessness of just 13%.

Community agencies secure housing and offer supportive services – like mental health counseling, substance use treatment, and employment assistance – to keep their clients in stable homes.

Using this best practice nationally, the Veterans Administration permanently housed nearly 48,000 veterans this year alone and more than 133,000 in the last three. That generated a drop in veterans experiencing unsheltered homelessness of nearly 11% over just one year.

## CRIMINALIZING COSTS TAXPAYERS 3X MORE THAN HOUSING.

1. All data derived from HUD System Performance Measures submitted by NC CoCs for Fiscal Year FY23
2. <https://nchousing.org/county-fact-sheets/>
3. <https://nlihc.org/oor/state/nc>
4. <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/north-carolina>
5. <https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Summary-of-Public-Opinion-Polling-on-Homelessness-June-2024.pdf>
6. <https://shnny.org/uploads/Florida-Homelessness-Report-2014.pdf>
7. <https://ncnewsline.com/2024/04/25/three-thousand-people-released-from-prisons-last-year-were-homeless/>

D90 Chair Representative Sarah Stevens

# Why Criminalizing Homelessness Doesn't Work

## WHAT NORTH CAROLINA VOTERS THINK ABOUT HOMELESSNESS<sup>1</sup>

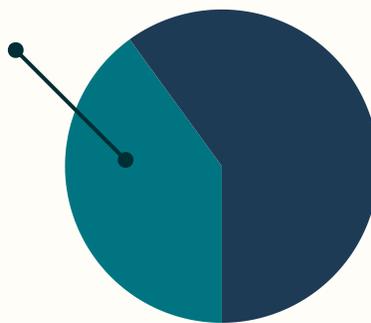
**75%** believe that, to keep people safe, we need to invest in resources rather than send people to jail – which makes it harder to find jobs or housing.



**77%** believe homelessness is caused by a lack of affordable housing

**80%** support expanding affordable housing and healthcare services instead of making homelessness a crime.

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, **40% of unsheltered people had employment** during the year of their homelessness. Displacement and property confiscation can cause unhoused people to miss work or lose their jobs. If enforcement results in a criminal record, it can complicate future efforts to access jobs and housing, including publicly subsidized housing.



People experiencing homelessness – both sheltered and unsheltered – in NC have increased mortality, including high overdose, violence, injury, and chronic disease death rates. **The mortality rate from all causes was 7 times that of the state's general population and 14 times the overdose mortality rate.**<sup>2</sup>

During the last statewide count in January 2024, more than 4,500 people were unsheltered.

That's nearly 39% of those experiencing homelessness in NC.

This represents a 31% increase over the previous year, increasing visible homelessness as affordable housing options decrease.<sup>3</sup>



Research shows that criminalizing homelessness exacerbates the crisis. Fifty-seven social scientists with peer-reviewed research on homelessness submitted an amicus curiae brief against criminalization – highlighting how it squanders public resources while causing severe harm to individuals' health and well-being.

**There is zero empirical evidence that criminalization reduces homelessness. Many laws criminalizing homelessness have existed in numerous cities since the 1990s, providing decades of outcome data.**<sup>4</sup>

1. Survey based on 600 interviews with registered North Carolina voters conducted in February 2025 by ACLU YouGov. The margin of error is approximately 4.5% with a 95% confidence interval

2. <https://ncmedicaljournal.com/article/55415>

3. 2024 Annual Homeless Assessment Report Part 1

4. How Criminalizing Homelessness Worsens the Crisis (compilation of broad research) - <https://bit.ly/4IKUxvg>