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Help The Homeless -- Is It Enough?

By Shailee Diwanji

There is a new, rather disturbing trend emerging in U.S. violent crimes. Violence against homeless people has increased significantly in recent years even as the FBI's statistics indicate that violence against other targeted groups is decreasing. Attacks against homeless people, including assaulting them while they sleep or instigating them to fight each other, are usually perpetrated by males, who often consider it a sport. But even more worrisome are the [ages](#) of these perpetrators - 80% of the attackers of homeless people were under the age of 25. Attackers see their victims as simply homeless, rather than homeless people; as if homelessness could render an individual to be sub-human.

These attacks are even more vicious because homeless people have no way to protect themselves - no home, no door that locks. Several of these individuals are veterans and have served this country for several years, and their treatment by and in society today is hardly the gratitude they deserve.

In light of these facts, [Florida](#) is now the latest of five states and the District of Columbia to pass legislation designating violence against the homeless as a hate crime. The nature of the crime comes into play during sentencing, with states generally imposing a more severe sentence when the action classifies as a hate crime, than would normally be allowed for the particular crime. Florida is the largest of these states to pass such legislation although the effect of this legislation on violence against the homeless still remains to be seen. The legislation is nevertheless a step in the right direction.

On the federal level, Senators Ben Cardin of Maryland and Susan Collins of Maine have [sponsored](#) the *Hate Crimes Against the Homeless Statistics Act*, which, if passed, would require the FBI to gather statistics on crimes against homeless people to allow for better resource allocation and remedial measures. The FBI currently collects statistics on hate crimes that cover race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, gender, and gender identity, which are protected characteristics under federal or state laws. But as homelessness is not a protected characteristic under any anti-discrimination law to-date, should homelessness become a protected characteristic for federal legislation?

Arguably not. While there is no doubt that more needs to be done to protect the homeless, the protected characteristic to be included in legislation should be more general. Homelessness is a subsection of the socially and economically disadvantaged. Is it not a hate crime if a child is targeted for being targeted for being poor even though he has a home

Bullying is on the rise in our nation's schools and is leading to more extreme and unpredictable results. We cannot and must not wait for such violence to get worse before we attempt to resolve it. We cannot allow future generations to fall victim to such abhorrent crimes. Violence is bad enough when it is senseless and unmotivated. But it is worse when the perpetrator tries to justify his actions on the basis of bias and prejudice.

Posted by The Modern American at [4:32 PM](#)