

Alabama shouldn't make housing insecurity a crime: Vote 'No' on HB 24

HB 24, sponsored by Rep. Reed Ingram, R-Pike Road, would make it a Class C misdemeanor to loiter on a public roadway or the right-of-way of a public roadway. This effectively would criminalize Alabamians who are experiencing homelessness and asking for help. Here are three reasons why Arise opposes this bill:

1. **Alabama should invest in solutions to housing insecurity, not criminalize poverty.**
 - Being housing insecure shouldn't be a crime. Neither should asking neighbors for help.
 - This bill would create unnecessary hardship for people who lack housing. They also could increase the likelihood of tense encounters between police and marginalized Alabamians.
 - This legislation could have the unintended consequence of exacerbating the overcrowding and funding crisis within our county jails.

2. **Multiple federal courts already have deemed this type of law unconstitutional.**
 - Passing this bill would result in expensive litigation that would waste Alabama taxpayers' money. And the most likely outcome would be for the state to be retold what a federal court already has stated: Laws like this are unconstitutional.
 - A federal judge intervened in March 2023 to block a similar municipal law and to prevent the Montgomery Sheriff's Office and the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency from arresting people who were soliciting donations. The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals also has ruled these kinds of laws violate the First Amendment.
 - By criminalizing poverty in this way, our state would be demonizing a marginalized segment of our population. Alabama also would be wasting valuable resources on lawsuits seeking to impose fines (or potentially jail time) on the people who can least afford them.
 - This bill would be a bad and unconstitutional approach to an issue that requires empathy and communal engagement, not callousness and incarceration.

3. **Putting people in jail over housing insecurity would be both cruel and expensive. Investing in housing and other support services is a much more humane and efficient approach.**
 - More than 3,700 people in Alabama experienced some form of homelessness in 2022, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. More than 300 of them were veterans.
 - In 2022, Madison County reported that it cost approximately \$55 a day to incarcerate someone in their county jail. Based on that amount, if all 3,500 or so of Alabama's housing insecure population were incarcerated for the full three months of jail time allowed under this bill, it could cost taxpayers more than \$17 million a year.
 - That \$17 million would be much better invested in affordable housing, health care access and other social services that are proven to prevent housing insecurity. As an added benefit: No one would go to jail for being poor.

It's time for Alabama to stop criminalizing poverty:

Oppose HB 24

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- 1. Alabama should invest in solutions to housing insecurity, not criminalize poverty. Being housing insecure shouldn't be a crime. Neither should asking neighbors for help.**
- 2. Multiple federal courts already have deemed this type of law unconstitutional. This bill likely would result in expensive litigation that would waste Alabama taxpayers' money.**
- 3. Putting people in jail over housing insecurity would be cruel and expensive. Investing in housing and other support services is a much more humane and efficient approach to addressing this issue.**