

To: House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
From: Bernie Beaudreau, Community Volunteer, Rumford, RI
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Date: March 4, 2026

Re: TESTIMONY regarding **H-8000** Homeless Bill of Rights – Encampments

Position: **Against** the introduced version of the bill

On Friday, January 16, I reached out to the East Providence Police in response to a call from a homeless tent dweller who saw a City notice taped to a traffic cone set in the middle train tracks across from the path to her encampment. It said that the encampment occupants had 5 days to vacate the city property or they will be removed. I spoke with the officer in charge of enforcing the city's ordinance and asked him why now, in the middle of winter? Can't you wait until Spring? He said they had a complaint and the Mayor has ordered the eviction.

I went to Mayor Roberto DaSilva's office twice to appeal to his good will and humanity requesting he postpone the eviction and clearance. Several staff came to me and explained that the mayor was booked with appointments. I detailed the issue of the planned encampment sweep for the Tuesday, January 20, the day after the Martin Luther King Day. Staff tried to justify the mayor's decision, arguing that the campers were illegally occupying City property and have better shelter/housing options and had no right to be there. I told them the homeless really don't have viable options. I have gotten to know how many of the homeless have not been helped by the State's shelter system. Beds are not often available. People feel unsafe experiencing punitive and violent incidences.

I wrote to the mayor with my request to postpone the eviction, on behalf of the folks in the woods. No response. I wrote again over the weekend, no response, not even an acknowledgement of my concern. No dialogue, no discussion. Decision made.

By Tuesday morning, January 20th, it had snowed several inches and the temperature had plummeted to single digits. The police officer in charge and he told me that it was too cold and icy for DPW to send in their backhoe, trucks and dumpster and that they may try again on Thursday with the forecast of a warmer day, but he was not sure. In the meantime, I delivered refills of fuel to the people living there taking a chance that they would have a least a few more weeks grace period before they had to move.

Around 11 AM on Thursday, on my way to deliver one more tank of fuel, I came upon a collection of DPW trucks, a backhoe and a huge dumpster at the beginning of the path into the encampment area. I got out and asked some of the men what was going on. They were waiting for the police officer in charge to lead the crew into the woods.

The DPW workers expressed that they felt terrible removing the campers. None of them wanted to do it but they had orders from Mayor DaSilva and would lose their jobs if they didn't.

When the officer in charge arrived, I appealed to him directly: ***“Please don't do this. It is unnecessarily mean and inhumane. There's no reason why it has to be done now with a huge storm forecasted and deep cold forecasted.”***

He ordered the action anyway. The backhoe crossed the train tracks and went down the path to one of the tents. The woman occupying the tent stood before the officer and backhoe and argued – she is unable to move her belongings right now, didn't have the help, and most importantly, has no place to go. The officer reconsidered and gave her until the next day, Friday January 23, to remove her belongings. The backhoe then went to another tent. The occupant ran out through the woods. The backhoe then gobbled up the entire tent and its contents and dropped it in the big dumpster. The next day came and went and the city DPW and police did not show up to remove the remaining tents. Then came the first blizzard on Sunday January 25, and the DPW was halted indefinitely by a foot of snow.

The City's action was totally unnecessary. To insist on clearing the encampments especially in the dead of Winter was inhumane. Personal belongs were thrown out and there was no serious effort to help these unsheltered homeless people find alternatives, shelter or housing. I heard one of the police officers tell the homeless woman to just move her tent a few hundred yards over the city line to Pawtucket.

I was finally invited to meet with the Mayor on February 10th. I felt there was a vindictiveness in his comments to solving this 'public nuisance' of homeless people in tents by evicting them:

- They have no right to be there!
- It's a public safety issue.
- We already have too many homeless in our city.
- I don't want to encourage other homeless people to move here and set up encampments.
- We're doing our part to provide affordable housing. Homelessness is not ours to solve.

After describing the real situations, experiences of the homeless people I have gotten to know encamped on City property, the Mayor finally agreed to extend the notice to vacate to April 1. After that the remaining tents will be removed. I think the Mayor finally listened and came to see the cruelty and unreasonableness of the City's actions.

H8000, as currently written, unnecessarily punishes desperately poor and homeless people without a true effort to transition them to better housing alternatives. Municipal actions to protect the “public safety” must include the safety and survival of the homeless themselves.