

Shabbat shalom. My name is Jesse and I work at the National Homelessness Law Center, where I direct the Housing not Handcuffs Campaign. But more importantly, I live in DC with my family. I'm here today because I want my kid to grow up in a DC where nobody lives outside because everybody has their needs met, not in a city where the army patrols the streets and police harass homeless people. I'm going to talk about the devastating impact of Trump's DC takeover on our homeless neighbors, but first, I want to explain how we got here.

More people are sleeping outside than ever before because the rent is too damn high and wages are too low. The average cost of a 1-bedroom in DC is \$2,300. Now, for Donald Trump and his billionaire cronies, that might be pocket change, but we know it's just too much for many people to afford.

Raise your hand if you pay too much in rent or worry about becoming homeless. See-our housing system is broken.

But instead of lowering rent and helping people, Donald Trump wants to cut housing support and make it a crime to sleep outside. That's shameful.

Laws that make it a crime to be poor or Black are as old as America- but they are in the middle of a rebirth. The takeover of DC is part of an attack led by right-wing billionaires on people who are poor, sick, or disabled. Trump has abandoned real solutions to homelessness- like housing and support - and has said for years that he wants to round up homeless folks and force them into government-run detention camps. When a fascist tells you what they want to do: believe them.

So what does Trump's attack on homeless Washingtonians look like? To me, it looked like violent, state-sponsored chaos. I saw dozens of federal police officers- from the FBI, Secret Service, and Homeland Security- gather near a few tents in Foggy Bottom. They didn't come with housing or support; they came with guns and flashing lights. The following morning, a caravan of over 20 police cars and trash trucks sped from site to site, throwing away people's belongings. In my decade of witnessing encampment evictions, I've never seen anything like this. In DC, nearly 90% of people experiencing homelessness are Black. It is not a coincidence that Trump is targeting them, it is white supremacy in action.

Throwing away somebody's belongings does not help them pay rent, and putting somebody in jail doesn't make housing cheaper. The money spent on national guard deployment since Trump's takeover - for the DC guard alone - could have ended homelessness for 500 people for a year. Why can we find millions of dollars for the national guard to pick up trash but not for the government to help people in need?

For me, this is personal. Not just because I love DC, but because Trump is locking up my neighbors. Look, I may be biased, but I think you should care about people living outside because they are people. My Jewish faith teaches me to treat every person like they have G-d's name written on their forehead, because we are all created in the

Divine image. “Love thy neighbor” means love thy neighbor, regardless of where they live, what they look like, or where they came from.

But if that isn’t enough, I need you to care because what starts with homeless folks in DC will spread to everybody across the country. Locking up or removing people you don’t like or don’t want to see is textbook authoritarianism. Trump is testing public opinion on groups that he believes have little public sympathy, like folks who live outside, migrants, and trans folks. We must include the attacks on homeless people in our collective understanding of Trump’s power grab.

I used to do homeless street outreach in the very parks Trump is targeting. People lived in these parks didn’t want to be there, but housing was too expensive and the shelters were either full or downright inhospitable. These folks, like most homeless people in DC, have deep ties to the District. They do the best they can to survive in a city and in a country whose politicians would rather remove them than help them. In these parks, I saw the best in people. Folks struggling to get by built community and supported each other. And I even saw a few clients get housing they could afford and supports they wanted. These folks thrived. They got their lives back on track, they got healthy, and stopped living outside.

We need housing and support, not handcuffs and a military takeover. The solution to homelessness is housing. The solution to authoritarianism is solidarity. We need both. Free DC.