

Oppose San Diego's "Unauthorized Camping Ordinance"

Timeline: Send letters by June 5, 2023. The San Diego City Council will vote on the ordinance **on June 13.**

Suggested publication(s) to send letters to: [San Diego Union Tribune](#) (150 word limit)

Reference articles such as these in the "Article or topic you are referring to" box in the online submission form:

- [May 13 San Diego UT editorial board column](#) opposing the ordinance

Help us track our impact: [Please send us copies](#) of your submitted letters to the editor, whether they are accepted or not.

[Read these tips](#) for writing effective Letters to the Editor

Background:

Earlier this year, Councilmember Stephen Whitburn introduced an [ordinance that would ban homeless encampments](#) within 2 blocks of schools or shelters, at transit hubs and other sensitive areas. It would ban encampments elsewhere on public property, but only when there is shelter where people can go.

Several organizations, including Alliance San Diego, [Regional Task Force on Homelessness](#), San Diego Housing Federation, Center on Policy Initiatives, the [Union Tribune editorial board](#) and many others have strongly opposed the ordinance, with questions about its legality, effectiveness and enforceability – not to mention its practicality and its morality.

Key points (select one or two, to keep your letter short and sweet)

Practicality

- The ordinance states that encampments are allowed as long as shelter is unavailable. This situation can change from one day to the next. **How is a homeless person supposed to know where they can camp?**
- [Alliance San Diego has released maps](#) which show that the ban would almost entirely shut out unhoused people from the city. Where are they supposed to go?
- [Criminalization increases homelessness](#), rather than the other way around, as recent studies have shown.

Effectiveness

- **This ordinance will cost the City money** in the form of incarceration and police involvement and will make the problem worse, rather than better. It is a waste of the taxpayers money.
- **The city has [far more homeless residents than it does shelter spots](#)**, but this ordinance does not include any expansion of shelters, or safe camping locations. The result will be to shuffle homeless people from one location to another, doing nothing to solve the problem.
- **“Merely uprooting encampments sets off an endless cycle of uprooting and re-rooting.** The people don’t disappear, they just regroup. The process is hard on the people on the streets, hard on the police who have to carry it out and if the ongoing presence of so much human suffering on our streets is itself a form of violence that traumatizes all who have to move through it, then the approach ensures the most people possible experience it.” (Scott Lewis, Voice of San Diego)
- **Arresting and jailing homeless people is counterproductive.** Incarceration can exacerbate the underlying causes of homelessness, such as substance abuse and mental illness, and can lead to a cycle of repeat homelessness and incarceration. Instead, governments should focus on providing homeless people with the support they need to address the underlying causes of their homelessness.

Legality:

- **The City already has an ordinance against homeless encampments** on public lands. Why do we need another one?
- **This ordinance violates the Supreme Court’s [Martin v. Boise ruling](#)**, which states that homeless people cannot be punished for sleeping in encampments in the absence of alternatives

Morality

- **Housing is a human right.** In 1948, the U.S. signed the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), calling on all signatory nations to aspire to protect fundamental human rights including the right to adequate housing (Article 25). This was reinforced by the [San Diego City Council’s January, 2023 unanimous vote](#), declaring housing as a human right. These rights are at risk in the proposed encampment ban.
- **The ordinance [makes it a crime to be homeless](#) in San Diego.** If a society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens, how will San Diego be judged?

Solutions

- **Instead of criminalizing homelessness, which is costly, ineffective and cruel, [experts agree that there are proven solutions](#).** These include permanent supportive housing, affordable housing, high quality street outreach services, more shelter beds, and more safe camping locations, to name a few.

[Read more background information on issues and solutions for homelessness here](#)

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