



PRESS RELEASE

Burlington DSA

btvdsa.org

press@btvdsa.org

facebook.com/btvdsa

twitter.com/btvdsa

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BURLINGTON DSA CONDEMNS COUNCIL HOMELESS VOTE

Housing and healthcare are human rights

Burlington, VT – The Burlington chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the largest socialist organization in the United States, condemns the August 28 City Council resolution which singles out the homeless and mentally ill for criminal penalties, and demands members of local government at all levels devote their efforts and resources to guarantee that none of our residents will go without a home or proper medical care.

Homelessness and its associated problems—including substance abuse, and severe and persistent mental illness—need not be facts of life. They are the predictable results of an economic arrangement that values money over people, resulting in unaffordable housing and lack of easy access to free, comprehensive, quality healthcare.

The Burlington DSA applauds Councilors Dieng and Tracy (Wards 7 and 2) for voting against this hateful legislation, and echo Dieng’s statement, “We should be a city with no homeless people.” The marginalized population upon whom the City Council has declared war is not the problem. Food, shelter, and healthcare are basic human rights. The real criminals are the 1% and their politicians who dream of multimillion dollar development projects, even as they allow others to go a single night without a home or access to effective medical treatment.



PRESS RELEASE

Burlington DSA

btvdsa.org
press@btvdsa.org
facebook.com/btvdsa
twitter.com/btvdsa

NOTES

1. We are deeply concerned about the issue of selective enforcement. “Quality of life” issues (e.g., public intoxication and urination, fighting, etc.) have plagued downtown and ONE nightlife for years. The message seems fairly clear to us: these unacceptable sorts of behaviors will be punished just as long as you’re not a college student.
2. Focusing on “quality of life” crimes was the basis of New York City’s failed “broken windows” policing policy, which did little but fill up prison cells and rob young blacks and Latinos of their futures. Should we expect to see a stop-and-frisk law next?
3. We can’t help but notice the curious timing of this legislation, which is coincidentally complementary to the city’s aspirations for greater gentrification, such as the mall project and plans for the privatization and reconstruction of City Hall Park.
4. The factors underlying homelessness and its associated problems are accelerating gentrification, skyrocketing rent (fueled in no small part by UVM, which refuses to provide sufficient housing for its own students), an opioid crisis the city is only now starting to really tackle, and a broken mental health care system. However, rather than address the structural issues closer to the root of the problem, the city’s solution is to pass draconian legislation and erect metal barricades to protect its precious small business owners.
5. We are unaware of the city making any serious efforts to address the need for robust tenant protections including rent control and reduction measures, such as:
 - a. Requiring UVM to provide housing (*not* buy up local housing) for the entirety of its student body, and provide clear financial incentives for students to live



PRESS RELEASE

Burlington DSA

btvdsa.org
press@btvdsa.org
facebook.com/btvdsa
twitter.com/btvdsa

on-campus. Given its tuition for even in-state students, and that it is exempt from property taxes, such an undertaking should be quite affordable.

- b. Instituting tenant protections and pricing controls requiring landlords to base rent on cost of living. Vermont is now one of the top five states in the US with the highest disparity between earned income and cost of living.
- c. Providing comprehensive mental health and substance abuse treatment services rather than effectively outsourcing it to a patchy network of nonprofits and private providers.
- d. Conducting a comprehensive survey to determine the actual occupancy rates of housing in the Burlington area throughout the year. In the Old North End, entire stretches of multi-unit houses sit empty throughout the summer, likely because no one can afford to rent them except groups of students.