

## **Facebook post by Beacon, Inc.**

An Open Letter to the Mayor regarding tonight's impending eviction from Seminary Park, signed by the Beacon Board, the Monroe County Commissioners, the Bloomington and Benton Township Boards, many elected officials, and more.

Dear Mayor Hamilton:

Given the City of Bloomington's impending deadline of Monday, January 11th to remove all people experiencing homelessness who are sleeping in Seminary Park and the adjacent public right-of-way, we, the undersigned call upon you, Mayor John Hamilton, to desist and establish an immediate moratorium on evictions until the end of the COVID-19 state of emergency.

While we appreciate many of the ways the City aids the work of supporting people without homes and we in no way see sleeping outside as a safe experience, we believe the forceful removal of people and the dismantling of their outdoor homes by the Police and Parks Department will do even further harm.

We offer three reasons for this charge to you, our Mayor.

First, the number of people sleeping outdoors this winter is at an all-time high and Bloomington does not have sufficient beds to shelter everyone. Usually near zero during the winter, a recent survey by Beacon's street outreach team found 38 people sleeping in the public right-of-way near Seminary Park and estimate another 20-25 sleeping in camps elsewhere. There are also an uncountable number of people sleeping in their vehicles. With Friend's Place at capacity and Wheeler Mission near capacity, forcing people to vacate Seminary Park will cause them to retreat to more distant, hidden, and unsafe locations, further away from the services they need.

Second, we are in the middle of a global pandemic. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends allowing "people who are living unsheltered or in encampments to remain where they are." They reason that, "Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread."

Lastly, the forcible removal of people living outside violates their Constitutionally protected rights to public space. The Supreme Court let stand the Ninth Circuit Court's ruling in *Martin v. Boise* (12/2019), which affirmed that people experiencing homelessness cannot be criminally punished for sleeping outside on public property if there are no available alternatives. The Court ruled that criminalizing people without homes for sleeping in public constitutes "cruel and unusual punishment" and therefore violates their 8th Amendment rights. Simply put, to arrest people without homes who refuse to leave our parks and other public spaces would be cruel.

We strongly urge the City to extend the moratorium on enforcement of the Parks Department camping prohibition and work with social service agencies and impacted people

to find real solutions to the struggles in the park. There are a number of potential short-term and long-term solutions offered by many concerned citizens and elected officials, such as those proposed in the Bloomington Homeless Coalition's petition on [change.org](https://www.change.org), which as of this writing has been signed by over 1500 people. Using Building Trades Park could be another alternative option to Seminary given the public restroom already available. Bottom line—we must find a better solution and we need the City to allow the time and provide the support to do so.

Fight Poverty, Not the Poor.

Signed,

Organizational Co-signers

Beacon, Inc.

Bloomington Christian Radical Catholic Worker

Bloomington Homeless Coalition

Bloomington Housing Authority Resident's Council

Bloomington Township Board

Benton Township Board

Democracy for Monroe County

Hotels for Homeless

Limestone Medic Collective

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Monroe County Mutual Aid

Monroe County NOW

Mother Hubbard's Cupboard

Neighbors United

No Space for Hate

Pigeon Hill Pantry

Sacred Heart Church

Individual Co-signers

Abby Ang

Kim Alexander, Bloomington Township Trustee

Rita Barrow, Van Buren Township Trustee

Michelle Bright, Benton Township Trustee

Dan Combs, Perry Township Trustee

Ashley Beeler

Nicole Bolden, City Clerk

Vauhxx Rush Booker

Sean Buehler

Michelle Bloom

Jean Capler

Gina Carney

Cathi Crabtree

Jennifer Crossley, Monroe County Democratic Party, Chair

Jackie Daniels

Lindsey Dominguez

Gavin Everett, Monroe County Democratic Party, Vice-Chair

Lorraine Merriman Farrell

Rebecca Rogers Figg

Matt Flaherty, Bloomington Common Council, At-Large

Vera Flocke

Gina Forrest

Kenny Garrison

Rev. Forrest Gilmore

Tassie Gniady, Ph.D.

Kay Goodman

Dorothy Granger

Rahgene Hoard-Jackson

Carol Hostetter

Nicole Johnson

Laura Lasuertmer

Joe Linsky

Laura Littlepage

Jane Martin

Ross Martinie Eiler

Rachael Jones McAfee

Bruce McCallister

Sofia McDowell, Monroe County Democratic Party, Secretary

Geoff McKim, Monroe County Council, At-Large

Chelsie McKinney

Tammie Meek

Deborah Myerson

Katie Norris

Isabel Piedmont-Smith, Bloomington Common Council, District V

Emily Pike

Ashley Pirani

Carlene Quinn

Mallory Rickbeil

Kate Rosenbarger, Bloomington Common Council, District I

Nicole Schonemann

Marty Spechler

Molly Stewart, Ph.D.

Darrell Stone

Marc Teller

Steve Volan, Bloomington Common Council, District VI

Carol Watson

Cathleen Ingle Weber

Von Welch

Lloyd Williams

Patty Wykes

Paula Worley