

The Criminalization of Poverty in the United States

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Testimony Roadmap

1

Who I Am

Introduction of the speaker — Amanda J. Richer, lived expert

2

What I've Witnessed

Homelessness & housing insecurity | Food & water insecurity

3

What Must Change

Conclusion & recommendations to the United States

Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

330+

cities, towns, and states have passed laws criminalizing sleeping and sheltering in public since the 2024 Grants Pass decision.

EXECUTIVE ORDER 14321 · JULY 2025

Directs federal agencies to clear unhoused people through camping bans and involuntary commitment — and sent National Guard troops to sweep encampments in Washington, D.C.

*“Tents were slashed with box cutters.
Some hid. Some disappeared. Some died.”*

Food and Water Insecurity

Nearly 42 million

people had food and safety-net support cut by the July 2025 “One Big Beautiful Bill” — including refugees and survivors of trafficking and domestic violence, now stripped of eligibility.

THE RIGHT TO WATER

Poor, predominantly Black and brown communities across the deep South and Midwest are left without basic sanitation or affordable, clean water.

Food and water are human rights — not privileges to be earned. The United States has yet to recognize them as such.

Recommendations

1 · Abolish laws that punish and criminalize unhoused people and their support systems.

- Repeal ordinances criminalizing unhoused and housing-insecure individuals, and civil involuntary commitment.
- Abolish laws criminalizing sex work.
- Create safe, sanitary public restrooms; repeal laws criminalizing public bathing and urination where facilities do not exist.
- Fund homeless services without discriminatory conditions, welcoming to all regardless of race, gender identity, ability, or migration status.
- Ensure mutual-aid providers are not targeted or defunded for assisting unhoused people.

2 · Provide housing that is accessible, affordable, habitable, well-located, and culturally adequate.

- Fund universal legal counsel for eviction cases; hold negligent landlords accountable.
- Adopt race-conscious measures to remedy historic and ongoing housing discrimination.
- Raise the federal minimum wage and index it to inflation.
- Upgrade public housing and penalize landlords who violate code-enforcement standards.
- Require community-impact assessments and public hearings before new development displaces residents.

3 · Suspend immigration enforcement around schools, hospitals, food sites, and faith institutions.

- Establish non-custodial alternatives to immigration detention — especially for children, families, and others in vulnerable situations.

4 · Restore public spending for food, nutrition, and life-saving humanitarian assistance.

- Invest in SNAP and WIC, and eliminate punitive, unrealistic income-eligibility rules that block eligible families.
- Invest in safe water and sanitation for all, especially in poor and marginalized neighborhoods.

Poverty is not a crime. Dignity is not a privilege.