



DEAR REP. JOHN RUTHERFORD,

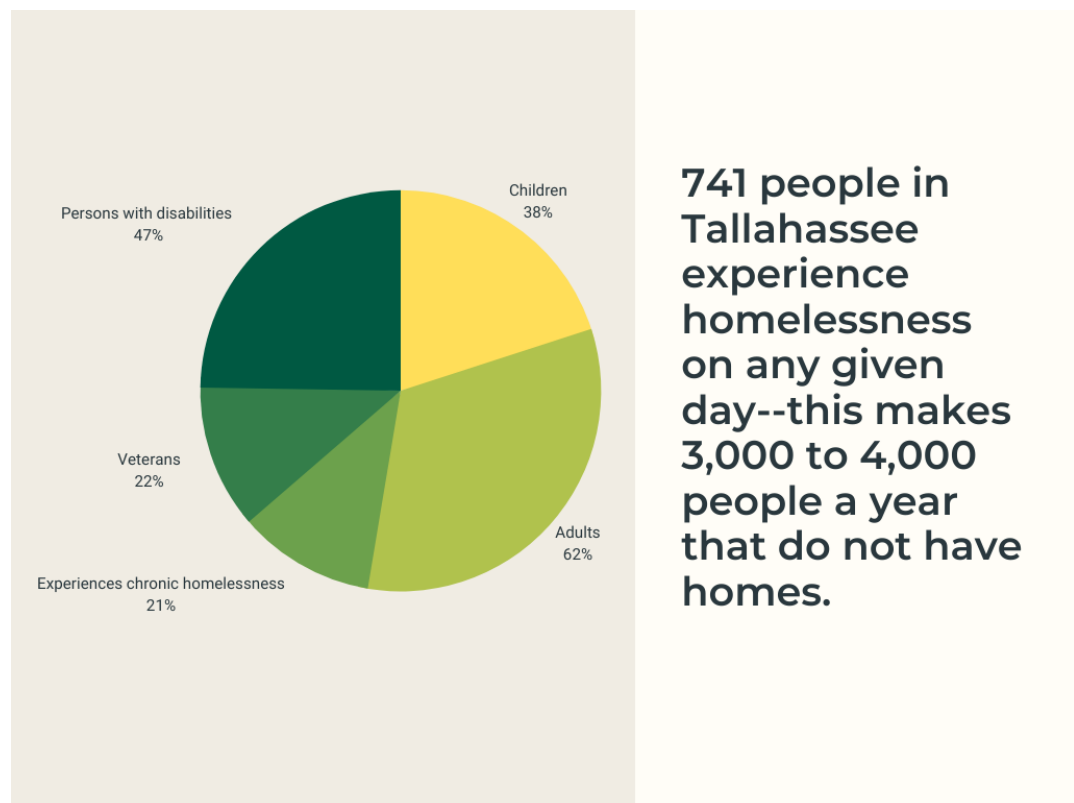
In a world with increasing polarization, I find it comforting that there are certain elements of the human experience that are universal to everyone: sharing joy with family and friends, maturing and finding one's own identity, and, perhaps the greatest and most binding of all of these is the opportunity to love and give love to others, be they strangers or people near and dear to us.

The ability to give this sacred love should be the single greatest motivator for all of us, every single day, to become better members of our community and better people.

It pains me to see this love waning before my very eyes. I grew up in the early 2000s, when the shock of 9/11 seemed to drive people together. I remember feeling safe in my community, and the support offered to my mother when my father was deployed in Afghanistan— I remember feeling like we all had a common purpose, and if anyone was left behind or in distress there would be an outpouring of support to guide them back to where they belonged. This presence of community and centrality is being threatened by attacks on our unalienable rights— our rights to choose the paths of our lives, to protect our children when they go to school, and the right to exist in a space without fear of violence from those sworn to serve and protect. Our communities are the greatest facilitators of love, because they recognize that the process of sharing love with others is not transactional—it is a mere obligation to help others when you see them fall, to be there for the people who need you, and to speak up against injustice when you see it. Community action is the single most important thing when it comes to combating these evils. Community functions second family, an extension of support— a home.

The destruction of our communities is most visible and apparent in our great city of Tallahassee when you look outside and see our streets full of homeless people— members of our community that we are actively failing. I am a strong believer that silence is no better than violence, and by not doing anything we are complicit in and just as violent factors that push people into extreme poverty in the first place. I urge you to listen to the voices of those below you— everyone deserves a home. It is our duty to ensure that is the case.

The reason why this issue is so prevalent is the way that it affects children– according to [Big Bend Homeless Coalition](#), 38% of the 741 homeless people on any given day are children under the age of 18. There are also a number of veterans and people with disabilities that have been pushed into homelessness. Their condition is due to an increasingly worsening problem across America: lack of good paying jobs and not enough options for affordable housing. These mitigatable factors are not receiving the attention that they need, and as a result, 3,000 to 4,000 people a year living in Tallahassee do not have homes.



The homelessness crisis has become so severe that organizations designed to support homeless people– homeless shelters and charities– are becoming overloaded to the point that they are no longer able to provide help.

People are pushed into homelessness for a myriad of reasons– but among the most prevalent are mental health disorders. According to the [National Alliance for Mental Illness](#) in Tallahassee, between 32 and 50% of homeless people in the Big Bend area have a diagnosed mental health disorder– which is a significant contributor to the state of homelessness now.

All of these factors: the dismantling of our communities, lack of fair wages and increasing housing prices, and the pervasiveness of mental health disorders in our area have made homelessness an incredible problem. It is also an incredibly fixable problem– but you can't do it alone. We must lean on each other to ensure that not only the problem is fixed, but also the sources that lead to the problem are fixed, and in order to do that, a multifaceted solution is required.

Here's what you can do:

1. Advocate for fair and accessible labor. That means increasing minimum wage and advocating against discrimination practices that bar veterans, people with disabilities, people of color, and queer people from maintaining employment. This is the first step in mitigating the problem in its entirety. So often, systems of power work against the very citizens that they are meant to serve. Vulnerable people like veterans and those with disabilities need support in finding reliable and fair paying employment. It's essential for them to have the ability to provide for themselves and their families, and the first step in making this possible is ensuring that they have jobs, even if it means creating some for them.
2. Hold the housing industry accountable. Rent prices everywhere are skyrocketing with no real end in sight, and because wages have not increased with inflation rates, many are struggling to make ends meet. This ties into the first solution, advocating for fair wages, but it also calls for ensuring that people with economic power don't take advantage of others just because they can. In addition, providing funding efforts to give homeless people options, like rapid rehousing and shared housing, as well as supporting safe houses for people in immediate danger, can be a part of this solution. Last but not least, providing funding for homeless shelters in our area is essential. The work that they do is essential, and many would not survive without it. They need fiscal support to keep doing this– and more importantly, they need to know that the people that represent them in government are in their corner and not working against them.

You've done your part, now help us help you.

1. No one in the city of Tallahassee enjoys seeing homeless people in our community, and no one wakes up and decides to be homeless. There are people who want to help, but don't know how. And there are people who want to help, do know how, and do not have the support to do so. Many members of our community: religious leaders, charities and non profit organizations, members of the LGBTQ+ community and the Black community that identify with the homeless people that they see and have the desire to help them. It is important to build relationships with these people– it may be uncomfortable, but discomfort sparks change. Listen to their concerns, strategize with them, and learn how you can work together to ensure that our streets are clear.

2. Mental health matters, and there are members of our community that are trained and prepared to handle the small group therapy sessions and the biggest crises that one can face. Empowering organizations that provide these services are an amazing way to ensure that those who cannot afford care still have access to it. Another potential solution– although transformative– is strategizing with community members to develop systems where people are willing to respond to mental health related crises when needed. There are times when going to the police is unsafe, pushing many into silence– which is unacceptable. Having people who are willing and able to provide support when

needed would be a great resource, and also ensure people who face mental health issues that they are not alone. Knowing that there are people in your community that want to help you and want you to persevere is incredibly impactful.

There are by no means easy solutions– they will likely take years to actualize, many difficult conversations, and many hours of talking, planning, and strategizing. It will have all been worth it, though, if one day we can say that, as a whole, we ended the homelessness crisis in our community because of our joint efforts. Our communities are stratified right now– but we can fix that. We can support and uplift each other, and we can solve this problem. I urge you to remember the time where community was powerful, when we were unstoppable, when we were beyond great: we were excellent. I urge you to help us rebuild that. We are willing and able, if you are.

I wish you well.

Cameron Glymph