

**From:** Michelle Sayles via AAHDDiscuss <aahddiscuss@aahddiscuss.topicbox.com>

**Sent:** Thursday, April 4, 2024 9:51 AM

**To:**

**Subject:** [AAHDDiscuss] AAHD Signs Amicus Brief in Support of the Rights of the Homeless in Landmark Supreme Court Case

## Press Release

*American Association on Health and Disability Joins Law Enforcement Associations, Faith-Based Organizations, Medical Professionals, Legal Experts, Academic Leaders, Advocates, and Members of Congress to Urge an End to the Criminalization of Homelessness*

**Rockville, MD** – The American Association on Health and Disability proudly announced that it has signed onto an amicus brief submitted today in support of the plaintiffs in the upcoming landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Johnson v. Grants Pass*.

*Johnson v. Grants Pass* is the most important case regarding homelessness in the past 40 years. It will address the critical issue of whether laws punishing homeless individuals for sleeping outdoors with basic protections such as a pillow or blanket – when no safe and accessible shelter options are available – are violations of the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which protects against excessive bail, fines, and cruel and unusual punishment.

The American Association on Health and Disability joins the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) in submitting an amicus brief in solidarity with the rights of homeless individuals across the U.S. They are joined by the National Homelessness Law Center (NHLC) and a broad array of over one thousand organizations and public leaders who have submitted nearly 40 amicus briefs on behalf of the plaintiffs.

“We know that health for people with disabilities is intrinsically tied to social determinants, like access to safe, stable, and affordable housing. Without accessible shelter space and supportive housing services, people with disabilities are at much greater risk of houselessness. We believe that our community deserves proper supports like Housing First, not criminalization.” Says Karl Cooper, AAHD Executive Director.

“This case challenges us to face the reality that using things like jails and fines do nothing to solve homelessness and actually make homelessness worse” said Jesse Rabinowitz, campaign and communications director for NHLC. “Punishing our neighbors who have no choice but to sleep outside pushes them further into poverty and makes it harder to secure work and housing. The overwhelming support from a diverse array of organizations that we see in these amicus briefs underscores the need for our elected officials at every level of government to solve homelessness with housing and support, not make homelessness worse by using jail cells and bulldozers.”

Currently, more than 600,000 people in America experience homelessness on any given night, with nearly half—250,000—sleeping outside. [Data](#) from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development shows a rise in homelessness for both sheltered and unsheltered individuals in nearly every state. The primary cause of the record levels of homelessness we see today is the unaffordable housing market, according to [research](#) from the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies.

***Below is an excerpt from the amicus brief signed by AAHD:***

Homeless people are significantly more likely to have disabilities compared to both the United States population at large and individuals living in poverty.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”), nearly one in three homeless individuals experience a chronic pattern of homelessness, “meaning that they have experienced homelessness for extended periods of time and have a disability.” HUD estimates that on any given day, nearly one-quarter (24%) of homeless individuals (143,105 of 653,104 individuals) are people with disabilities who meet the federal definition of experiencing chronic homelessness. A 2018 survey of homeless people found that 78% of respondents reported having mental health conditions. Yet another study found that 25% of homeless individuals reported a lifetime history of psychiatric hospitalizations. The California Health Care Foundation recently reported that 42% of California’s homeless people have a disability. Another California study found that 66% of participating homeless people reported having a mental health condition and 24% reported not being able to find housing that met their needs due to a physical disability.

Many homeless people with disabilities are also older adults, which is one of the fastest growing age groups among people experiencing homelessness. The growth of that older group means that more of the homeless population has geriatric conditions and chronic health problems. (finding that, “[c]ompared to their housed counterparts,” homeless older adults have a higher prevalence and severity of memory loss, falls, difficulty performing daily tasks, cognitive impairments, functional impairments, and higher rates of mental health and substantive use disorders) (citations omitted). As compared to younger homeless adults, those over 50 years of age have higher rates of chronic illnesses, cognitive impairments, high blood pressure, arthritis, and functional disability. Worse still, the population of homeless older adults is rapidly growing and is expected to triple by 2030 in several major U.S. cities.

Chronic homelessness is on the rise, demonstrating the need for policy intervention rather than criminalization measures.

***Read the full brief submitted by the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) et al. here:***  
<https://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/city-of-grants-pass-oregon-v-johnson/>

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**ABOUT THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION ON HEALTH & DISABILITY**

*About the American Association on Health and Disability: AAHD is dedicated to ensuring health equity for children and adults with disabilities through policy, research, education, and dissemination at the federal, state and community level. AAHD strives to advance health promotion and wellness initiatives for people with disabilities. AAHD’s goals are to reduce health disparities between people with disabilities and the general population, and to support full community inclusion and accessibility.*

**ABOUT THE NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS LAW CENTER**

*The National Homelessness Law Center (NHLC) is at the forefront of the fight against homelessness in America. Our mission is to fearlessly advance federal, state and local policies to prevent and end homelessness while fiercely defending the rights of all unhoused persons. We work to shape and advance policies at the federal, state, and local levels aimed at preventing and ultimately ending homelessness. By fostering partnerships, influencing policy, and mobilizing communities, the NHLC is dedicated to transforming how society addresses homelessness, striving for a future where everyone has a place to call home. Learn more at [homelesslaw.org](http://homelesslaw.org).*

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