

The Link Between Felons and Homelessness

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America's largest cities continue to foster a growing homeless population. In 2015, prisons and corrections facilities contained approximately 2 million inmates and almost 5 million people were on either parole or probation. At least 10 percent of released inmates will be homeless for varying amounts of time after leaving prison. Although many people recognize that newly released felons are at risk for experiencing homelessness, many do not know that a fifth of existing homeless people purposefully commit a crime in order to spend time in jail and off of the streets.

Experts argue that the prison system is partially to blame for the unemployment of released felons. Security measures prohibit inmates who are being released from knowing or notifying anyone about when they will be back in the real world. This means that it is virtually impossible for the newly released to have anything set in place ahead of time; this includes living situations, job interviews, and health care plans. In order to get government subsidized housing, you cannot have been convicted of any crimes. Felons trying to piece their lives back together after being released often have a difficult time connecting with friends and family; their significant others have most likely moved on, relatives may now be deceased, and other friends may have stigmatized them and want little to do with them. Most employers are extremely reluctant to hire felons and those who have been behind bars for an extended period of time have probably lost all forms of identification. Landlords often refuse to rent out their properties to ex-offenders. When prisoners are released on parole, they are required to live in the same geographical parameters where their former partners in crime are likely to still reside. With so many obstacles stopping the newly released from turning their lives around, they are extremely likely to reconnect with other criminals and go back to their old ways. Once embedded in a life of homelessness, it is next to impossible to gain the resources needed to get hired. Not being able to shower and have access to clean clothes further prevents homeless felons from making a good impression on employers.

There are some volunteer-run transitional houses for the newly released and other organizations to help felons with nowhere to go, but the high statistics of homeless felons reveal that there is much work to still be done. America's prisons are supposed to reform felons, but our broken prison system typically sets felons up for lives of poverty and despair.

<https://www.centerforhealthjournalism.org/blogs/are-prison-release-practices-creating-homelessness>

<https://outandemployed.wordpress.com/2010/05/27/no-place-to-go-the-homeless-epidemic-among-ex-offenders/>

<https://csqjusticecenter.org/nrrc/facts-and-trends/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2010/dec/23/homeless-committing-crimes-for-shelter>