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Non-profit Board MISSION files Court Statement Against “Criminalization of Homelessness in Washtenaw County”

ACLU Brief calls prosecution of homeless camper “cruel and unusual punishment”

Ann Arbor, Mich. – In this season of giving, we must also take the time to remember that there are many that go without: without food, without shelter. Despite many efforts, local shelters and support services are overwhelmed. In Washtenaw County, as elsewhere, many people live outside in camps or in their cars. The worst part is that even while shelters face enormous financial strain, the county would spend tax dollars prosecuting homeless campers for trespass – essentially criminalizing homelessness.

Today, the Michigan Itinerant Shelter System-Interdependent Out of Necessity (MISSION) filed a statement in support of Caleb Poirier in 15th District Court for Ann Arbor. Caleb was a resident of local homeless encampment, “Camp Take Notice,” when he was arrested back in September. Local civil rights attorney David Blanchard is representing Caleb. He has asked the court to dismiss the case as an unconstitutional attempt to criminalize Caleb’s status, calling the arrest a “targeted homeless sweep” based on the public message of the camp. Caleb’s crime, if anything, was trying to live in public. What the prosecutor calls trespass, the ACLU has called “cruel and unusual punishment” in an amicus brief also filed with the court today.

The Board of MISSION felt the need to speak out on the extreme crisis faced by underfunded local shelters and homeless support services, and the lack of any viable housing solution for the chronically homeless. This is a time of year when people of all faiths take stock of their blessings and assess their priorities. In doing so, MISSION calls on the County and other local government to take the money spent prosecuting the homeless and put it toward real solutions.

About MISSION:

Tent cities are growing as a direct result of the housing crisis, and they will not go away through efforts to marginalize or even prosecute their residents. In recognition of this reality, MISSION was formed to encourage and support the efforts of self-governing tent communities to provide a positive environment through safer and more sanitary conditions. Michigan Itinerant Shelter System—Interdependent Out of Necessity (“MISSION”) is a partnership between homeless and “homeful” Washtenaw residents to support Michigan tent communities during the current housing and employment crises. In Ann Arbor, MISSION supports the efforts of Camp Take Notice (“CTN”) to build and strengthen a community through self-governance and accountability. Self-governing tent communities such as CTN give a voice to the homeless, allow them to live with a sense of dignity and self-sufficiency despite the lack of permanent housing, and they make the community safer and better able to connect with support services.