

Protect Homeless People from Violence

Homeless men, women, and children are particularly vulnerable to crimes against them because they are an easy, visible, susceptible target and lack a place to retreat for safety and protection.

- ◆ In 2007, the “**Meanest State**” in the nation was **Florida**, which **led the nation in the number of violent acts** committed against homeless people, as determined by the National Coalition’s research.
- ◆ In the last 6 years, there have been at least **40 reported violent acts** on homeless people in Florida, occurring in at least 21 different municipalities.

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Apopka	Daytona Beach	Holiday	Melbourne	Tampa
Bradenton	East Palatka	Holly Hill	Miami	
Broward County	Ft. Lauderdale	Hollywood	Orlando	
Charlotte County	Gainesville	Key West	Sarasota	
Miami-Dade County	Hillsborough County	Kissimmee	St. Petersburg	

- ◆ Violence against homeless people goes **under-reported**. Homeless people **often do not report** crimes committed against them due to fear of retaliation, past incidents, mental health issues, substance abuse, and/or frustration with and fear of the police.
- ◆ In many documented cases, the perpetrators admit to **intentionally and deliberately choose their victim because they were homeless**:

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 - ... they killed the homeless man “**for fun**” because they “**needed something to do.**”
 - ... the teens punch the victim repeatedly, then stand up, **laugh, and give each other high-fives.**
 - ... had gone out “**looking for homeless people to rob.**”

- ◆ These crimes are usually committed by 2 or 3 **young men acting as a group**.
- ◆ These are acts of **bias-motivated crimes**, or hate crimes, based on prejudice or partiality of the perpetrator against the victim’s real or perceived grouping or circumstance. In these cases - **homeless status**.
- ◆ Florida has demonstrated a **commitment and responsibility to protect our most vulnerable citizens** - and has done so through laws that protect our children, elderly and disabled citizens.
- ◆ Adding homeless status to the state’s current hate crimes law is simply a **continuation of this commitment and responsibility**.

This change has **no fiscal impact** based on the Criminal Justice Impact Conference determination in 2007 that this bill would have an **insignificant prison bed impact** on the Department of Corrections.

NO ONE should be beaten, harassed, threaten, assaulted, robbed, injured or killed simply because they do not have a safe place to sleep at night.

Support:

H.B. 81 sponsored by Rep. Priscilla Taylor and Senate companion bill.

Turn over and read about some of the attacks on homeless people committed in Florida.

Presented by the Florida Coalition for the Homeless
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Coordinated by the Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County



A Few of the Documented Cases of Violence Against Homeless People in Florida

January 2007 - **Hillsborough County**: A group of teens kill a homeless man in retaliation for the man fighting back in the December 2006 attack.

January 2007 - **St. Petersburg**: Two homeless men were shot to death by two young adults, 18 and 20.

December 2006 - **Ft. Lauderdale**: A homeless man was attacked by a teen with metal shears. After being discharged from the emergency room, the same teen attacked the man with a metal pipe and brick.

December 2006 - **Hillsborough County**: A group of homeless men living in a wooded area in Gibsonton is harassed by a group of teens.

November 2006 - **Ft. Lauderdale**: A homeless woman was robbed after being woke up by the robber.

April 2006 - **Orlando**: A group of five teenagers attacked a homeless man. The man died in the hospital a month after the attack. The group is believed to be responsible for at least a half dozen attacks on homeless people and 'terrorize' homeless people for 'sport.'

January 2006 - **Ft. Lauderdale**: Three homeless men were beaten by teenagers; one man died. This horrible crime was captured on video and shown around the world.

February 2005 – **Daytona Beach**: Two homeless men were walking along the railroad tracks when five or six young men attacked and threw rocks at them. Calling the homeless men names, the assailants beat the victims with their fists and a blunt object and then fled after rifling their pockets.

May 2005 – **Broward/Miami-Dade Counties**: Two Homeless Voice street newspaper vendors were shot at a total of four times each while on the job. A vendor working in the same vicinity was shot in the chest with the same type of gun a few weeks later.

May 2005 – **Holly Hill**: Five teenage boys were charged in the death of a 53-year-old homeless man after they repeatedly beat him. Two of the teenagers said they killed the homeless man "for fun" because they "needed something to do". Friends said they later bragged about the beating and offered to show them Roberts' body. Visitors to the site included Spurgeon's cousins, aged 4 and 8.

June 2005 – **Holiday**: Four men beat a man with a baseball bat and threw his bicycle into a nearby pond, breaking his arm among other injuries. The man was scolding children for throwing rocks at him when the four men approached him and began to attack him.

January 2004 – **Old Town**: A homeless man was beaten sustaining a broken arm and leg. His tent camp was also burned. that resulted in breaking his arm and leg.

March 2004 – **Key West**: A 58-year-old homeless man was found with large, bloody cuts on his forehead. A witness directed two police officers to the location where "several males" were beating the homeless man. When the police arrived, they saw the teens punch the victim repeatedly, then stand up, laugh, and give each other high-fives.

November 2004 – **Bradenton**: A group of men kicked and beat a sleeping homeless man. Damon Morgan, the victim, told deputies the men stole his clothes, fifteen dollars, and a bicycle. Morgan's left eye was cut.

January 2003 – **Sarasota**: Six boys, ages 11 to 15, allegedly attacked and robbed a homeless man. In confessions given to police officers shortly after the attack, they said they beat Michael Poole, 49, and also stole his watch and wallet. One of the boys told police that they had gone out "looking for homeless people to rob." Poole, who sustained head injuries, was airlifted to the Bayfront Medical Center trauma center in St. Petersburg.

August 2003 – **Melbourne**: Two teenage males attacked a 50-year-old homeless man and two of his friends. At least one of the men was beaten with beer bottles, a chair, and the assailants' feet, suffered a fatal head injury in the attack.

September 2003 – **Apopka**: Six police officers in Apopka face charges for firing pepper balls into a homeless camp. Although a number of homeless people live in the camp, no one was there at the time. An internal investigation showed that the officers had violated a number of department regulations in the September 2003 incident at the camp. The violations/citations included: not immediately reporting the incident to a supervisor, excessive force, conduct unbecoming an officer, abusive or unprofessional conduct, misconduct and lying. The penalties the current officers will face have not been determined. One officer said that this incident was not the only time pepper balls had been fired into the camp.

October 2002 – **Gainesville**: A homeless man was beaten and robbed of his wallet by four men on Banks Street. The men were seen leaving in a brown car.