

## Housing for ALL Floridians 2010

### 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.

Florida continues to be the “**Meanest State.**” Since 2005, our state has had greatest **number of violent acts** committed against homeless people in the country. (*Hate, Violence, and Death on Main Street USA*, [http://nationalhomeless.org/publications/hatecrimes/hate\\_report\\_2008.pdf](http://nationalhomeless.org/publications/hatecrimes/hate_report_2008.pdf))

Bradenton	Deland	Ft. Myers	Lakeland	Ocala	Ruskin
Broward County	Delray Beach	Gibsonton	Lauderhill	Orlando	St. Augustine
Bunnell	Deltona	Holiday	Leesburg	Panama City	St. Petersburg
Charlotte County	East Palatka	Holly Hill	Manatee County	Pompano Beach	Tampa
Dania Beach	Ellenton	Key West	Merritt Island	Port Charlotte	West Palm Beach
Daytona Beach	Ft. Lauderdale	Kissimmee	Miami-Dade County	Riviera Beach	

From 2005 to 2008, there were **141 reported violent acts** on homeless people in Florida, in at least 35 different municipalities.

A 2009 survey revealed that 27% of homeless individuals in Hillsborough County have been physically attacked. (Survey by the National Coalition for the Homeless in conjunction with the Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County)

Violence against homeless people is often **under-reported**. Homeless people **do not usually 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.

These crimes are usually committed by 2 or 3 **young men acting as a group**. In 2008, 73% of the attackers were 25 and under; 43% were between 13-19 years old.

In many documented cases, the perpetrators admit to **intentionally and deliberately choosing their victim(s) because they were homeless:**

- ... 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.**
- ...the group had gone out “**looking for homeless people to rob.**”

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.

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

*Presented by the Florida Coalition for the Homeless; Funded by the Miami Coalition for the Homeless; Coordinated by the Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County*



**To read about some of the attacks on homeless people committed in Florida, turn over...**

## Some Documented Cases of Violence Against Homeless People in Florida

January 2008 -**Manatee County**: A man was drunk and malicious when after trying to steal a car from D&L Auto Sales. He tried robbing a nearby homeless man who was sleeping. According to the Sheriff's report, "the intoxicated suspect was found in the process of robbing a homeless man who had been sleeping on the back porch".

April 2008 -**Key West**: Two teenagers attacked two homeless men outside a Wendy's fast food restaurant . The two teens started arguing with the homeless men as they walked out of the restaurant, and one of the teens pulled out a knife. The two victims were found walking down the street injured.

August 2008 -**St. Augustine**: Three homeless men were attacked by a group of teenagers underneath a railroad bridge. Two of the men were hospitalized and were placed in critical condition. They suffered serious head injuries after enduring many blows with a board, a shopping cart and rolled-up fencing. The third man only suffered minor injuries and was able to get back to a nearby restaurant and receive help.

September 2008 -**Key West**: A homeless man was stabbed while riding his bicycle in what may have been an attempted robbery. After the attackers knocked down the victim, the victim struck back and hit one of his assailants in the face. At this point, one of the assailants pulled out a knife and stabbed the victim in the stomach. The victim was able to ride his bike to the hospital and recovered from surgery successfully. His attackers are still at large.

October 2008 -**Pompano Beach**: A 64 year old paraplegic homeless man was found pleading for help after receiving a beating with a board and having \$94 and his wheelchair stolen from him. His attacker, a man known to the area, 35, has yet to be captured by the police. The man received a free motorized wheelchair to replace his old one from the owner of a local medical supplies company.

December 2008 -**St. Petersburg**: A disabled homeless Vietnam Veteran was beaten alongside his homeless son after attending the second annual Homeless Persons' Memorial Day vigil. As he slept on the steps of city hall an estimated nine teenagers demanded that the man turn over his son's bike as well as his own. He refused. Subsequently the teenage group started beating him on the spot. He was struck in the face and was unable to recover. Homeless Peoples Network reported, "By the end of the encounter, in which the teens called the two men 'homeless scum,' he had suffered a minor concussion, broken nose, black eye, damaged ear drum and numerous scratches and bruises".

June 2007 -**West Palm Beach**: A homeless woman known to suffer from a mental illness was walking past a gang house when a young man and a young woman stepped out of the house to block her path. The young woman started savagely beating the homeless woman while the young man blocked her attempts at escape and other gang members joined in, mocking and spitting at the woman.

May 2007 -**Dania Beach**: A homeless man was shot with a paintball gun while riding his bike. The attackers were driving by when they shot the homeless man who thought he was shot by a real gun because the impact knocked him off of his bike.

March 2007 -**Ellenton**: A driver got out of his car and punched a 59-year-old homeless man in the face for blocking his right of way.

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

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

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

May 2006 -**Orlando**: A 51-year-old homeless man was killed on his way to the bus stop so he could get to work. He lived in a shelter and worked long hours in theme park kitchens.

March 2006 -**Orlando**: A group of five teenagers attacked a homeless man who 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.

September 2005 - **Orlando**: A homeless man was being arrested for trespassing at a church and ended up in the hospital with life threatening injuries. The homeless man was grabbed by a police officer, thrown on the ground, shot with a taser gun, struck with a baton, and punched in the face several times.

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 the body.

*Compiled from research by the National Coalition for the Homeless and newspaper stories.*