



Monroe County Legislature

RACHEL BARNHART

Legislator – District 17

PHONE: (585) 210-3246

E-MAIL: RACHEL@RACHBARNHART.COM

October 8, 2024

To The Honorable
Monroe County Legislature
39 West Main Street
Rochester, NY 14614

Re: Memorializing County Executive Adam J. Bello, Sheriff Todd Baxter and Mayor Malik Evans to Oppose the Decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Grants Pass v Johnson* and Resist Punishing Unhoused Individuals

Honorable Legislators:

The recent ruling by the United States Supreme Court in *Grants Pass v. Johnson* has raised serious concerns about the treatment of unhoused individuals across the country. The court found that the arrest and fining of people sleeping outdoors—regardless of the lack of available shelter— does not violate the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition of “cruel and unusual punishment.”

This ruling opens the door to harsher punitive measures against those experiencing homelessness. However, we strongly urge you to resist taking steps that further criminalize homelessness and poverty in our community.

In our own county, we have witnessed troubling practices such as the "sweeps" of homeless encampments, where people are forcibly removed and their personal belongings confiscated, often without a judicial warrant or probable cause. These actions are ineffective and harmful, especially when the resources offered do not align with the unique needs of individuals in these situations. Many are under "sanction," preventing them from accessing shelters or benefits due to previous rule violations, while others face serious mental health challenges for which there are few available treatments.

Critically, not a single person displaced from a homeless encampment has been offered immediate access to permanent housing. Rather than punitive measures, we should prioritize providing stable housing for every member of our community.

Until we achieve that goal, we respectfully request that our community refrains from arrests, forced removals, and the seizure of personal belongings from those sleeping outdoors. These actions do not address the root causes of homelessness and only serve to exacerbate an already dire situation.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachel Barnhart". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

Rachel Barnhart
Legislator District 17