

# The feds are redefining homelessness to make it disappear

Paul Boden is the executive director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project, or WRAP. Street Roots is a proud member of the West Coast coalition of organizations.

BY PAUL BODEN  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

What kind of a cold, mean, and even sadistic homeless service provider would you need to be to tell a family of three, four or five people living in a single room occupancy hotel or “illegally” sleeping on the floor of a friend’s apartment that is desperately asking for emergency shelter “No, you ain’t homeless enough, your just poorly housed. Go sleep in the streets for a while, come back and maybe we’ll put you on the waiting list. And remember when you do come back you better stay homeless and be able to prove it.

Since 2009, this would be the only kind of homeless service provider the federal department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is willing to fund. In fact they are so serious about this issue that in 2011 they put out a 105-page memo detailing to local communities the severe penalties incurred for providing any services with money you may get from them (HUD is, by far, the largest funder of homeless services) or not thoroughly documenting the new eligibility requirements before families or youth can be served. And not just served but identified as a priority or counted in the ridiculous point-in-time head counts HUD requires communities to perform.

HUD’s restrictive definition of homelessness has created a cruel and vicious cycle. Once families lose their homes, they scramble for any place to stay. If they sleep in a vehicle or remain on the streets (which is a criteria for being considered homeless), they risk being categorized as “unfit parents” and losing their children to public agencies. Hoping to avoid that, families will stay with other people, often in unstable and unhealthy situations which render them ineligible for homeless assistance. As if that ain’t cold enough (and it is) HUD also requires that these rules apply to unaccompanied youth as well.

Sen. Diane Feinstein and Rep. George Miller, both Democrats from California, have introduced legislation in their respective chambers to overturn these draconian criteria.

Why this Ebenezer Scrooge approach to addressing homelessness?

Because families and unaccompanied youth cost too damn much money, that’s why.

HUD and some of the national homeless groups are trying to sell everyone on the amazing success of their 10-year plans to end homelessness. Yes, their head count numbers have gone down (through redefinition, not reality) and yes, thousands

of single adult homeless people have been housed in hotel rooms. When fewer visible heads in the streets and getting people into hotel rooms becomes your measuring stick for success, you really can’t be wasting money caring for or protecting people who aren’t in a safe position or vulnerable enough to be visible in the first place.

It’s about selling a product and if the product is expensive to produce, the production goes down. Simple business. They can room 25 single adults in a hotel for the cost of housing three families or helping out seven unaccompanied youth, so the single adults become the business of HUD. The human math is pretty simple too. In 2006, we had 600,000 homeless students in public schools across the country. In 2009, we had 930,000, and in 2012 it was 1.168 million. Yet in 2012, only 247,178 homeless people in families were eligible to receive services through HUD homeless assistance programs.

Call it poorly housed or call it the invisible homeless. No matter what you call it, this is incredibly heartless public policy.

For updated information and to find your elected representatives contact info, visit [www.helphomelessyouthnow.org](http://www.helphomelessyouthnow.org). This column also was published for WRAP in the San Francisco Chronicle.

## Sisters Of The Road

non-profit cafe in Old Town

“Being at Sisters has kept me remembering who I am, that I am a human being who can love people and do good things. There are good attitudes, open arms welcoming me, and I never leave without a smile.” — Sisters friend and customer



### UPCOMING EVENTS:

Aug. 4-13 -- CLOSED for new PC floor!  
Aug. 23 -- Wolf from the Door Benefit  
Aug. 27 -- Kid’s Day!  
Aug. 29 -- Volunteer Appreciation BBQ!  
Sept. 1 thru 30 -- Dining with Dignity!

All are welcome!

Monday - Friday 10am-2:30pm

133 NW Sixth Ave.  
Portland, OR 97209  
503 222 5694  
[www.sistersoftheroad.org](http://www.sistersoftheroad.org)

## I AM NOT A POET

15  
YEARS

OF  
Street Roots Poetry & Art

### Incarceration

by Shannon Andrews

A thought for a thought  
Time edges on the brink of  
The road like a ticking time bomb  
Petrol fuel  
Infuses the brain of the mechanics of clockwork  
Beginning inspirations  
From day to day  
It’s a daily humdrum  
Of the cycle of life  
Keep walking, stay alive

### Genesis Redux

by Dharma Bum

The first man  
Urban and wild  
The hum of traffic  
The music of the city  
Rivers of asphalt  
Canyons of concrete  
This is the jungle  
This is Eden  
Under skies of wonder  
We stand at the crossroads  
With Infinity below our feet  
As we wiggle our toes in a dream.



Order e-books and print copies at  
[iamnotapoet.org](http://iamnotapoet.org) or  
[streetroots.org/iamnotapoet](http://streetroots.org/iamnotapoet)



### PAID TRAINING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES!

5312 NE 148th Ave.  
Portland, OR 97230

#### REQUIREMENTS:

- ✓ Pass a drug test
- ✓ Must be at least 18
- ✓ Must be able to provide documentation of a disability
- ✓ Fluency in English
- ✓ Clean background check

#### QUESTIONS?

Please call (503) 261-1266  
or (800) 874-7917  
email: [dcherry@phcnw.com](mailto:dcherry@phcnw.com)

Read up on the news that’s important to you at [news.streetroots.org](http://news.streetroots.org)