

Mayor Warns Murfreesboro Risking Becoming a Magnet for Homelessness

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– Categories: Human Rights



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Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Mayor Shane McFarland is raising concerns that his city is becoming a magnet for homelessness due to a lack of accountability among some service providers and growing public safety complaints. He is calling for immediate action to ensure the city's resources are managed responsibly and that residents feel secure in their community.

In a recent Facebook statement, Mayor McFarland voiced concern that Murfreesboro's support services may unintentionally encourage more unhoused individuals to move into the area. "If other communities don't provide those resources, we end up turning into a haven for more people to come here," McFarland warned. He added that the burden this creates on local infrastructure and public spaces is unfair to Murfreesboro residents who expect safe, orderly streets.

According to the most recent point-in-time count by the United Way, 367 individuals without stable housing were recorded in Rutherford County in 2024. While this year's full data is still being compiled, early indicators suggest little change in the overall number. However, McFarland said reports of public safety issues, particularly in parks and sidewalks, have increased noticeably.

City officials have announced plans to post signage at high-traffic panhandling areas, encouraging residents to support established nonprofits through a Quick Response (QR) code rather than giving directly to individuals on the street. Murfreesboro City Council Member Jami Averwater explained, "We want to encourage giving through the proper channels so that funds go toward meaningful, accountable assistance."

McFarland also raised concerns about some nonprofits providing services such as meals and laundry with little to no structure, making Murfreesboro more appealing to those seeking help without expectations. "Other communities and other counties are sending people to Murfreesboro because someone can get their laundry done and get a meal with no accountability," he said. "That is not fair to the residents of Murfreesboro."

Averwater echoed the call for structure, pointing out that many local organizations already provide job placement and housing services tied to responsibility. "If this organization helps them find a job, those people have to show up to work, and that is the kind of accountability the city council wants to see," she said.

Data from United Way's Coordinated Entry and Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), as of July 7, revealed that a significant portion of the unhoused population has long-standing ties to the county:

- 16% have lived in Rutherford County for under a month
- 18% for 1–12 months
- 41% for 1–5 years

- 23% for over five years
- 2% unknown

To address the issue more comprehensively, Murfreesboro is forming a committee to partner with local nonprofits and strengthen oversight. “We’re making sure our safety is balanced with our grace,” Averwater stated. “We want to help those in need while keeping our neighborhoods safe and functional.”

The Journey Home, a nonprofit serving Rutherford County’s homeless population for 17 years, acknowledged the mayor’s concerns in a statement and emphasized its commitment to collaborating with city officials. “We’ve seen firsthand how the significant population growth in Rutherford County and Murfreesboro has unfortunately coincided with a rise in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness,” the organization said.

Mayor McFarland made it clear that while compassion has its place, unchecked growth in homelessness must be met with serious, results-driven policy. “If you want what has happened in other cities where you can’t walk down the sidewalk, that’s not what the majority of our community wants,” he said.