

Compassionate Revanchism, Homelessness, and the Divided Local State: The Case of Spokane, WA

Written & Presented by
Katie Gower

Mentor: Dr. Matthew
Anderson

Department of Political
Science & Public Policy



Why Spokane?

- Spokane has seen consistent increases in its homeless population for the past five years, and the current housing crisis will only worsen this
- Recent public events have demonstrated the changing landscape of homelessness policy in Spokane
- The conflict within Spokane's local government is an opportunity to better understand cities as complicated and ambivalent rather than unified fronts on homelessness policy



Research Objectives

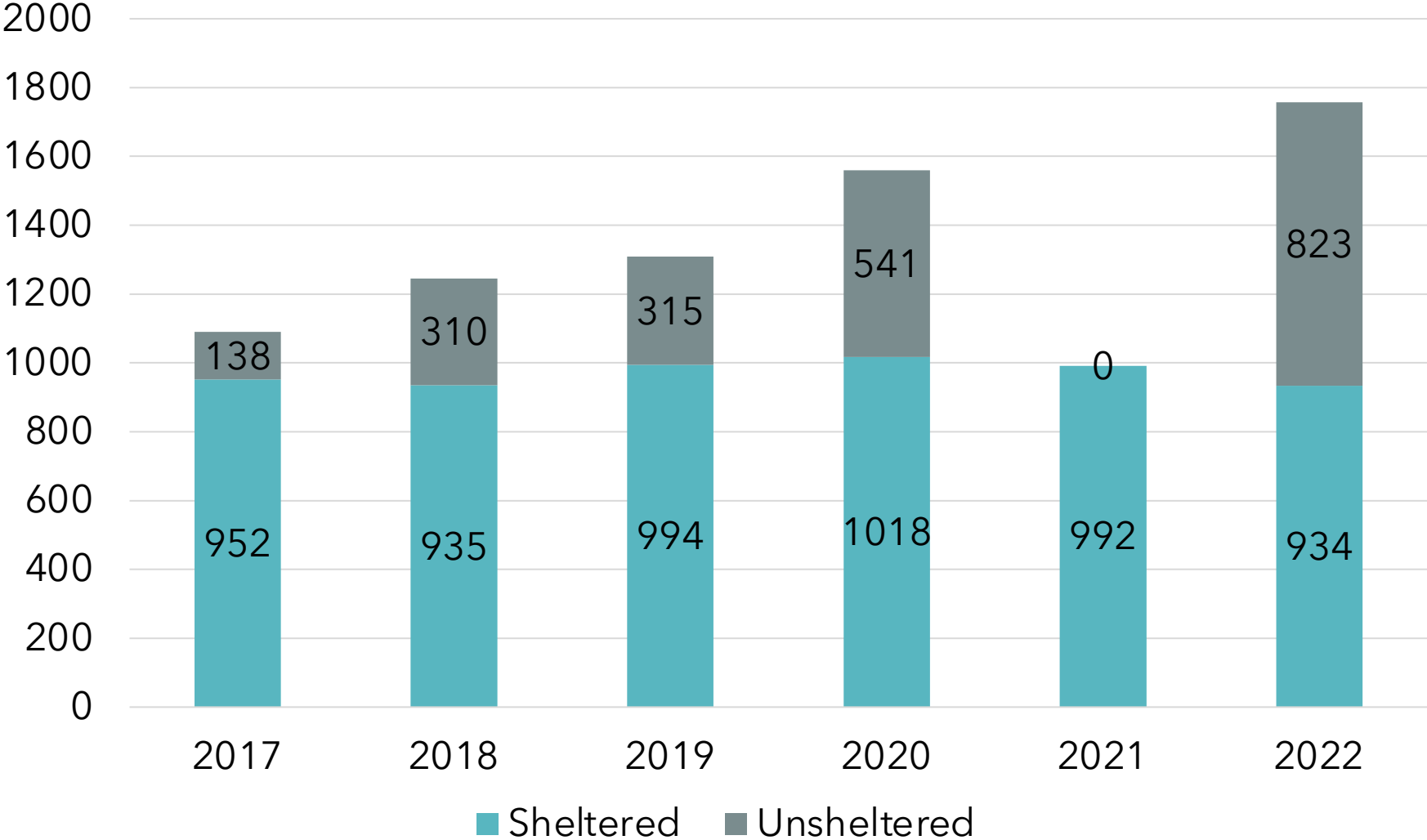
1. To provide a more nuanced study of homelessness policy within the local state
2. To expand homelessness literature beyond the overstudied larger cities like Seattle, WA and Portland, OR
3. To demonstrate the complicated and ambivalent nature of the local state as opposed to its portrayal as a monolithic entity

Disproportionate Impacts

- Certain demographic factors, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, veteran status, and disability status, increase risk of homelessness and lead to more adverse outcomes for persons experiencing homelessness.
- People of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and persons with disabilities are more likely to become homeless and are more vulnerable to discrimination and violence while homeless.

Current Homelessness Trends in Spokane

Spokane County Point-in-Time Homeless Count



City of Spokane Point-In-Time Count, 2022.

Individual vs. Structural Framing

Individual

- Individual framing emphasizes that the causes of homelessness are developed on an *individual level*
- These causes include mental illness, substance use, and criminality
- Individual framing often prioritizes solutions that emphasize responsibility and accountability

Structural

- Structural framing emphasizes that the causes of homelessness are rooted in *structural problems* out of the individual's control
- These causes include unemployment, a lack of affordable housing, and a lack of social safety nets
- Structural framing prioritizes solutions that target these structural causes

Revanchism in Homelessness Policy

- Following a decade of federal, state, and local structural responses to homelessness in the 1980s, homelessness policy in cities took a punitive and neoliberal turn
- Smith (1996) used the term **“revanchism”** to describe the *vengeful retaking of the city by elites* through the removal of marginalized groups from prime public spaces and downtown areas
- Revanchist policies include criminalization, through which homeless persons are policed and arrested for actions like panhandling and sleeping in public spaces

Compassionate Revanchism

- In the late 1990s and 2000s, cities began to recognize the tactic of strict revanchism was doing little to reduce homelessness and its visibility
- The newer phenomenon of **compassionate revanchism** illustrates the strategic combinations of the revanchist tactics of exclusion and punishment and compassionate tactics of care and services - also labeled as "coercive care" or "tough love" tactics
- Compassionate revanchism tactics include the use of shelters to police and contain persons experiencing homelessness, as well as the toleration of encampments to avoid responsibility

Spokane's Compassionate Revanchism

- Spokane demonstrates a turn to compassionate revanchism through the continued use of criminalization and clean-ups policies, and the utilization of shelters
- A focus on expanding the shelter system rather than increasing affordable housing demonstrates a focus on the visibility of homelessness rather than fixing the core problem
- Moreover, recent events like the Hello for Good symposium show a turn towards "**compassionate accountability**" and an increasing focus on mental illness and substance use rather than the structural causes of homelessness

Spokane's Structural Policies and Practices

Housing

- City of Spokane policy identifies affordable housing as a critical structural solution to homelessness
- The City also emphasizes housing-first policies that prioritize entering persons experiencing homelessness into permanent housing
- Acknowledgement of the current housing and rent crisis in Spokane

Shelters

- The City of Spokane professes housing-first policies and shelters
- Spokane policy places a priority on low-barrier shelters to provide ample access to emergency housing for persons experiencing homelessness
- Funds for low-barrier housing must not be used for high-barrier housing

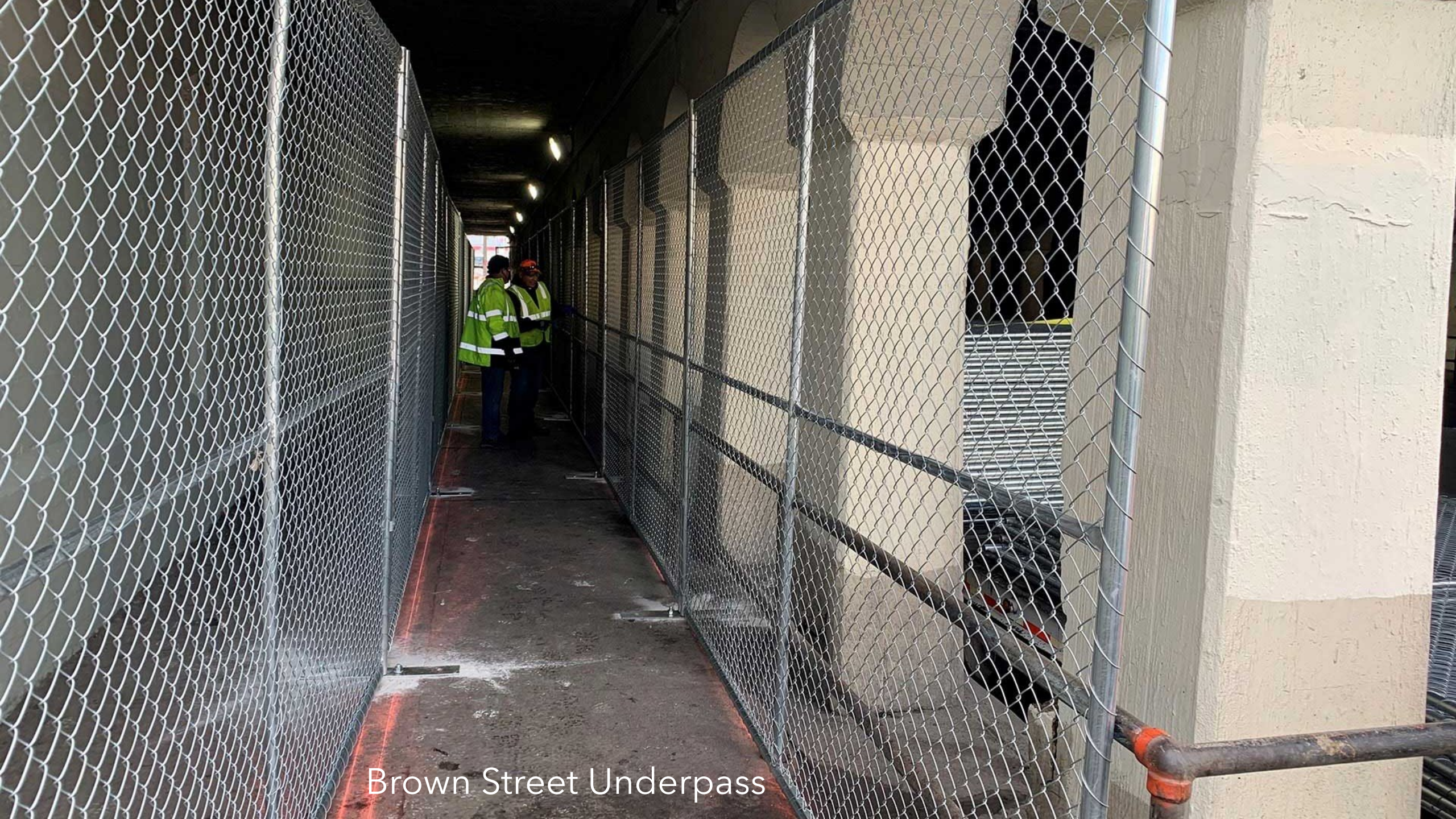
Spokane's Individual Policies and Practices

Criminalization

- Spokane criminalizes 12 different behaviors that are often unavoidable for homeless persons
- While the Community Court reduces sentences and fines, it does not address the basic problem of criminalizing acts of survival
- Spokane often prioritizes the concerns of local businesses over the best interests of persons experiencing homelessness

Clean-Ups

- Spokane routinely performs clean-ups of encampments regardless of shelter availability
- Recently, it has erected fences under the two downtown viaducts to prevent camping
- Proposed changes to ordinances to further limit camping near City-owned property, schools, and railroads



Brown Street Underpass

Division & Sprague Viaduct



Inner Governmental Conflict and Compassionate Revanchism

- The conflict between Mayor Nadine Woodward and the City Council demonstrates the ideological differences between the structural and individual perspectives, and moreover, Spokane's move towards compassionate revanchism
- Mayor Woodward purports the individual perspective rhetoric of accountability and deservingness while supporting and implementing revanchist criminalization and clean-up policies
- Meanwhile the City Council tends to emphasize structural solutions and recognizes the futility of revanchist methods



THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW



Spokane City Council eyes second round of changes to homeless shelter laws as mayor, councilor remain at odds

UPDATED: Fri., July 23, 2021

'We make it easy to be homeless': Spokane mayor introduces changes to city's illegal camping laws

Nick Jahnke, KHQ Digital Producer Jul 6, 2022

NEWS > SPOKANE

Woodward to maintain course for proposed 250-bed homeless shelter as City Council recommends limits, alternatives

Wed., April 27, 2022

City Council sends letter of concern, claims mayor failed to follow ordinances regarding shelters

Jan 13, 2022 Updated Jan 13, 2022

Conclusion

- The conflict within Spokane's local government reflects the distinct ideological differences present within compassionate revanchism
- Future research into local homelessness policy should further investigate the complicated nature of local government
- Additionally, the study of mid-sized cities responses to homelessness should be expanded

References

- Bryne, Thomas, Ellen A. Munley, Jamison D. Fargo, Ann E. Montgomery, and Dennis P. Culhane. 2012. “New Perspectives on Community-Level Determinants of Homelessness.” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 35, no. 5: 607-625. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9906.2012.00643.x>.
- Chamberlain, Chris and Guy Johnson. 2011. “Pathways into Adult Homelessness.” *The Australian Sociological Association* 49, no. 1: 60-77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783311422458>.
- City Council sends letter of concern, claims mayor failed to follow ordinances regarding shelters.” *KHQ*. https://www.khq.com/news/city-council-sends-letter-of-concern-claims-mayor-failed-to-follow-ordinances-regarding-shelters/article_a63abd18-74cd-11ec-9337-c3952d686bd2.html.
- City of Spokane. 2022. “2022 Point-in-Time Count WA-502 Spokane City & County CoC.” <https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/chhs/hmis/reports/2020-pit-count-homeless-populations-report.pdf>.
- City of Spokane. 2021a. “Spokane City Council eyes second round of changes to homeless shelter laws as mayor, councilor remain at odds.” *The Spokesman-Review*. Accessed February 21st, 2022. <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2021/jul/22/spokane-city-council-eyes-second-round-of-changes-/>.
- City of Spokane. 2022. Ordinance No. C36076. 563. <https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/citycouncil/current-agendas/2021/07/city-council-current-agenda-2021-07-12.pdf>.
- Community, Housing, and Human Services (CHHS). City of Spokane. 2022. “Shelter Capacity Report.” <https://my.spokanecity.org/chhs/resources/>.
- Community, Housing, and Human Services (CHHS). City of Spokane. 2022. “Homelessness Resources Pocket Guide 2022.” <https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/chhs/resources/resources-pocket-guide-jan-2022.pdf>.
- Criscione, Wilson. 2020. “Despite a lack of shelter space, records show Spokane Police still enforce laws targeting homeless people.” *Inlander*. Accessed February 21, 2022. <https://www.inlander.com/spokane/despite-a-lack-of-shelter-space-records-show-spokane-police-still-enforce-laws-targeting-homeless-people/Content?oid=20484809>.
- Olson, Justin, Scott MacDonald and Sara Rankin. 2015. “Washington’s War on the Visibly Poor: A Survey of Criminalizing Ordinances & Their Enforcement.” *Homeless Rights Advocacy Project*. <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/hrap/9>.
- Robert Martin v. City of Boise., 902 F.3d 1031 (9th Cir. 2018) .
- Shanks, Adam. 2022. “Fences erected under Browne Street viaduct in effort to deter camping.” *The Spokesman-Review*. Accessed February 21st, 2022. <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2022/feb/08/fences-erected-under-browne-street-viaduct-in-effo/>.
- Mason, Greg. 2022. “Woodward to maintain course for proposed 250-bed homeless shelter as City Council recommends limits, alternatives”. *The Spokesman-Review*. April 27th, 2022. <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2022/apr/27/woodward-to-maintain-course-for-proposed-250-bed-h/>.
- Jahnke, Nick. 2022. “‘We make it easy to be homeless’: Spokane mayor introduces changes to city's illegal camping laws.” *KHQ*, July 6th, 2022. https://www.khq.com/news/we-make-it-easy-to-be-homeless-spokane-mayor-introduces-changes-to-citys-illegal-camping/article_9219688e-fd62-11ec-b1f0-bf724b12d6bf.html.