

Protection from National Guard for the Unhoused Community

The Trump Administration has deployed the National Guard to Memphis under the false claim of “combating crime.” In other cities, these deployments have targeted unhoused people, people with warrants or records, and anyone without ID—not violent crime (not just immigrants but ANYONE who doesn’t have their documentation on them). This guide helps you know your rights and stay safe, especially if you are unhoused or a person who uses drugs (PWUD).



Here are ways to protect yourself from potential targeting, harassment, sweeps, arrest and incarceration from the National Guard & other authorities!

We’ve provided a list of information so you can “Know Your Rights”

If you Encounter Federal Agents While Outside/Unhoused

If you find yourself interacting with the National Guard, federal agents, police, or an immigration officer (ICE), remember that...

YOU SHOULD:

- Remain calm and keep your hands where the officer can see them.
- If you’re stopped, ask: “Am I free to leave?” If yes, walk away calmly.
- If detained, say: “I want to speak with a lawyer,” and stay silent.
- You only need to give your **name and address** (if known) under Tennessee law.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- **If officers say you are not free to leave, you have the right to ask why** (they must have reasonable suspicion to detain you).

YOU SHOULD NOT:

- You have the right **to not share your citizenship or immigration status**.
- If you have an “ID” from *The HUB*, that is **NOT a real/standard ID**. It is made specifically for unhoused people. **do NOT wear it visibly** to prevent the risk of targeting.
- **DO NOT** sign anything you don’t understand. State “you wish to speak with an attorney.”
- Don’t rely on the *Union Mission* or *The HUB* for protection — multiple reports show they have called police on unhoused people with warrants upon presenting ID/legal name.

Using Tents While Unhoused is ILLEGAL in Memphis:

- Tennessee law makes camping on public property a felony.
- This includes tents, tarps, or shelters in parks, under bridges, or on sidewalks.
- Violations can lead to up to six years in prison and fines.
- If possible, avoid setting up visible structures and stay in groups for safety

Under the 14th Amendment, people cannot be criminalized simply for being unhoused — but police use “loitering,” “trespassing,” or “public intoxication” as excuses to harass and displace unhoused people across Memphis and the South.

