

# Rep. Steineke: Guest column: “Why conservatives are focusing on ending homelessness in Wisconsin”

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The problem of homelessness in Wisconsin is an issue that often follows the saying, “Out of sight, out of mind.” Though we can all recognize the people standing on corners or sleeping on benches, there are many unseen people living out of their cars, moving from motel to motel, or consistently on the verge of eviction. These “hidden homeless” are hard to recognize and quantify, making funding for preventing and ending homelessness equally difficult.

In 2015, Wisconsin had 27,532 clients who received services and shelter from agencies that enter into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Wisconsin’s homeless population has seen a slight decline over the last few years, with total homeless numbers going down by 6.1% since 2015. This reduction is largely due to an increased advocacy for homelessness resources and funding. With homelessness presenting an ever-growing need for aid and, ultimately, rehabilitation, preparing legislation that serves the most vulnerable of constituents is a top concern.

I understand the importance of putting forth pointed measures to end homelessness in Wisconsin. Wisconsin funded homelessness services and shelter for over 27,000 people in 2015. As a conservative, I recognize that these funds could be better utilized to bring people facing homelessness a permanent solution – a stable job and steady income. In 2016, we saw that almost half of people experiencing homelessness were part of a family with children, while 1,133 veterans were exposed to homelessness. I know that most people experiencing homelessness are

motivated to find a solution that works. Giving Wisconsinites the tools needed to move them towards independence is crucial.

In the 2017-18 legislative session, we in the Assembly have clear steps that can begin to take on the issue of homelessness head-on. Exploring the possibilities of no-cost legislation in tandem with measured government spending, we can move the state forward in achieving a goal of every person in Wisconsin having a place to call home.

Solutions to end homelessness come in many different packages. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to individual circumstances. An attention to job creation and retention will be a big contributor to providing people with the tools needed to be housed and successful, while a focus on administrative policies and funding will help define sustainable solutions for the state and the homeless population. It is clear that a coordinated approach among local units of government, the state, and federal programs, coupled with a healthy private sector partnership, will produce the best results.