



February 20, 2026

The Honorable Chuck Efstration
Majority Leader
Georgia House of Representatives
338 State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

The Honorable James Burchett
Majority Whip
Georgia House of Representatives
415 State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

The Honorable Carolyn Hugley
Minority Leader
Georgia House of Representatives
609 Coverdell Legislative Office Building
Atlanta, GA 30334

The Honorable Sam Park
Minority Whip
Georgia House of Representatives
609 Coverdell Legislative Office Building
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Majority Leader Efstration, Minority Leader Hugley, Majority Whip Burchett, and Minority Whip Park:

On behalf of Health Students Taking Action Together (H-STAT), we write to strongly oppose the passage of HB 295 due to its potential to worsen the homelessness crisis in Georgia while imposing a significant financial burden on municipal governments. [H-STAT](#) represents the collective voices of hundreds of healthcare students and trainees across Georgia who are dedicated to improving health outcomes for all citizens. We urge you to vote in opposition to this bill.

In Georgia, there are an estimated [13,000](#) people experiencing homelessness (PEH), with nearly [3,000](#) of these individuals being in Atlanta, underscoring the urgent need for evidence-based long-term solutions. Yet, HB 295 fails to be an appropriate solution for the homelessness issue by encouraging municipal governments to enforce punitive action against PEH in encampments out of fear of monetary retaliation from property owners. Not only would such a bill worsen the [homelessness crisis](#), but it also fails to address the root causes of homelessness, which the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) identifies as critical to improving housing stability and reducing public expenditures. For many in Georgia, homelessness is not a result of criminal intent or 'laziness', but rather the [result of rising housing costs](#), stagnant wages, substance use disorders, untreated mental health issues, and gaps in access to care.

According to the [National Healthcare for the Homeless Coalition \(NHCHC\)](#), PEH have increased rates of illness and die on average 12 years sooner than the general U.S. population due to a multitude of factors, including, but not limited to, increased vulnerability to communicable disease, weather exposure, challenges storing medications properly, lack of access to a nutritious diet, and inability to properly care for injuries. These mentioned struggles already exist without the punitive policies that HB 295 would implement, such as the accelerated encampment sweeps, potential increase in criminalization of homeless encampments, and further destabilization of already medically and socially vulnerable individuals. Research demonstrates that [encampment clearings](#) are associated with loss of essential belongings, medications, identification documents, and medical supplies, all of which can disrupt continuity of care.

Although HB 295 does not directly impose costs on taxpayers, it exposes local and state governments to costly legal action and potential settlements, which taxpayers then bear the brunt of. According to the [Institute for Legal Reform](#), as of 2022, Georgia's total tort costs were among the highest in the country, imposing substantial costs on the state's economy. While the total tort cost is not specific to government settlements, it underscores the [significant financial burden](#) the state already faces. Passing HB 295 risks using limited public resources towards reactive legal costs rather than investing in proactive solutions that address the root causes of homelessness.

States across the country have implemented similar enforcement-driven measures with limited success. Arizona's [Proposition 312](#), passed in November 2024, takes a similar punitive approach to HB 295 by failing to focus on the root causes of homelessness and instead prioritizing aggressive encampment clearings, further exacerbating the [homelessness crisis](#). In doing so, it [increases administrative costs](#) and diverts local government funds to reimburse property owners instead of creating more affordable housing. Early implementation has also raised concerns about effectiveness, as many reimbursement claims have reportedly been rejected, casting doubt on whether the policy meaningfully addresses property owner complaints and potentially eroding public trust in effective policy implementation.

From a constitutional standpoint, multiple [Supreme Court Justices](#) recognize the criminalization of homelessness through punitive action towards encampments as unconstitutional, deeming it cruel and unusual punishment that breaks the 8th amendment. Yet, punitive action towards homelessness is not the only way to address the issue at hand. The [Homekey program](#) in California converted vacant buildings into permanent housing, resulting in 9,000 new homes being occupied by over 157,000 PEH as of October 2024. Its creation during the 2020 pandemic helped decrease the spread of communicable diseases by eliminating the need for congregate shelters, highlighting the impact of increasing housing access on health outcomes. [Strategies that encompass](#) permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and expanded mental health and addiction services are both more effective and cost-efficient than punitive, criminalization strategies that cycle PEH through the court system, jails, and emergency services, which accrue costs on both [PEH and municipal governments](#).

We urge you to consider the ramifications of a harmful bill both on municipal budgets and the health of a vulnerable demographic.

As future healthcare professionals, we strongly support policies that promote fiscally sustainable and equitable access to quality care for all individuals. Thank you for your consideration of the issue. We look forward to working with you to promote the health of people in Georgia. If you have any questions,

please contact Megan Blasberg, H-STAT Board Member and Director of Street Medicine, at megan@healthstatgeorgia.org.

Sincerely,

Megan Blasberg
H-STAT Street Medicine Director
Health Students Taking Action Together

Emma Woods
H-STAT Street Medicine Advocacy Team Lead
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Nicholas Wilson
H-STAT President
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