

Salem News You Don't Get in *The Salem News*

151 incidents involving homeless individuals in one month, January 1-31, 2026

“How can you post about homeless people in the middle of this bitter cold?” This question was directed at me more as an accusation than a query. The answer is simple: As any journalist will tell you, we report on the news while it is happening, whether it’s a fire, a snowstorm, or a city overwhelmed by homelessness (something the wealthier cities and towns around us do not have).

I cannot say enough times that my intention is not to demonize an entire group of people but to keep you aware of what is taking place in and around Lifebridge and how the actions of *some people* from the homeless community impact the entire Downtown. Lifebridge is ill-equipped to manage most of the situations that take place within its facility. Without a security force or medical team of its own, Lifebridge depends on our municipal services to handle its problems. Yes, it’s cold out. Yes, life is hard for people without a place to call home. We are not unsympathetic. But we also choose to keep abreast of what is happening in our city. In this month’s installment, I offer a narrative summary of a month’s worth of police incidents that involve the homeless community. It is, as the title says, Salem news you don’t get anywhere else. Why would you choose to be unaware of what’s going? You’re paying for it—financially, municipally, and societally.

– Joanne Mattera

Statistics for January 1-31, 2026

While Downtown is the site of much homeless activity, you can see from this report that the police have also responded to businesses and private homes throughout the city (specific addresses are redacted in the police report I receive). I have highlighted Lifebridge (39 times) and Margin Street (40 times) to point out how often police responded specifically to that facility and the surrounding neighborhood.

Why so many incidents on Margin Street? We have been told by residents of Lifebridge that they are encouraged to resolve their issues and disputes “outside” so that police do not respond directly to the facility itself.

44 Incidents requiring police intervention

10 Disputes

Margin Street, five times

Nicole’s Mini Mart on Essex Street
Speedway on Derby Street

Steve’s Market on Margin Street
Walmart on Highland Avenue
Address at Leach & Glover Streets

6 Suspicious persons

Address on Cleveland Street
Address at Jefferson/Winthrop Streets
Margin Street
Address on Pioneer Terrace
Address on Pratt Street
Witch City Mall

4 Harassments

Lifebridge
Margin Street
Address on Canal Street
Address on Sutton Terrace

3 Assaults

Lifebridge, twice
Address on Ober Street

3 Fights

Lifebridge
Margin Street, twice

3 Larcenies

Lifebridge, twice
Salem Depot

2 Disturbances

Lifebridge
Wendy's on Lafayette Street

2 Drunk individuals

Margin Street
Steve's Market on Margin Street

2 Fraud/scams

Lifebridge
Address on March Street

2 Suicidal persons

Lifebridge
Margin Street

1 Accidental 911 Call

Lifebridge

1 Arrest

Witch City Mall

1 Domestic violation

Redacted address

1 Lost and Found

Salem Police Department

1 Sexual assault

Redacted

1 Threat

Lifebridge

1 Panhandler

Steve's Liquors on Gedney Street
Panhandling in and of itself is not illegal, but police may be called when a panhandler is on private property and refuses to leave the premises or keeps returning.

15 Well-Being checks

Police are called when a person appears to have difficulty walking or breathing or appears unresponsive. There is no information as to the outcome of these police responses:

Lifebridge, twice

The Cove at Salem, hotel on Bridge Street, twice

Address on Bridge Street
Address on Canal Street

Address on Derby Street
Address on Derby Wharf
Family Dollar Store on Canal Street
Address on Jefferson Avenue
Address on Lafayette Street
Address on Mason Street
Address on Pickering Way
Richdale's on Lafayette Street
Steve's Market on Margin Street

33 Incidents of Loitering

In freezing weather we understand why people want to duck into a warm place. But it becomes a problem for businesses when non-customers take seats and tables needed by paying customers—most businesses run on narrow profit margins—and when bathrooms are used for washing up or shooting up. Additionally, bank lobbies where ATMs are located are often used for shooting up or as a place to urinate.

Police responded to:

Lifebridge, twice

Question: How is it loitering if Lifebridge is set up to provide shelter?

Margin Street, four times

Witch City Mall, five times

Wendy's on Lafayette Street, three times

Dunkin Donuts on Washington Street, twice

Essex Pizza in Witch City Mall, twice

Salem Hospital Emergency Department, twice

Address on Washington Street, twice

And individual calls to:

Bank of America on Highland Avenue

Address on Becket Street

North Shore Bank on Lafayette Street

Address on Park Street

Salem House of Pizza on Margin Street

Salem Waterfront Hotel on Derby Street

Seagrass Dispensary on Dodge Street

Starbucks on Washington Street

Steve's Liquors on Gedney Street

Steve's Market on Margin Street

Walgreens on Derby Street

59 Requests for Medical Aid

Medical aid can be anything from treatment for a fall to a 911 call that draws police, fire, and ambulance. While several requests were due to the cold, there were also calls for overdoses and mental health issues

23 responses to Lifebridge

. Including three overdoses

. Two mental health issues

19 to Margin Street around Lifebridge

(Requests for Medical Aid, continued)

1 to Lifebridge transitional shelter on Canal St.

And one at each of these locations:

Address on Boston Street

Bouchard & Son on Jefferson Avenue

Burba Dental on Highland Avenue

Address on Canal Street

Citgo Quick Mart on North Street

Dept. of Transitional Assistance on Congress St.

Address on Derby Street

Domino's Pizza on Canal Street

Fire Station 4 on Essex Street

Address at Lafayette Street/Derby Street

Riley Plaza

Salem Depot

Salem Police Department

Shaw's Supermarket on Trader's Way

Speedway on Derby Street

Steve's Market on Margin Street

Additionally

. 14 Community Impact Reports

The Salem Police Department's Community Impact Unit (CIU) led by Sgt. Sean Andrus, consists of a dedicated group of officers who help unhoused individuals living outside of Lifebridge. I am not privy to their reports, but in the month of January, the CIU issued 14 reports documenting their daily activities with members of the unhoused community. Typically this is not about arrests but about efforts to assist

. 5 Directed Patrols

Officers, typically patrolling on foot, made rounds in and around the Witch City Mall.

Express your concern!

If you are concerned about these numbers, tell Mayor Pangallo (mayor@saalem.com) and the City Council, whose members can be reached individually at citycouncilors@saalem.com.

Although our city government seems to have privileged the rights of unhoused individuals over those of taxpaying citizens—at least in the neighborhoods closest to downtown—it remains important to maintain paper and electronic trails of your concerns and complaints.

Also contact our State Senator, Joan Lovely, and our State Representative, Manny Cruz.

. joan.lovely@masenate.gov

. manny.cruz@mahouse.gov

What is the impact of mental illness in the homeless community?

"Homelessness is not like the old days when folks were down on their luck and needed a helping hand. That's a small percentage now," says **Captain John Burke of the Salem Police Department**. "Mental health issues are acute among homeless people on the street and in a communal setting."

If you have spent any time Downtown, you have seen people whose behavior bears this out. Often drug addiction and alcoholism are involved.

"We do a lot of outreach, says Capt. Burke. "It's difficult work. We have made arrests, but we also have success stories." For success, he says, "we need the willingness of people to be helped." Not everyone takes up his offer.

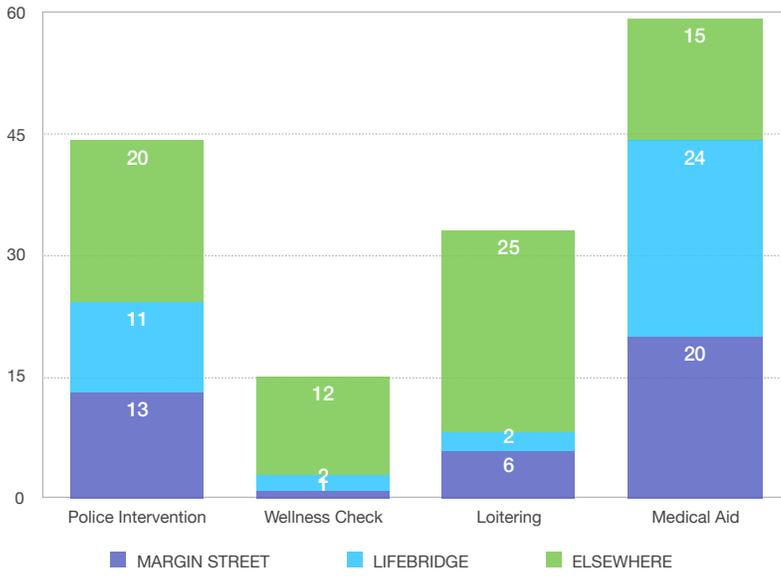
Most incidents you see noted in this report are directed to other members of the homeless community. The recipients of harassment or violence may have no option but to remain. But these actions can be and are also directed outward to members of the larger community. As a result, some neighborhood residents are afraid to venture Downtown, kids take more circuitous walking routes to school, and business owners see fewer customers.

Here's AI summarizing the issue: "Mental illness in homeless communities creates a bidirectional cycle where behavioral health issues, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and depression, increase homelessness risk, while the trauma of being unhoused exacerbates these conditions. Roughly 1 in 5—or up to 67% in some reports—of homeless individuals experience severe mental illness, which often leads to extreme social isolation, high rates of substance use, victimization, and mortality."

Says Burke, "I say to people, 'I can arrest you but I can also help you.'"

One must ask why the onus seems to be on the police. Why does Lifebridge not do more to help the clients it purports to serve?

INCIDENTS BY LOCATION: JANUARY 1-31, 2026



INCIDENTS BY LOCATION: JANUARY 1-31, 2026

	MARGIN STREET	LIFEBRIDGE	ELSEWHERE	TOTAL INCIDENTS
POLICE INTERVENTION	13	11	20	44
WELLNESS CHECK	1	2	12	15
LOITERING	6	2	25	33
MEDICAL AID	20	24	15	59
TOTAL BY LOCATION	40	39	72	151
SOURCE: Salem Police Dept. Terms as used by SPD.				
Infograph courtesy GESNA/ONOH.				