

Statement from Family Support Network on Supreme Court Grants Pass Decision

7/28/2024

Thank you for joining us today. My name is Aaron E. Lewis, Co-Founder and President of the Family Support Network. We gather here today in the wake of a Supreme Court decision that has significant implications for the most vulnerable members of our society – those we at FSN prefer to call Domestic Refugees.

This term, Domestic Refugees, is crucial because it highlights the reality that these individuals are displaced not by choice but by circumstances beyond their control. They are refugees within their own country, seeking refuge from the harsh conditions of the streets, from the scarcity of affordable housing, from the lack of mental health support, and from the grip of addiction.

The Supreme Court's ruling in *Johnson v. Grants Pass* permits the enforcement of public camping bans even when shelter beds are unavailable. This decision effectively criminalizes those who have nowhere else to go, further marginalizing our Domestic Refugees and making their already difficult lives even more challenging.

We must remember that these Domestic Refugees are our neighbors, our fellow citizens, and our brothers and sisters in humanity. They are individuals who have fallen on hard times, often through no fault of their own. They deserve our support, our empathy, and our commitment to finding real solutions.

Think of the elderly man who worked tirelessly his entire life, contributing to our society, only to find himself homeless because his Social Security check no longer covers his basic needs. Picture the grandmother who raised her children and grandchildren, now left to sleep on a park bench because the rent for her modest apartment has skyrocketed. These are the people who once cared for us, who built the very foundations of our communities. They should be enjoying their golden years with dignity and peace, not facing the indignity of arrest and imprisonment simply for trying to survive.

Consider the single mother, juggling multiple jobs just to make ends meet, desperate to provide a better future for her children. She dreams of stability, of a safe home where her children can thrive, but instead faces the constant threat of arrest for seeking shelter in public spaces. Her crime? Struggling to protect and provide for her family in a society that has failed to provide the basic necessities of life. Imagine the fear in her eyes as she tries to keep her family together, knowing that any night could end in separation and more despair.

These Domestic Refugees are not strangers; they are our teachers, our veterans, our caregivers, and our friends. They are the faces we see every day, the people we interact with, and the voices that echo our own struggles and dreams. When we walk past them on the streets, we are not just ignoring a social issue; we are turning away from our collective responsibility to care for one another.

In the face of such profound need, how can we justify turning our backs? How can we justify laws that criminalize the very act of existing without a home? Our humanity is measured by how we treat the least fortunate among us. It is our moral duty to extend a helping hand, to offer compassion, and to ensure that everyone, regardless of their circumstances, is treated with dignity and respect.

They deserve our support, our empathy, and our commitment to finding real solutions. They deserve to be seen, to be heard, and to be helped. Together, we can change the narrative from one of punishment to one of compassion, from one of marginalization to one of inclusion, and from one of despair to one of hope.

Today, I call upon our local governments, community organizations, and every concerned citizen to join us in rejecting this decision and advocating for policies that truly address the needs of Domestic Refugees. We need more affordable housing, better mental health services, and comprehensive addiction treatment. We need policies that uplift and support rather than punish and marginalize.

The Family Support Network and HSN will continue to fight tirelessly for these individuals. We will not allow this decision to dampen our resolve. Instead, it strengthens our

commitment to advocate for humane and just policies that offer real hope and tangible help to those in need.

We must work together to create a society where everyone has a safe and secure place to call home. Let us be the voice for those who have been silenced by circumstances and let us champion the cause of our Domestic Refugees with unwavering determination.

Thank you for your time, your support, and your dedication to this critical cause. Together, we can and will make a difference.

Sincerely,

Aaron E. Lewis

Co-Founder & President

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