

Community Comment  
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A question of defining homeless

I read in the paper that a democrat in the assembly or senate of California will introduce a bill to make it legal to sleep or panhandle in public places. My immediate reaction was as a former council member. Here was the state taking away another tool to keep a community safe, clean, and encouraging.

Let me first tell a story of our schools. We have very good schools in Humboldt County. You can tell that by our test scores and how we relate to the rest of the state. Not enough evidence? I don't think these tests are much of an indicator either. If you are a parent or grandparent and take the time to volunteer or otherwise be involved in your child's education, you would find most of our teachers to be dedicated and competent at their profession. Like anything, this is not universal but we do well in this Humboldt community. What we don't have is adequate funding. Class size needs to be manageable. As we mainstream more and more special needs children, we need to make this work without the rest of the class suffering. It can and is done with adequate funding for well trained professionals. The variable schools can do little about are the parents. The school day starts and ends at home. Parents need to be part of the educational process and supportive of our teachers. Things learned in school need to be reinforced at home, not undercut. Children need to be encouraged and taught the tools of success, not ignored and excused because of one problem or another. We hear third graders say to us "I can't focus". All kids have some difficulty focusing. Most of us learned how to concentrate. We learned in school how to pay attention, keep still and listen when that was called for. We learned that part of this was learning manners. We learned about respect for those people trying to help us succeed in life. Over time and as we got older, we learned how to question authority in a mature and positive manner. Eventually we learn how to make the best life for ourselves we can and be a positive force within our communities. These things are as important as math and science and language and history and geography and the rest.

If you are ignored and not encouraged to learn all you can and the rules of the road, it's very hard to get to the point of making your own way and being successful.

How does this relate to the homeless? I think we can classify homeless in three ways. This is a simplistic look but I think it comes close. Some homeless are down on their luck, lost their jobs and have no family support, and would like to get back on their feet. I fully support the programs we have in place to help these people. After all, helping them get back on their feet helps the entire community.

Some homeless are unstable and truly cannot function in society. We can blame ourselves for taking support away for these folks.

Some people make being homeless a lifestyle choice. We have a lot of that in Arcata and elsewhere and I don't support laws that excuse this behavior; just like some parents excuse their kid's behavior.

If this proposed law goes through we may as well call the Arcata Community Forest a campground with out facilities. The forest and the rest of us will suffer the loss. In the end, we all lose.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.