

NYC MAYOR'S BENIGN HOMELESS POLICY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a humane way to treat the mentally ill homeless:

In most of our big cities, we treat homeless cats and dogs better than we treat homeless men and women. That is about to change in New York City: Mayor Eric Adams has instituted a new policy that allows homeless humans to catch up with homeless animals.

It is estimated there are 3,400 homeless people living in streets, subways, trains, and train stations. Most of these people suffer from one mental illness or another, and up until now, they could not be removed to a shelter involuntarily unless they were a danger to themselves or others.

The new policy allows the police and emergency medical workers to have people removed to hospitals involuntarily if they are unable to care for themselves, even if they are not a public threat. The policy says that "unawareness or delusional misapprehension of surroundings" or "delusional misapprehension of physical condition or health" is now grounds for hospitalization.

One of the prime reasons for the change in policy is the surge in violent crime in New York, much of it attributed to mentally ill persons wandering the city.

Predictably, the New York Civil Liberties Union argues that the mentally ill who sleep on the sidewalk are exercising their civil liberties, and when they are involuntarily removed, their rights are being devastated. Thus do they make the case that humans should be treated inferior to cats and dogs.

According to Section 373 of New York State Law, any police officer or officials associated with organizations instituted to prevent cruelty to animals, “may lawfully take possession of any lost, strayed, *homeless* or abandoned animal found in any street, road or other public place” (my italics).

Regarding places other than these, such persons may remove any animal “which for more than twelve successive hours has been confined or kept in a crowded or unhealthy condition or in unhealthy or unsanitary surroundings or not properly cared for or without necessary sustenance, food or drink,” provided the complaint follows legal procedures.

Had we used this same common sense policy for homeless men and women all along, much hardship and crime could have been avoided.

Mayor Adams’ new directive is quintessentially Christian in nature. He is not rounding up the mentally ill homeless and throwing them into some kind of dungeon. On the contrary, he is treating them with the care and respect they deserve, but are incapable or providing for themselves.

Arthur Caplan, professor of bioethics at New York University’s Grossman School of Medicine, is correct to note that Adams’ policy “is replacing an immoral and scandalous indifference to severe chronic illness with a humane and moral approach.”

Rights must always be tailored to responsibilities. When those who are mentally challenged cannot exercise responsibility for themselves, it is cruel to pretend they are experiencing freedom by living in squalor. Freedom was meant to be enjoyed, not endured.

Kudos to Mayor Adams. Let him know you support this policy.

Contact: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov