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## THE UNHOUSED'S ABILITY TO FILE GRIEVANCES FOR MISTREATMENT

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# THE UNHOUSED'S ABILITY TO FILE GRIEVANCES FOR MISTREATMENT

STEPHEN CLAYBAKER '24 - CSSA SUMMER IN THE CITY RESEARCH PROJECT



## NEOCH MISSION STATEMENT

Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH) exists to eliminate the root causes of homelessness while loving its diverse community, through the avenues of organizing, advocacy, education, and street outreach.

## KEY TERMS

- Unhoused: Lacking a dwelling place or shelter.
- Community Organization: Organizations that provide social services to their community. Some examples in Greater Cleveland include Luterhan Metropolitan Ministry (LMM), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and Salvation Army.
- Street Outreach: Services provided by NEOCH to support unhoused individuals. This includes providing food and clothing, medical support, and permanent housing search assistance.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

What ability do unhoused individuals have to file grievances for mistreatment against social service providers in the Cleveland metropolitan area?

## METHODS

Select community members who had been unhoused and/or worked for a community organization serving the unhoused were interviewed. Further empirical observations were made while performing street outreach services and having discussions with currently unhoused individuals. Previous literature on the topic from various areas across North America was also analyzed for background information. All research was performed during the summer of 2023.



## CURRENT ZELMA GEORGE FAMILY SHELTER GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

### THE SALVATION ARMY HARBOR LIGHT COMPLEX ZELMA GEORGE FAMILY SHELTER CLIENT GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

The Zelma George Family Shelter, a program of The Salvation Army Harbor Light Complex, recognizes the need to protect and enhance the rights of a person receiving services. The Salvation Army ensures that an individual's rights are observed and respected while participating in the program. In addition to the public display of the rights and grievance procedures, both program staff and clients receive instruction regarding these matters. Clients are required to sign and date the form that is sent placed in the file. The Client Grievance Procedure enables a program participant to make complaints regarding services and/or staff and to have those complaints heard and acted upon in a timely manner. Any individual who believes he/she has been discriminated against because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age or disability may initiate a grievance. If necessary, the Grievance Committee, consisting of the Program Director, Client Rights Officer, Executive Director and at least one other non-program staff will convene to review a grievance. Staff and clients are instructed to keep all grievances private and confidential.

#### THE GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE IS AS FOLLOWS:

1. The client is encouraged to first seek a resolution to the situation with the Program Director and/or Case Management staff. Many times an objective view as well as open and honest communication will lead to a resolution of the problem.
2. If an acceptable resolution does not occur within the program, the client can obtain a grievance form from Kathy Smith, Grievance Officer, 1710 Prospect Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Cleveland, Ohio 44115, 216.392.3773 ext. 122. The grievance form includes the date and time of the incident, names of persons involved, witnesses, a clear description of the incident, the date the form was submitted, and the client's signature.
3. The Grievance Officer will assist the client in filing a complaint and will investigate the incident. A resolution to the incident will be given to the client within three (3) working days of submitting the completed grievance form.
4. If the client determines the situation is unacceptable, a meeting with the Grievance Committee is scheduled within three (3) working days.
5. Within five (5) working days of the hearing, the Grievance Officer will provide a written summary of the Grievance Committee's proceedings for review by the client. The summary will be placed in the client's file. If and when action is taken against program staff, the appropriate documentation will be placed in their personnel file(s).
6. If the client is unsatisfied with the resolution reached by the Grievance Committee, he/she should first contact the Cleveland Mediation Center of Cleveland but they also have the right to file with the U.S. Health and Human Services within 180 days of the incident.

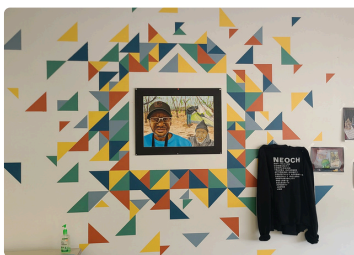
Cleveland Mediation Center  
2012 West 37<sup>th</sup> Street #12  
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

Ohio Criminal Justice Services  
1970 West Broad St.  
Columbus, Ohio 43223

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
Office for Civil Rights Region V  
225 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 240  
Chicago, IL 60601  
Telephone: 312.688.2839

Ohio Legal Rights Services  
8 East Long Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Columbus, Ohio 43215  
Telephone: 614.466.7264

Client Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Witness Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



## FINDINGS

Unhoused individuals are often not given the proper ability to file grievances. Most grievance procedures at organizations, while thorough, are complex and demanding for an individual who is unhoused. There is a reliance on witness testimony when making judgements, often resulting in a "he said, she said" scenario between the grievant and the staff member they accuse of mistreating them. Grievances often don't make it past the initial reporting phase at most organizations. One of, but not the sole, cause for this is the overall dehumanization of unhoused individuals by society.

## COMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The number of select community member interviews was limited. Responses from multiple community organizations for interviews were nonexistent. Acquiring quantifiable data of total grievance counts against each organizations over a year span was unsuccessful.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- NEOCH
  - Add individuals to the organizing and advocacy team, expand street outreach team
  - Continue focus on municipal and county government level advocacy
- Social Service Providers
  - Review and accurate tracking of current grievance processes and cases
  - Simplify the grievance process to within an unhoused person's means
  - Develop more ways to document instances aside from witness testimonies
- Government Entities
  - Increase development of social housing, create incentives for develop non-market housing by private sector
  - Reform current government restrictions on housing development (zoning codes)
  - Review and develop better coordination systems between various nonprofit social service providers

Being unhoused is a situation with various detrimental effects on the individual. These can range from the obvious, such as lacking a proper place to live, to ones often overlooked, such as losing representative ability and the chance to advocate for oneself. This study examines the unhoused's ability to file grievances against social service providers for mistreatment. This project was completed during the summer of 2023 while interning at Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH) via John Carroll's Summer in the City program. The research was conducted qualitatively through select interviews of key community members, empirical observations while on street outreach with NEOCH team members, and a review of topical scholarly literature. After a review of all information and data collected, it was found that unhoused individuals lack reasonable means to file grievances against social service providers. Subsequent recommendations for NEOCH, social service providers, and government entities were developed.