

Remembering Our Neighbors Who Died While Homeless

By Kate Coventry

[Duane “Joey” Henderson](#) died of a heart attack, after living in Fort Reno Park for several years. He was well known in the neighborhood and an avid sports fan.

Joey was not alone. At least 45 residents died while experiencing homelessness in the District over the past year, most of them at a premature age. DC residents gathered this week for the Homeless Memorial Vigil, led by the [People for Fairness Coalition](#), a local organization headed by individuals who have experienced housing instability. Community organizations, government officials, faith groups, and residents came together to remember those who died in the past year—and to commit to ending homelessness in the District so that no one else dies here while homeless.

Homelessness cuts lives short. People who don't know where they're going to spend the night struggle to receive needed services like medical treatment or counseling. And they are often forced to stay in places that are unsafe or make their illnesses worse. As a result, the life expectancy of people facing chronic homelessness is far shorter than for those who are stably housed.

This tragedy highlights the need to make further progress on the city's plan to end chronic homelessness and take additional steps to protect residents when they are homeless.

Among the other people who were remembered this week:

[George Siletti](#) died just shy of his 61st birthday. He had been homeless for nearly 30 years. As a speaker for the National Coalition for the Homeless, he educated thousands of young people about the realities of being homeless.

[Freddy “Showtime” Cougar](#) died at age 57 after living near Freedom Plaza for about 20 years. He was known for making people laugh with his dancing and conversation.

[Michael Stoops](#) was a founding board member and former Executive Director for the National Coalition for the Homeless. He was one of the founding members of the North American Street Newspaper Association and served as Board Member of [Street Sense](#).



Participants called on Mayor Bowser and the DC Council to ensure that no one else dies while homeless by increasing funding for affordable housing programs. The DC Fiscal Policy Institute is proud to be a part of these efforts.

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