

Remembering Our Neighbors Who Died While Homeless

By Kate Coventry

[Leonard Hyater Jr.](#) died in July at age 59. He wrote for and sold the *Street Sense* newspaper, and received his real estate certification the week before his death. He is missed by the many vendors he worked with.

Leonard was not alone. At least 54 residents died while experiencing homelessness in the District over the past year, most of them at a premature age. DC residents gathered in December 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.



Photo by Andy DelGiudice

Chronic 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 experiencing homelessness.

Among the other people who were remembered:

Another *Street Sense* vendor and writer, [Charles Davis](#), died at age 55. He had been homeless for 28.5 years before he got his own place in 2016. He was known for his unfailing generosity and his love of go-go.

[Matthew Farks](#) died one month before his 37th birthday. He stayed at the 801 East Men's Shelter. He struggled with paranoid schizophrenia and had suffered numerous beatings while homeless.

Matthew sent many cards and notes to his mother and was known for his brilliance and sense of humor.

Participants called on Mayor Bowser to end chronic homelessness in her second term and to invest \$35.5 million in fiscal year 2020. [You can support these efforts by signing the petition.](#)

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