



# Washoe County Camping Ordinance (50.400): Enforcement, Impact, and Balance



**Presenter:**  
WCSO HOPE Sergeant Sonia Butler

# Ordinance Overview

Prohibits 'camping' on county property/public places (incl. 1,000 ft of Truckee River) unless permitted

- Camping = Sleeping/prep, storing belongings >48 hrs (abandoned after notice), tents/shelters/vehicles.
- Exceptions: Medical emergencies, disabilities, permitted events.
- Enforcement: Requires law enforcement to provide a warning or Written Posting first.
- Penalty: Misdemeanor.



# The Controversy – Voices on Both Sides

"A tool for law enforcement and service providers." vs. "Victimizes vulnerable population."

## Supporters

- Enables services and cleanups
- Protects public spaces (e.g., neighborhoods impacted by trash/debris).

## Opponents

- Risks criminalizing homelessness; seen as punishing poverty.

- Passed 3-2 (March 26, 2024) after heated public comment.

- Aligned with SCOTUS: *Grants Pass v. Johnson* (June 28, 2024) – Upholds bans as not 'cruel/unusual'

# Enforcement in Action – Stats Snapshot

Verbal →

Written Warning

→ Citation only if needed

- **Formal Charges: 3** (June 2024 – Dec 2025)
- **Written Warning Citations: 40**
- **Verbal Warnings:** Issued to virtually every person contacted under this ordinance (thousands of interactions)
- **HOPE Team Contacts: 4,529** (repeat contacts common to build trust)

# The Three Times the Ordinance Has Been Charged

All three charges occurred only after repeated warnings, offers of assistance, and/or additional criminal behavior.

- **January 9, 2025 (Courthouse incident)**

- Two individuals setting up camp on county courthouse grounds
- Resources offered & declined; one subject fled into Truckee River,
- Leading to resisting & paraphernalia charges; camping violation secondary

- **July 21, 2025 (North Hills Blvd)**

- Individual cited after ignoring posted 48-hour notice
- HOPE Team had previously cleaned up three separate encampments created by this same individual
- Multiple nearby businesses had submitted service requests due to large amounts of trash/debris accumulating around the site
- Resources repeatedly offered & refused over the prior year

# Why the Ordinance Is Necessary – Real Benefits

## The Tools

- 48-hour notice → lawful cleanup of unoccupied/abandoned sites
- Legal authority to contact → opens door for HOPE Team engagement
- Progressive enforcement: verbal warning → written warning → charge only as last resort

## Measurable Results

(June 5, 2024 – Dec 5, 2025)

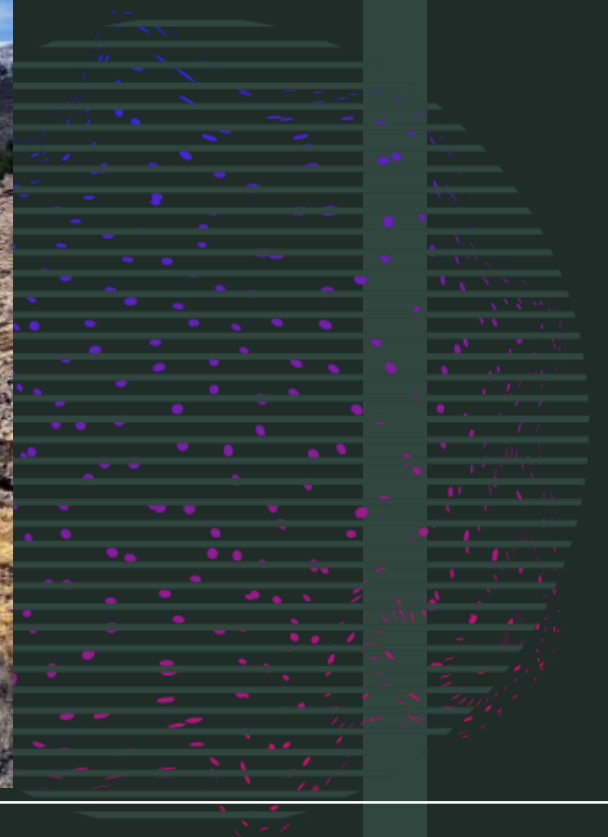
- HOPE Team contacts: **4,529**  
(repeat contacts build trust)
- Individuals moved to stable housing: **262**
- Individuals placed in transitional housing: **116**
- Travel assistance for family reunification provided
- Abandoned encampment clean-ups: **56**
- Debris/waste removed: **448 cubic yards**

(≈ 45 large dump-truck loads removed from county land)

# Conclusion – A Balanced Path Forward

Low enforcement + High outreach = Humane progress

- Protects public while prioritizing aid.



# Thank you

**Washoe County Sheriff's Office**

**Homeless Outreach Proactive  
Engagement (HOPE) Team**

**[washoesheriff.com/hope](http://washoesheriff.com/hope)**

