

The Ontario Safe Streets Act In Context

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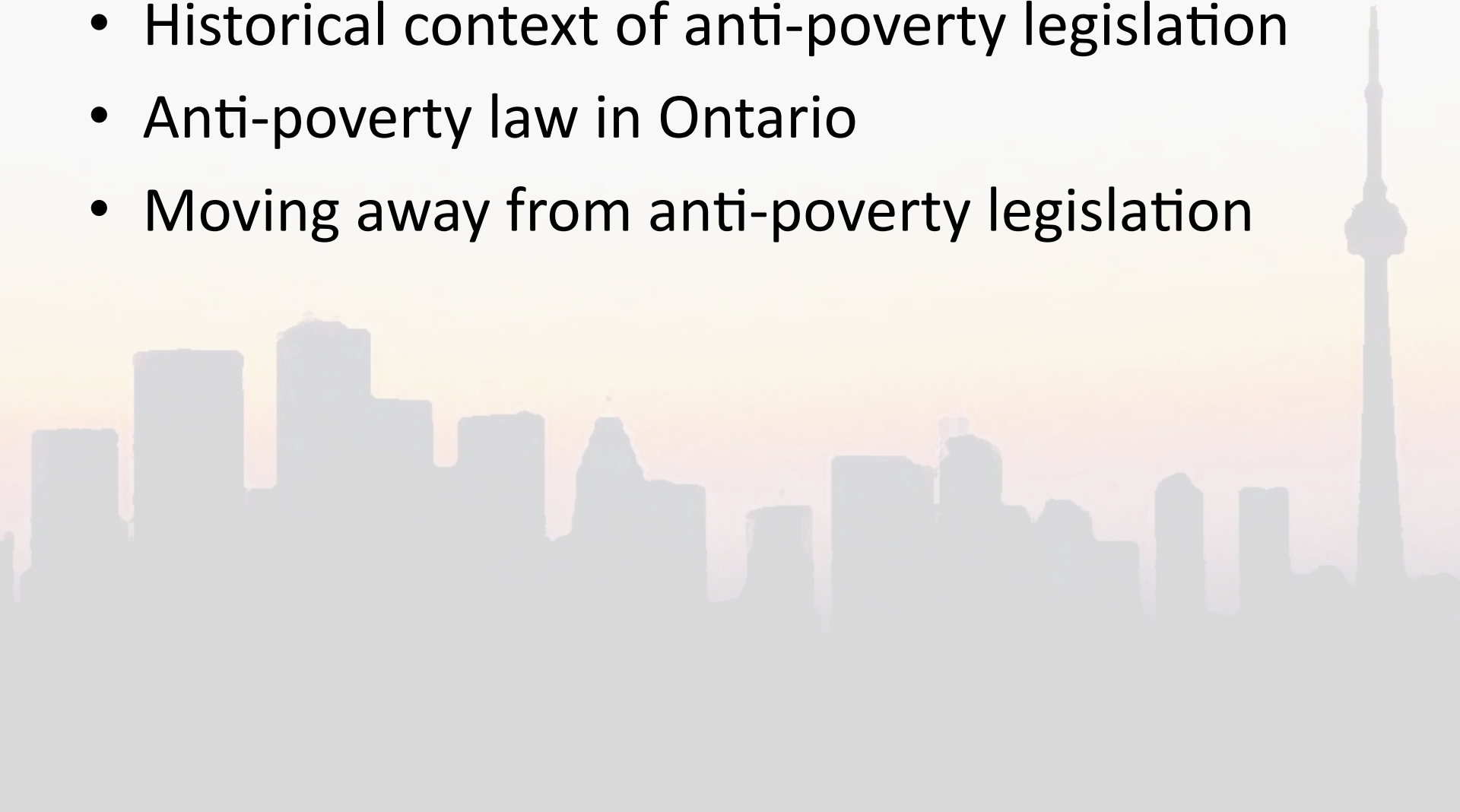
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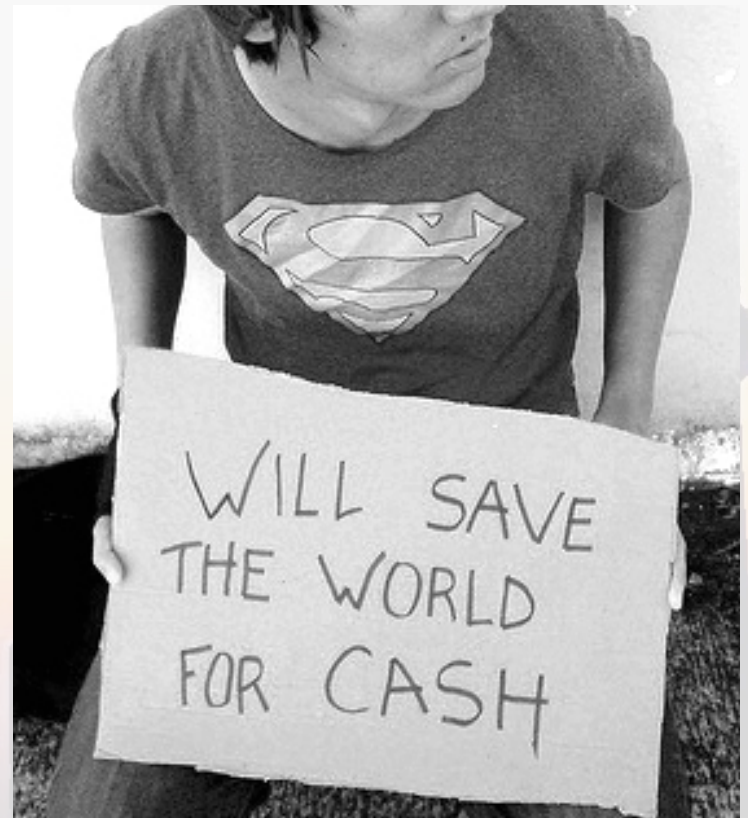
Overview

- Historical context of anti-poverty legislation
- Anti-poverty law in Ontario
- Moving away from anti-poverty legislation



Historical Context

- 1984 – Federal cutbacks to social housing programs
- 1993 – Federal government stopped all spending on new social housing
- 1997 – Researchers coin the term “dehospitalization” to describe the trend of poorly planned discharge of individuals with mental health issues into the community
- 1998 – Squeegee Kids in the Media
- 1999 – The Safe Streets Act is passed

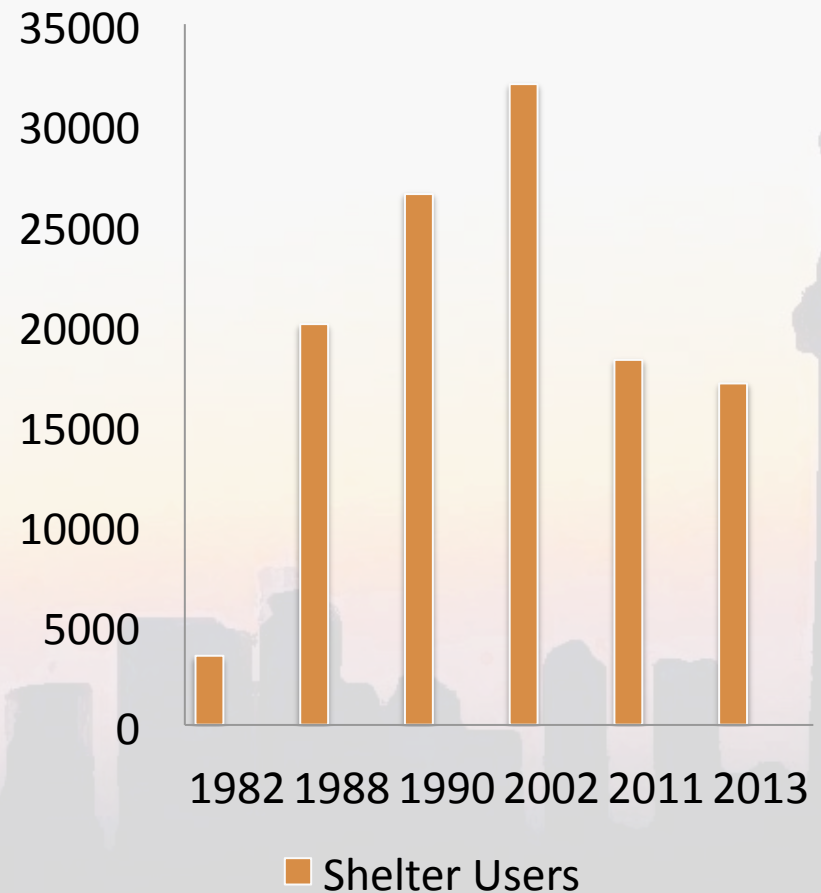


Toronto Homelessness Over Time

- 1982 – estimated 3340 homeless individuals in Toronto
- 1988 - roughly 20,000 people were using Toronto's emergency shelter system annually
- 1990 - 26,529 individuals used Toronto's emergency shelter system
- 2002, roughly 31,985 individuals
- 2011, 18,246 individuals
- 2013, 17,075 individuals

Policy Initiatives

- SSA passed in 1999
- Supportive housing doubled from 2000 to 2005
- S2H started in 2005



Anti-Poverty Laws

A survey of 235 US cities found that:

- 30% prohibit sitting/lying in certain public places.
- 47% prohibit loitering in particular public areas
- 47% prohibit begging in particular public places;
- 49% prohibit aggressive panhandling and 23% have citywide prohibitions on begging.

IN ONTARIO

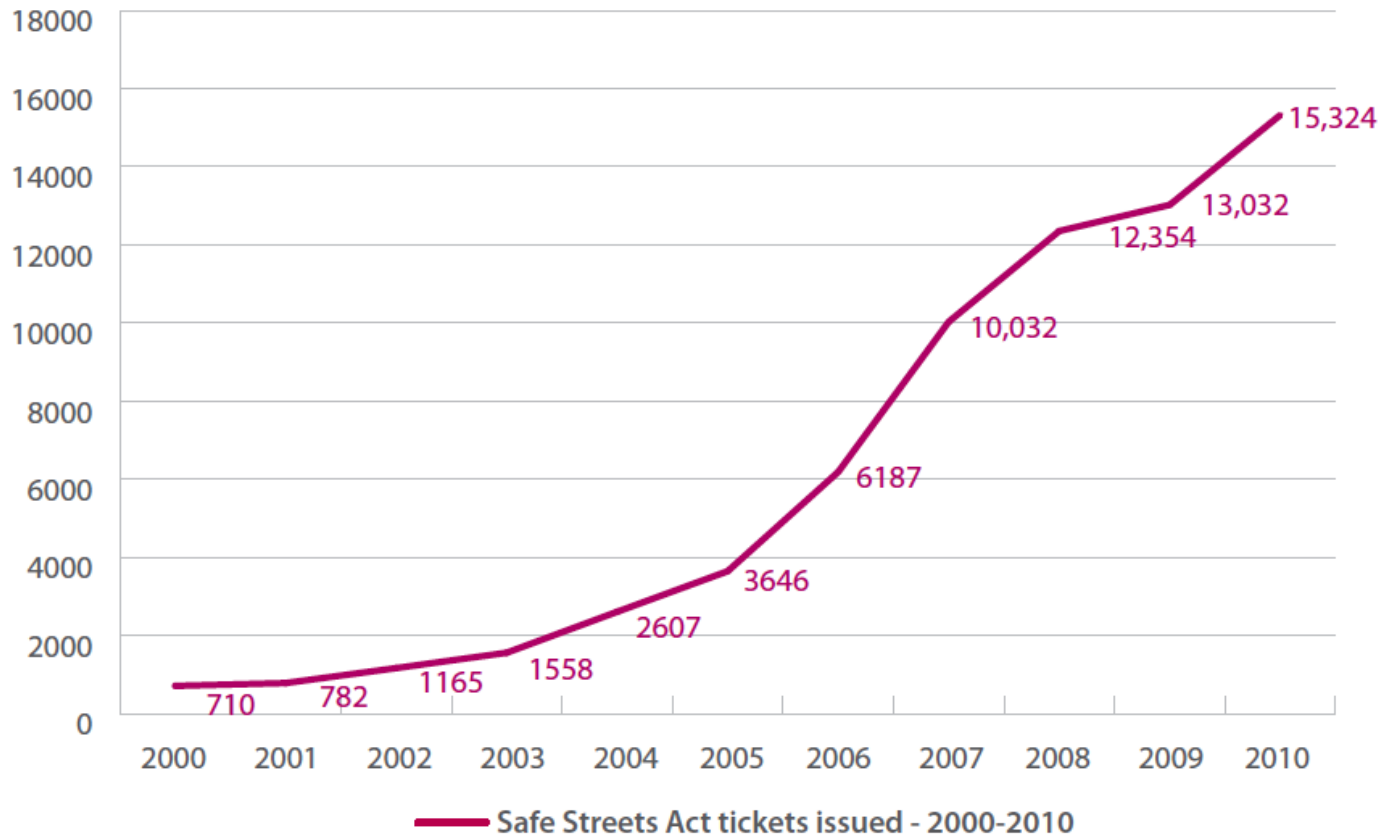
- Safe Streets Act
- Trespass to Property Act
- City By-laws (“Encumber the Street”)

Ontario Safe Streets Act

- Definition of “aggressive” panhandling
 - “aggressive manner” means a manner that is likely to cause a reasonable person to be concerned for his or her safety or security
- Soliciting a “captive audience”
 - Near ATM
 - Near public transit stop
 - On a roadway
- Charities Exempt

Enforcing the SSA the Statistics

FIGURE 1 - SSA Counts - 2000-2010



Cost of Enforcement

- Decrease in panhandling, decrease in homelessness but increase in tickets
- Estimated over \$900,000 in police hours to give out tickets
- Additional costs – Court time, prosecutor, testifying officer

Consequences of SSA Tickets

- Outstanding panhandling fines count against a driver's license, so the SSA makes it harder for people to find jobs, keeping them on the street longer
- If panhandlers are not homeless they soon might be. The maximum penalty for panhandling is 6 months in jail. When jail over 30 days is imposed social assistance programs like ODSP and OW stop paying rent for the incarcerated person. This can lead to eviction, so when they are released, panhandlers are forced back onto the street, actually increasing homelessness.

Coalition to Repeal the SSA

What We've Been Doing

- Getting and keeping the SSA in the Press
- Political Pressure, discussions with Government

What You Can Do

- Join the Coalition here:

<http://www.homelesshub.ca/RepealSSA>

- Sign the petition here:

<https://www.change.org/p/the-legislative-assembly-of-ontario-repeal-the-safe-streets-act>

Sources

- **Can I See Your ID** (O'Grady et. al., 2011)
- **Finding Home** (Hulchanski, et. al. 2009)
- **Homelessness, Housing, and Mental Health: Finding Truths - Creating Change** (Forchuck, et. al., 2011)
- **The State of Homelessness In Canada, 2013** (Gaetz et. al., 2013)

