



DeKalb County Government

Manuel J. Maloof Center
1300 Commerce Drive
Decatur, Georgia 30030

Agenda Item

File ID: 2024-1233

Substitute

1/9/2026

Public Hearing: YES NO

Department: Police Services

SUBJECT:

Commission District(s): All Commission Districts

Substitute Agenda Item 2024-1233 – A Joint Policy Statement On An Effective, Coordinated, And Compassionate Response To Homelessness.

Information Contact: Greg A. Padrick, Chief of Police

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PURPOSE:

A request to accept the substitute agenda item for 2024-1233 with the Joint Policy Statement on an Effective, Coordinated, and Compassionate Response to Homelessness.

NEED/IMPACT:

DeKalb County recognizes that homelessness is a complex social condition influenced by housing availability, economic instability, behavioral health needs, and other systemic factors. Addressing homelessness effectively requires coordinated, collaborative approaches that prioritize dignity, safety, and lawful, professional practices rather than punitive enforcement.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Unknown at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

•To approve the substitution and to authorize the Chief Executive Officer to execute all the necessary documents.

**A JOINT POLICY STATEMENT
BY THE GOVERNING AUTHORITY OF DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA ON AN
EFFECTIVE, COORDINATED, AND COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE TO
HOMELESSNESS**

Policy Statement:

The Governing Authority of DeKalb County, Georgia affirms its commitment to public safety, constitutional governance, and the fair and humane treatment of all individuals, including those experiencing homelessness.

DeKalb County recognizes that homelessness is a complex social condition influenced by housing availability, economic instability, behavioral health needs, and other systemic factors. Addressing homelessness effectively requires coordinated, collaborative approaches that prioritize dignity, safety, and lawful, professional practices rather than punitive enforcement.

To ensure clarity, consistency, and effectiveness in Countywide responses while preserving operational integrity, the Governing Authority establishes the following guiding pillars to inform homelessness-related practices across County departments, public safety agencies, and community partnerships.

Guiding Pillars:

- 1. Constitutional Enforcement and Non-Criminalization:** The County affirms that homelessness and poverty, in and of themselves, shall not be treated as criminal conduct. Public safety responses must be grounded in constitutional principles, professional standards, and equal protection under the law, ensuring that individuals are not arrested or cited solely due to unhoused status absent other lawful grounds.
- 2. Public Safety, Dignity, and De-Escalation:** The County recognizes that law enforcement officers and first responders are often at the forefront of interactions involving individuals experiencing homelessness. Responses should prioritize safety, dignity, and de-escalation, acknowledging that arrest and incarceration are not effective solutions to homelessness and may exacerbate underlying challenges.
- 3. Coordinated Services and Supportive Referrals:** The County supports coordinated efforts, when appropriate and available, to connect individuals experiencing homelessness with supportive services, including shelter, behavioral health resources, substance-use treatment, and housing assistance. Such efforts are intended to reduce reliance on the criminal justice system while supporting safer and more sustainable outcomes.
- 4. Operational Integrity and Law Enforcement Discretion:** The County affirms the importance of preserving the operational discretion of the DeKalb County Police Department to allocate resources, structure response strategies, and act when

criminal conduct occurs or when public safety is at risk. Nothing in this policy statement is intended to restrict lawful enforcement authority.

- 5. Capacity, Sustainability, and Resource Awareness:** The County acknowledges that current service and shelter capacity does not meet existing demand. Meaningful progress requires continued evaluation of needs, strategic investment in housing and wraparound services, and sustainable, data-informed approaches.
- 6. Collaboration and Continuous Improvement:** The County supports ongoing collaboration among County departments, municipalities, nonprofit organizations, and community partners. Continuous assessment of best practices, interagency coordination, and response strategies is encouraged to ensure effectiveness, accountability, and adaptability to evolving community needs.

The Governing Authority acknowledges these pillars as guiding principles to assist the DeKalb County Police Department and relevant County entities as strategies are collaboratively developed and implemented. This policy statement is intended to provide clarity of purpose and alignment, while allowing flexibility to respond thoughtfully to future challenges and community needs.

The Governing Authority and the DeKalb County Police Department reaffirm their unified commitment to safety, fairness, professionalism, and compassionate, inclusive service for every resident of DeKalb County.