

OPINION: New York woman homeless in Fall River not given a vacant bed at a shelter due to red tape

The following was posted on Facebook by Fall River's Christopher Peckham:

"Over the last few weeks, I've been trying to make time to get out and speak to those in the community that are less fortunate and get a better understanding of their stories. I'm trying to also get a better understanding as to how bad the opioid/homelessness situation is in our City, aside from my personal life experiences with family.

Here's the story of a 43-year-old woman named Tracy. Tracy is originally from New York and left due to domestic and financial hardship. While in New York, Tracy sought help and was referred to a program in New Bedford. Once arriving in New Bedford, Tracy was told that there was no room in the program and that they would buy her a bus ticket to Boston, where the possibility of finding shelter and stability would almost be certain.

Tracy did, in fact, find shelter in Boston, but after being bounced around from shelter to shelter she was told by Staff in Boston that Fall River had MANY programs for the homeless and they bought her a bus ticket. Tracy arrived in Fall River expecting that our City would be her savior and she would soon be back on her feet.



Fast forward a few months and Tracy lives in this tent. Tracy explained that she stays close to the roadway due to the fact that she gets nervous at night being all alone. She then proceeded to show me a backpack full of rental listings, addresses, phone numbers, program booklets and everything she has tried to do to better her situation. Tracy worked for a temp agency up until last week when the job ended and she was let go. She was going to work and returning home to her TENT! Tracy wasn't able to put enough money aside for first, last and security.

Now, this is where the story takes a twist. Tracy does not struggle with substance abuse, she does struggle with PTSD due to past life events. I asked Tracy if she had assistance offered while in Fall River to find shelter and she explained that she was able to stay at the First Step Inn on Durfee St for 30 days. After the 30 days, she was told that she had to leave. Tracy then told me something that completely shocked me.

Tracy explained that there are 50 beds at the First Step Inn but the facility only utilizes 20 of them. 12 beds for men and 8 for women. When she asked why she couldn't use one of the remaining 30 beds, she was told that they were not funded for the summer months. She was then informed that all 50 beds

would be funded for the winter months and to try back then.

I gave Tracy my number and I contacted a friend that said they would assist her in finding a place to stay.

My questions are, why does the First Step Inn, a shelter that offers great services to the homeless of our City not have funding to operate to its capacity? Are there no grants, or other avenues to explore that allow their work to reach more than 20 people at a time? They are a great asset to our community. I mean, if a homeless facility has 50 beds, wouldn't you think it would benefit the City to have 30 more people off of the street, getting help?

Lastly, is it really feasible to think that it is better to be homeless in the summer, than being homeless in the winter? I would imagine it is torture regardless of what day, week or month it is. I most certainly have the intention of finding out why these beds cannot be funded year-round and explore ways to find funding by thinking outside of the box."