

90-year-old Florida man faces jail for feeding the homeless

by [Lindsay Ellis](#)

November 4, 2014

([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Late last month, the city of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, passed a series of laws that restricted where organizations could feed the homeless.

On Sunday, when a 90-year-old man received a citation in Stranahan Park, the effects of these new laws came into full view.

Arnold Abbott, who is ordered to appear in court, said that hundreds of homeless people had gathered in the park and then police arrived. Police issued court orders to him and two members of the clergy, who were handing out food. He said he faces a maximum of 60 days in jail.

Abbott, who founded Love Thy Neighbor in 1991, has been providing food to homeless people at a local beach for more than 20 years. He said he will return to that beach Wednesday night—and expects a repeat of Sunday's interaction with police.

"After I was cited, I took everybody over to a church parking lot," he said in a phone interview. "We did feed everybody. It wasn't a complete waste."

Mayor Jack Seiler, who was unavailable for an interview by press time, told the *Sun Sentinel* that providing homeless people with a meal perpetuates a "cycle of homeless" in Fort Lauderdale.

"Providing them with a meal and keeping them in that cycle on the street is not productive," he said.

David Raymond, who served for nine years as executive director of the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust, said last month that limiting outdoor food service could make sense. Food, he said, should connect homeless people with other services. And he noted the tensions that can occur when those providing food bring homeless people periodically to the same place, which can hurt area businesses.

One of the recent laws passed in Fort Lauderdale, aiming to mitigate this tension, will require volunteers to bring portable toilets to all food distribution events.

These rules, Abbott said, are “ridiculous.”

“They’re doing everything in the world,” he said, “to rid the area of homeless persons.”

The National Coalition for the Homeless released a report last month called “Share No More,” listing more than 30 cities that have restricted or are taking steps to restrict food-sharing programs. The report also aims to correct assumptions about food sharing. To the coalition, a lack of affordable housing, few job opportunities and disability perpetuate homelessness more than food-sharing programs do.

Other cities that have attempted to restrict, ban, or relocate food-sharing programs are Denver, Nashville, Philadelphia, and Phoenix, according to the report.

Rules that restrict organizations from feeding the homeless, Abbott said, show a lack of common sense among legislators. Without outdoor feedings, homeless people would need to resort to digging through dumpsters or similar drastic measures, he said.

“This I don’t want to happen,” he said. “I will continue fighting, I will promise you that. I will not let up.”