

## Feces in courtroom, trespassers attract more attention to homeless at City-County Building



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The discovery of feces in a Madison Municipal Courtroom this week followed by the arrest of two overnight trespassers there is returning the spotlight to the use of the City-County Building by homeless people.

It's not the first time that workers at the CCB have been confronted with bodily waste, Municipal Court Clerk Kelly McConnell said Thursday.

"There are bio-hazards all over," she said, adding that staff members have

encountered blood, vomit and urine in various places.

On Wednesday, two men were arrested and charged with unlawful trespass after they tripped an alarm and were found by police getting ready to bunk on the second floor of the building, where the Municipal Court is located, according to [police reports](#).

The number of homeless people sleeping right outside and spending their days inside the governmental office building has increased in recent years, and [employees have complained](#) that the presence of inebriated, sometimes violent loiterers is upsetting and unsafe.

A joint city-county committee has struggled with how to make the CCB an inviting workplace while safeguarding constitutionally protected right of access to a public building.

The discovery of feces smeared on the wall of the room where the Municipal Court hears cases caused a 10-minute delay in the start of court Wednesday so that the mess could be cleaned from the room, which is also where the City Council and Dane County Board meet, McConnell said.

More often, restrooms are "trashed" by people who enter after hours at an entrance kept open to allow visits to the juvenile detention center and circumvent efforts to block off portions of the building, she said.

"We have to search all over the building for a clean bathroom to use," McConnell said.

McConnell said she feels unsafe at times because of the people congregating outside the building and in the lobby. She recalled that last week, as she entered the locked

municipal court area, a woman came out of nowhere and followed close behind her. Afraid of entering the empty office, McConnell said she turned and challenged the women, who then turned away.

"We're getting a different element in here," McConnell said. "It's the mentally ill. It's alcoholics who sit around drinking all day and get into fights."

McConnell and other CCB workers interviewed Thursday said that [new behavior rules adopted a year ago](#) by the City-County Liaison Committee that oversees administration of the building eased the situation only briefly. The same was true for a temporary higher police presence that they said followed Police Chief Mike Koval's promotion to the top job some six months ago.

One female city worker, who did not want her name used, said that she did not feel unsafe or uncomfortable because of the presence of homeless people in the lobby.

"It's more that they sometimes smell like alcohol. That can be off-putting," said the woman, who works on the 4th floor of the building.

Benches typically located in the lobby on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, where homeless people congregate, have been removed gradually in recent weeks, building workers said. On Thursday at noon, there were no benches and no one hanging around.

City Assessor Mark Hanson's office is just off the lobby.

"This is a place of business, and a public building. It is not a homeless shelter," Hanson said.

Hanson said his staff members tell him entering the building early in the morning, when it is dark and homeless people may still be asleep near the entrance, can be "kind of scary."

He said building employees are particularly annoyed by the presence of homeless people there who choose not to use services and shelters made available to them to instead sleep and hang out at their workplace.

"The city needs to do enough to make us feel safe, but we're not generally there yet," Hanson said.

McConnell said that city workers are frustrated.

"Our concerns are not being heard," she said.

## Pat Schneider



**Pat Schneider**

Pat Schneider joined The Capital Times in 1989 and has written on a wide variety of topics including neighborhoods, minority communities and the nonprofit sector.

