

We need HB2367, the Oregon Right to Rest Act. Historically, laws have been designed and enforced to keep unwanted, marginalized people out of public spaces. Vagrancy and loitering laws serve to target a group of people, not a criminal act. In Elizabethan England they were used against the poor, rogues who would not swear allegiance, and vagabonds that had no ties to a physical location (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-21/what-is-loitering-really>). In America, they were used against people of color who were demanding the right to vote, have equal education, and be in the same public spaces as everyone else. Today, they are used to criminalize those who are forced to survive by living outside.

A lot of people will say that nobody is forced to be homeless and they can get a job, and a house, if they just tried hard enough. But in reality, many people cannot afford sky-rocketing rents, with inflation rising, while pay stays stagnant. And many more people cannot cope with the demands of keeping up an unsustainable model, where instability is a constant threat. Access to doctors and mental health resources is lacking in a lot of communities, where there may be 1,500 and 350 people to 1 health care provider per capita, respectively (<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/douglas-county-or#health>).

Poverty rates are consistently higher in Douglas County than the state overall. Poverty is also higher in all age groups in the county, compared to the state. Close to 1 in 3 minors (28.6%) were living in poverty in 2016. (http://douglaspublichealthnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Douglas-CHA-2018_Optimized.pdf). Being homeless is not a moral failure. It is a failure of a system that doesn't provide adequate supports like a living wage, income based affordable housing, and adequate health services.

This Right to Rest Act will allow people to simply be in public spaces; to rest, sit, stand and sleep, to occupy a legally parked vehicle, to eat and share food, and to pray. Rest is essential to everyone's health, well-being, and ability to function. The lack of rest, resulting from constant harassment, exacerbates and causes physical and mental health issues (<https://raphome.org/what/homeless-bill-of-rights/oregon-r2r/>). The Right to Rest Act doesn't give unhoused people any special privileges. It simply affords them the same rights as a housed person. It will ensure they will not be moved around from place to place with unnecessary "sweeps", their possessions won't get confiscated or destroyed, and, in the absence of no other place to go, they are able to be where they are without being cited or told to move on. People have the right to protect themselves against the elements, to have possessions, and to exist in a way that doesn't obstruct other people's rights. HB2367 will help defend against being criminalized for daily acts of living.

The hearing for HB2367 is in front of the Oregon House Judiciary on March 9th, at 1:30pm. Please submit testimony online at <https://raphome.org/what/homeless-bill-of-rights/oregon-r2r/> prior to the hearing. If the House Judiciary committee votes in favor of this Act it will go before the Oregon Legislature for a vote. If that vote is successful it will become law.