Two blocks from my children's small elementary school, there is a longtime campsite that I would imagine to be the "best case scenario" for those who advocate for legalized public camping. Several people have been living in three tents pitched on a wide sidewalk under a viaduct, for at least three years. There is a collection of found furniture, extension cords run along the sidewalk, and a metal drum used for fires. Aside from an occasional pile of rotting food dumped near the camp, these campers rarely create the dangerous waste that one often sees in larger camps around the city.

If this were the prevailing norm for public camping, the discussion around legalizing it might be easier--the living conditions are unusual, but in light of the housing crisis, these campers' housed neighbors should be able to overlook the inconvenience of a blocked sidewalk to support fellow Portlanders in achieving successful, self-managed, stable shelter. Unfortunately, this sort of permanent campsite is not the prevailing norm. This campsite serves as an anchor for other campers who have much less ability to care for themselves or the area around them. Filthy and derelict tents, shelters, and vehicles radiate out in all directions from this spot. While we can argue about whether or not these campers are able to take care of themselves, it is overwhelmingly evident that they don't take care of their surroundings, and their effect on the neighborhood is disproportionate to the number of people these campsites support. While there are generally only a dozen or so people living in these blocks at any given time, piles of refuse, broken furniture, stolen construction site equipment, shredded tents and tarps, shopping carts, wheelchairs, soiled clothing, bikes and bike parts, stolen cars, and off-leash dogs block sidewalks, bike lanes, and one-way roads.

With its proximity to an elementary school, office buildings, greenway bike lanes, shopping areas, a library, playgrounds, and small businesses, these campsites pose real, regular danger to children, families, commuters, and workers. A mother and son walking from their car to the school were chased by a camper who threw chunks of concrete at them. A father and son biking to school from a few blocks away were forced to dismount and walk through a campsite sprawling over the greenway, as residents threatened them. Children walking in a group to the playground were verbally harassed by a woman who removed her clothing and threw it at them. Children walking to the playground were threatened by a dog belonging to a camper. Children and parents step in human feces on the sidewalks and hellstrips around the perimeter of the school. Tents set up next to parked cars burst into flames. Stolen cars are crashed and left on the sidewalk. Campers sleeping in vehicles have ODed

outside the door of a classroom. Police have found guns and weapons during wellness checks outside the door of a classroom. Children have watched as campers smoke fentanyl from tin foil, and have seen naked campers passed out on sidewalks and soiled mattresses. Corporate office managers have needed to hire valet parking staff as employees don't feel safe walking to their cars. A small restaurant was nearly burned down by a campfire. The list goes on.

Portland indeed has a housing crisis. The neighborhood that I'm describing has just built dozens of apartment buildings in the last few years, with more coming. The individuals, families, offices, and small business owners who are moving in are taking a chance living in this area. Their ability to live, work, go to school, commute, and recreate in their neighborhood should not be stolen by a handful of campsites. For those who cope well unhoused, like the first campsite I described, more Safe Rest Sites and those like Dignity Village should be encouraged. But for most, public camping is to no one's benefit. If campsites are legalized, even the most vibrant neighborhood won't survive.