

If I understand it correctly, HB 3501 would make it legal for the houseless to occupy public spaces without harassment, but it would do nothing to actually improve their condition. Put in other words, the government would no longer be responsible for moving campers off of public property. Public property is just that, for the public. Campsites and houseless tents make it impossible for the public to have their share of public spaces, and in fact make public spaces unsafe and unwelcoming for the public at large. Public spaces that are abandoned by the general public and given over to houseless encampments change the nature of those spaces, they are no longer public. In truth, it is using the public spaces as shelters, instead of building shelters. In my opinion, and I believe that of many, the role of government should be to create bills and policies that solve problems, not permit and perpetuate unacceptable circumstances by taking the pressure of government to respond.

I am a small business owner and a homeowner in Portland and we have been living with ‘the houseless situation’ for years now. There was a 16 tent encampment on the corner of my business where drugs were openly bought, sold and used for years. In addition to the tents and the debris, we have had our windows broken and our doors jimmied open. We have had to call social services and 911 for overdoses. We deal with syringes, blood and urine on our sidewalks, on our tables and in our bathrooms and hallways. We have been threatened verbally and physically by folks high on drugs or mentally ill or both. We have been stolen from, our tables and chairs have been vandalized, umbrellas have been stolen. Car windows are constantly broken. Camps pop up all over and whether moved along by authorities or not they eventually fall into disrepair, are surrounded by trash, and are inevitably extremely unsafe with propane tanks inside them and burst into flames.

Please, look at the destruction of our natural resources. The houseless have ripped branches off of mature trees all along SW 13th and 14th (405) and throughout the city. They have set fire to bridges. There are encampments in wooded areas along Barbur between SW Hamilton and Terwilliger that are accessed by now established trails, with vehicles driving in and huge quantities of garbage and debris and smoke from fires. NE 33rd is miles of abandoned and semi abandoned vehicle and RVs and trucks being used for housing. Delta Park swings between a full-on open air chop shop and campground and destroyed land. No one wants to live like this, and making it legal only perpetuates the misery.

Please, look at the increase in theft, vandalism and violence in Portland and its correlation to our houseless situation. Please, take a look at this population you are trying to ‘help’ with this proposed bill. HB 3501 is not help. These are people in real distress, who if you talk to them will tell you bluntly that it is a living hell. Making it ‘legal’ for them to live in hell is not compassion, it is ignorance and ironic cruelty. These folks are in desperate circumstances, they are in real distress, and making it legal to camp or live in your vehicle in public spaces only pushes any actual solution farther away, makes it easier for government to do nothing for these human beings in distress. I imagine It is cold comfort when you are houseless, mentally ill and drug addicted to be told that now you get to live like that forever. We have botched the decriminalization of drugs so tragically by passing a bill with nothing to support it (no treatment centers, no housing plan, no social workers, no communication with law enforcement), let’s not

do that again with HB 3501. This is a glib and self satisfied attempt to ‘take pressure’ off a population that is tragically suffering, let’s instead fight to actually help them by training and hiring social workers, accelerating the creation of housing, increasing shelter space in the meanwhile and creating clear plans with law enforcement about how to get help, and expanding services beyond the minuscule amount currently available.

Since the beginning of COVID Oregon has spent over \$1B on homelessness and what do we have to show for it? How many shelters could we have built, where we could have comforted and helped these people in distress, instead of leaving them to their own devices on the street? During that same time we have seen our economy tank, our downtown fall into abandonment, our nationwide reputation suffer and our population shrink. I see in the text of the bill that supposedly this will allow moneys to be diverted from enforcing the no camping ban to actual services. Show me those actual services. Show me an actual plan. Make it happen. Please, let's focus on real solutions by thinking things through and planning well. No more bills being put forward without doing the legwork and laying the groundwork first.