

To Chair Bynum, Vice Chairs Noble and Power, and members of the Oregon House Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of the Oregon Right to Rest Act, House Bill 2367. I am a member of the leadership team for BerniePDX, a volunteer run group that supports local progressive campaigns and causes, often in coalition and number over 2000 member strong since its start in 2015.

We support the passage of HB2367 because it protects individuals' right to move freely, rest, sleep and pray in public spaces. Criminalizing homelessness, including forced relocation of people camping in public spaces, unfairly places the burden of our collective failure to ensure that all people in our community have safe and affordable housing, health care, access to nutritional food and clean water, and basic sanitation. We know that our investment in affordable housing at the local, state, and federal level falls far short of the need, leaving victims of the latest economic crisis (a regular and routine event in our economic system that values profits over people) to cobble together informal camping communities in public spaces in order to survive.

COVID19 has made additional shelter available but has also hit houseless people harder and has forced more people into homelessness. Being without a stable shelter is someone's status, not their identity, and we should not criminalize status. We know that in Portland for too long houseless people have suffered a disparate number of arrests and detentions. As a city we have many leaders and groups advocating for better, humanistic responses that treat people in crisis rather than detaining people in prison while waiting for trials.

Citing people for crimes related to these necessary survival activities only harasses people already under extreme physical, mental, economic, and social stress, stacking up crimes and fines that result in wasted resources - both of those who are un-housed, and the criminal legal system that legitimizes this harassment. The fact that those of us with safe homes complain about the "nuisances" that result for the lack of sanitation facilities or trash removal should not justify this inhumane response. Instead of seeking a criminal solutions, states, cities, counties, and the federal government must address the root causes of homelessness - unfair and inequitable economic opportunities, lack of access to health care or appropriate education and job training, lack of affordable housing, gentrification, and so on. In our community, people have been arbitrarily moved dozens of times over the course of the pandemic, disrupting stable if temporary communities and endangering those forced to move. Removing this inhumane option will force all of us to make the changes we must make to change the direction of our society, which increasingly concentrates wealth and power in the hands of the few. This is fundamentally anti-democratic.

Criminalization of sleeping, eating, resting, praying, or just being in public when un-housed does not solve the problem - it simply burdens those already most vulnerable with additional stress, criminal charges, fines, and other disruptions that, in a pandemic, only put them and the rest of the community at further risk for COVID-19 transmission. Finally this bill will support youth in disrupting their stigmatization and likelihood of incarceration. It will also improve equity among Oregonians where BIPOC Oregonians and veterans are overrepresented. As eviction moratoriums expire later this year experts expect a surge in homelessness. Do the right thing and please support HB2367, the Oregon Right to Rest Act, sending it to the floor with the "do pass" recommendation after its long "rest" in committee.

Thank you in advance,
Siobhan Burke