

March 8, 2021

To: Members of the Oregon House Committee On Judiciary

From: Rural Organizing Project

Re: HB 2367 - the Right to Rest Act

Dear Members of the Oregon House Committee On Judiciary,



Rural Organizing Project (ROP) urges you to vote yes on HB 2367, the Right to Rest Act. ROP was founded in 1992 to break rural isolation and share resources between rural community-based human dignity groups. Today our network includes more than 84 autonomous volunteer-run groups in 34 of Oregon's 36 counties and one tribal community, as well as hundreds of long-time leaders in all 36 counties and tribal communities. The impact of the pandemic and ensuing economic crisis is exacerbated by the ongoing divestment from rural communities in our state. ROP's network of groups are organizing to create or expand services and taking care of our neighbors while building toward a vision of rural communities that have what we need to thrive for the long-haul. In South Lane County at our Community Building Center, ROP is coordinating with dozens of service agencies, school district workers, faith communities, the Oregon Food Bank and volunteers to hold twice-weekly resource shares to make sure families can get culturally-relevant food, hygiene items, personal protective equipment, clothes, pet food, books, school supplies, seeds, garden plants, and connection to service agencies with no limits and as few barriers as possible. 100% of the people served are living in poverty and most are precariously housed or unhoused.

Rural communities are showing up for each other now, as always, but are also witnessing brutal police and vigilante violence against their unhoused neighbors in areas across the state-evicting people from their sleeping areas, ticketing, threatening, moving along and making their very existence a problem. This type of targeting the most vulnerable families and individuals in a community is immoral and a waste of needed resources at any time. But during a pandemic, these actions threaten the health of the whole community and are the lowest of low actions. We need to address the root causes of why so many people in our communities are unhoused, not target people because they have lost their housing.

The United States has a long history of using mean-spirited and often brutal laws to keep “certain” people out of public consciousness. Jim Crow, Sundown Towns, Anti-Okie laws, Operation Wetback and Ugly laws all targeted already oppressed

communities based on their racial, economic, social, immigration or disability status. Understanding this history is important. Today's exclusionary and discriminatory laws target homeless people, criminalizing sleeping, sitting, loitering, panhandling and even food-sharing in public spaces. Just like the laws from our past, they deny people their right to exist in local communities.

At ROP, we see laws that criminalize and forcefully "move along" or evict people living outside simply because they have lost their homes, to economic devastation or wildfire, just as deadly and horrifying as many of Oregon's historic laws and practices that excluded Black, Japanese, Chinese, and other people from living here. ROP has worked hard to learn about, expose and challenge unjust laws, while working across the state to build welcoming communities enlivened by the values of justice, dignity and democracy.

We implore the members of the House Judiciary Committee, and all state legislators, to vote yes on HB 2367, the Right to Rest Act. Be on the right side of morality as well as the right side of history. Thank you.

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