

As a clinical social worker and resident of Oregon, I would like to extend my support for the Oregon Right To Rest Act (HB 2367). After working with unhoused individuals, it became clear what a difficult and traumatic experience homelessness is, and how much work we as a community and nation still have ahead of us in terms of creating effective supports, systems, and circumstances that would create more access to housing equity. As we now find ourselves a year into a global pandemic that has resulted in a substantial increase in job loss and evictions, the criminalization of those living in public, along with repeated displacement, is both hazardous to individual and communal health (and against CDC guidelines for disease prevention), and exceptionally brutal.

As noted by White Bird Clinic, "Penalizing people for living in public when no other options are available is not a deterrent, it is cruel and unusual punishment. Saddling people living in extraordinarily difficult circumstances with fines they can not pay and criminal records that create additional barriers to housing and employment has not prevented homelessness in Lane County, it has created chronic homelessness on a scale unseen in other communities across the United States." We have collectively created an unsolvable problem for the most vulnerable citizens among us where there is literally no place for them to go, yet they are punished for existing any place they find themselves. At a time when finding a place for all community members to be safely sheltered and remain in one place so that social distancing can be practiced, and services can be accessed in order to enter back into work and housing, criminalization and displacement go in complete opposition to attempts to stop the spread of Covid-19.

As a social worker, mother, and community member, I support the Right To Rest Act and all other measures we can take to collaboratively, effectively, and intelligently help our community move through this pandemic as safely and humanely as possible-especially those without housing, who are our most vulnerable community members who've been hardest hit by the financial and other impacts of the pandemic.