

I am an Oregon voter who has experienced homelessness outside and is housed now. HB 2367 must urgently be passed into law. It is vital for the following reasons and more:

1. It would end the cruel cycle of camp sweeps, which often involve police harassing homeless people, their belongings—including vital medications, documents, and survival gear—being taken away or destroyed, and/or campers being left with nowhere legal to go. It would establish basic rights for homeless people and their belongings, which folks need in order to survive and get housing, work, healthcare, and other important things. For many, these protections can easily make a difference between life and death, disaster and hope for a better life, and/or suffering intense trauma and not being needlessly traumatized. Sweeps often have catastrophic physical and mental health outcomes.
2. There are currently far from enough affordable housing units and shelter beds in Oregon for everyone in need. People are therefore forced to camp in order to survive. It is thus completely unreasonable to criminalize people for camping, sleeping, sitting, eating, or lying outside in public. In fact, as was decided in the Martin v. Boise case, it is unconstitutional. States and cities must stop treating human beings in crisis like illegally parked cars or trash messes to clean up.
3. The bill would protect people from being cited or arrested for acts of survival by both police and private security. As things are now, a huge disproportionate percentage of arrests are of homeless people, notably in Portland, but in other places too. When someone is homeless, among the last things they need are charges on their record or fines they cannot afford. Those things follow them and often prevent them from being able to get work and/or find housing, further trapping them in the cruel cycle of homelessness, sweeps, and criminalization.
4. Largely because of the costs associated with sweeps, policing, and prosecutions (and also mental health costs from the trauma of criminalization and emergency room visits from living in harsh or unhealthy conditions), it costs taxpayers significantly more to have a homeless person live outside than it would be to put that person in supportive housing. Sweeps are a huge waste of taxpayer money. We can save money and begin to invest it in different approaches that actually help people get out of homelessness and stay housed if we pass HB 2367.
5. For those who want our streets to be clean and safe, HB 2367 makes sense. It would decrease the trauma and duration of homelessness, make it easier for homeless people to access housing and work, result in fewer people on the streets, and improve long-term outcomes for homeless people. Homelessness cannot be swept or policed away; approaching it like that has only made it worse, even as it has resulted in some streets being temporarily cleaned. Homelessness can only truly be solved if homeless people are able to get off the streets, get the physical and mental healthcare (including addiction treatment) they need, begin healing, and get into long-term housing.
6. HB 2367 would decrease racial disparities in housing and other areas, help victims of domestic violence, prevent many rapes and assaults, save the lives of LGBTQ+ youths and adults who have been kicked out or discriminated against, protect folks with physical disabilities and mental health conditions, improve outcomes for veterans, stop people from becoming maimed or dying on the streets, help those who have been incarcerated re-enter into society, and decrease addiction rates—many people drink or use drugs to deal with the intense stress of homelessness and only start their habits after becoming homeless, not before.
7. Currently, sweeps combined with the lack of affordable housing, shelter beds, and safety net programs create a lot of stress and fear for many housed folks who are one or two crises away from homelessness.

Thank you.