

Submitter: Alina Houston

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure: HB3501

I moved to Northwest Portland in 2016, following my graduation from the University of Portland. I loved the vibrance of the neighborhood, the walkability, the neighborhood feel, and the access to parks, green spaces, retail amenities and more. All of this has been shattered over the last few years due to the increase of homelessness and drug use in my neighborhood.

The walks I once enjoyed are now filled with screaming houseless people, constant threats to my safety, and no longer being able to enjoy the view because of the focus on avoiding trash, tents, needles and other drug paraphernalia - not to mention the literal human feces that lines the sidewalks. In July 2021, I was physically attacked by an unhoused person on the streets of my neighborhood while walking home from a friend's house, forcing me to jump into a kind stranger's vehicle so I could escape - a trauma that has lived with me for nearly two years. When I leave my apartment to go to the gym in the mornings, I run to my car in fear as my street is lined with tents and houseless people that stare at you, make threats, ask for goods or yell - all at 5 AM while trying to maintain my health. I live within walking distance from work but can't walk as the 405 underpasses are filled with trash, houseless people and safety threats. I fear for my safety as I walk to Providence Park, the grocery store or to the nearby parks. My neighborhood has more rats than I've ever seen, likely because of the overwhelming amount of unmanaged trash being left by houseless people.

I chose my location within Northwest due to the location next to a park, hoping for a bit of nature in the heart of the city. This park goes mostly unused by anyone without pets as it reeks of human waste, is lined with tents and full of trash. The park is next to a school and I watched as parents hold their children's hands tightly, hoping their kids remain safe on their walks to and from school.

The ongoing crime by houseless and drug-using people has shuttered numerous businesses in my neighborhood and continues to threaten more as we see tenants like REI and Coava coffee leave the heart of the city as it has become impossible to maintain business, profit and employees in an unsafe environment. And I don't blame them because I too feel unsafe. If neither small local businesses or large corporations can thrive here, what's left? How many businesses will we let shutter before we do something about this? How many employees will be unemployed because we continue to do nothing about it? Why do we continue to prioritize the wants of those who come here to be houseless over the needs of those that actively contribute to our society?

If we continue to let houseless people overrun our city, there will be nothing left to call home in Portland. The vibrance of city, the love for people, the cleanliness, the greenspaces - it's all suffered because the City and the State refuse to take the action necessary to protect our residents, our communities and our businesses. When will we prioritize safety? When we prioritize cleanliness? When will we prioritize children? When will we prioritize small businesses? When will we prioritize our community? It's time for change. It's time to clean up Portland.