

To the Judiciary Committee:

“Sweeps” or the violent forced removal of “undesirable” people from public spaces is a brutal manifestation of the violence facilitated in our systems that targets BIPOC people, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ people, for **death**.

Sweeps are Structural Violence

“Structural violence is one way of describing social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm’s way... The arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people ... neither culture nor pure individual will is at fault; rather, historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces conspire to constrain individual agency. The accumulated effects of structural violence on an individual will necessarily mean less health and shorter life.” <http://www.structuralviolence.org/structural-violence/>

The refusal of the legislature to include the violence against houseless people in their “reckoning” with police violence speaks volumes to the dehumanization of houseless people that is rampant among all people, including our legislators. The silencing of houseless people that has taken place in this session by cancelling the hearing, deleting the public comments, and reducing the hearing to 15 minutes is despicable. The actions of legislators to silence some of our most marginalized community members speaks to extreme frailty on the part of legislators, that they can’t even handle hearing the truth of what is happening every day to houseless people. Because knowing the truth of sweeps would highlight how grossly inadequate the counter proposals present in this session are to deal with the root of the issue of sweeps. We don’t need parameters for what is a “humane” sweep because sweeps are inherently inhumane and dehumanizing. Sweeps need to be prohibited. Please reexamine your approach and allow people most impacted by the criminalization of houselessness and poverty to lead you to the solutions that will work for the community.

Ending sweeps will require contending with all of the forces of capitalism, racism, police violence and structural violence that converge to create, facilitate, and maintain a status quo of dehumanization, forced removal of people, destruction of belongings, and criminalization. Houseless people are constructed as in opposition to the flow of capital and therefore under capitalism they need to be disposed of. When people say capitalism kills, this is what they are talking about. Capitalism is built on the idea that people are disposable. This is well documented in literature about racial capitalism.

Policing is rooted in white supremacy and in the policing of BIPOC people and removing them from public spaces. I implore you to please avail yourself of all of the existing literature on the costs of criminalization of homelessness. Please learn about the oppressive structures of Business Improvement Districts and how they privatize public spaces and proliferate exclusion.

Please follow the lead of the people most impacted by structural violence and implement the solutions that houseless communities are proposing, namely Right to Rest. The people closest to the harms of structural violence understand the interlocking systems of oppression best, and can and have identified the solutions. Please have the humility to learn from houseless people and do your part to oppose and make illegal the structural violence of sweeps. This is needed now more than ever. Pass Right to Rest immediately. People are dying because of your inaction.

Sincerely,

Julia McKenna