

Through my 40 years of life, I have experienced homelessness caused by relocations to new areas, loss of housing due to rent increases, as well as the lack of affordable housing or available shelter. I live in Eugene, and I know a great deal of the houseless people here who have nothing more than a sleeping bag to call their home, and I have shared their struggles.

We need the Right to Rest Act in Oregon. There is no dignity or stability granted to those of us who have lost everything and have no place to go in the midst of our houseless struggle. Instead, we are regularly harassed, penalized, cited, and ordered to move along by police and city staff in our hour of need—for simply resting, lying, sitting, sleeping, or having temporary shelter anywhere in the city.

Sweeps cause harm and destroy any stability and community houseless people have. Whole areas of houseless people are regularly displaced, dislocated, and dispossessed by Police and city staff who force everyone to leave with nowhere to go. A lot of people end up losing their stuff because you can only take what you can carry. Then you move to another location, and get swept there again.

If the city is constantly making people change their living situation, it throws chaos, trauma and discord into their lives. Where can people go? Sweeps cause influxes of people who are in crisis into other homeless encampments, which in turn disrupts the stability and community of the place they are being forced to move to.

Police have threatened to ban me from all public parks in the city, simply because I had a pack and was sitting and resting next to it. This is a typical experience of many houseless people, and bans from parks can be a death sentence for folks.

A friend of mine left to turn in recycling for food, and came back to find that most of his belongings had been seized by the city. The city took just the necessities and means of livelihood, and left everything not worth anything behind. Another common story for the houseless, especially while folks are away at work.

I've seen pregnant women, disabled people, queer and trans youth, young victims of domestic violence, black and indigenous people, the elderly, and veterans be harassed and threatened by police and the city on a daily basis, all for just trying to rest and sleep in a public space.

We're still people, whether homeless or not.

Cities are using the public's money to harass and criminalize the poor, instead of dealing with the root causes of homelessness.

I urge you to vote in favor of the Right to Rest Act. People should not be criminalized for simply trying to survive and rest in public.