

To Chair Bynum, Vice Chairs Noble and Power, and members of the Oregon House Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of the Oregon Right to Rest Act, House Bill 2367. I am a member of the leadership team for the Springfield-Eugene Chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), a local affiliate of a national network of groups and individuals working to undermine white supremacy and to work for racial justice. We have joined the Decriminalize Homelessness coalition in our community because of our concern about the use of the criminal legal system to harm un-housed individuals and families in our communities.

Criminalizing homelessness, including forced relocation of people camping in public spaces, unfairly places the burden of our collective failure to ensure that all people in our community have safe and affordable housing, health care, access to nutritional food and clean water, and basic sanitation. We know that our investment in affordable housing at the local, state, and federal level falls far short of the need, leaving victims of the latest economic crisis (a regular and routine event in our economic system that values profits over people) to cobble together informal camping communities in public spaces in order to survive.

Citing people for crimes related to these necessary survival activities only harasses people already under extreme physical, mental, economic, and social stress, stacking up crimes and fines that result in wasted resources - both of those who are un-housed, and the criminal legal system that legitimizes this harassment. The fact that those of us with safe homes complain about the "nuisances" that result from the lack of sanitation facilities or trash removal should not justify this inhumane response. Instead of seeking a criminal solution, states, cities, counties, and the federal government must address the root causes of homelessness - unfair and inequitable economic opportunities, lack of access to health care or appropriate education and job training, lack of affordable housing, gentrification, and so on. In our community, people have been arbitrarily moved dozens of times over the course of the pandemic, disrupting stable if temporary communities and endangering those forced to move. Removing this inhumane option will force all of us to make the changes we must make to change the direction of our society, which increasingly concentrates wealth and power in the hands of the few. This is fundamentally anti-democratic.

We, the 700 members of Showing up for Racial Justice Springfield-Eugene Chapter, support the Right to Rest Act as a step in the right direction by eliminating the use of the criminal legal system as a failed solution to the "crime" of homelessness. Criminalization of sleeping, eating, resting, praying, or just being in public when un-housed does not solve the problem - it simply burdens those already most vulnerable with additional stress, criminal charges, fines, and other disruptions that, in a pandemic, only put them and the rest of the community at further risk for COVID-19 transmission.

Please support HB2367, the Oregon Right to Rest Act.

Thank you,
Rose Wilde
on behalf of Showing Up for Racial Justice Springfield-Eugene Chapter