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Testimony in support of HB 2367

In 2020, when Lane County Human Services Division conducted a “point in time” count to better understand the number of people who are experiencing homelessness in our community, they counted 1,606 people who were unhoused. Of these individuals, 467 people reported having a mental illness and 545 people identified as being chronically homeless. Mental health systems were the first to recognize and respond to the homelessness epidemic and a disproportionately high number of homeless people are living with mental illness. Evidence supports that sleep is an essential part of well-being and that lack of rest resulting from constant harassment can exacerbate mental health issues.

Affordable, permanent housing provides a safe place to shift focus from the uncertainty that comes with questioning where to sleep each night, if at all. Residential stability can lead to a sense of psychological stability and allows a person to focus on their home and relationships with others. Most of us take for granted how intertwined our home is with our life, providing security and privacy to nurture ourselves and others. As most affordable housing options have preconditions to entry, including biases against persons with criminal histories, prosecuting people for “crimes of survival” results in additional barriers to ending homelessness. With this in mind, it makes sense that success in tackling homelessness includes not only housing and supportive services, but an end to criminalization practices, as stated by the United States Interagency Council.

I support the Right to Rest Act to protect the rights of homeless people in our state to: use a tent to sleep in and protect themselves from adverse weather conditions in public space; to share food, eat, and pray in public spaces; to inhabit their own legally parked vehicle to sleep; and to prevent the unlawful seizure and destruction of their possessions.

Until we can do more to provide safe, stable, and supportive housing to the unhoused members of our communities in Oregon, we must end the unnecessary criminalization of survival associated with sitting, lying down or sleeping in public spaces. I support House Bill 2367 so that all Oregonians would have the right to exist in public space without the threat of harassment, citation, or arrest.

Sincerely,



Amanda Donofrio, AIA
Principal



Michael Magee, AIA
Principal