

I would like to voice my support for decriminalizing homelessness. As a community member, I would like my governments efforts and resources to HELP people who are experiencing homelessness by connecting them with housing, a safe space, health care, and services. By treating their mere physical presence sleeping, sitting or standing in public spaces as a criminal activity, without providing any alternative place to rest, we are merely making problems worse and adding to their legal, financial and mental health burdens. As a middle class white person, I have often taken a rest or nap in a library or in a park without anyone hassling me, calling the authorities, or even giving me a dirty look. I suspect that if I had a large bag of belongings with me (instead of having those safely stowed at home) and hadn't had recent access to a shower, this would have been quite different. In this country, and in Oregon, we have a long and tragic history of using laws to remove people who the privileged members feel uncomfortable to be around. I recognize that it is very uncomfortable to be viscerally reminded of deep income inequality and human suffering. However, our response must be to recognize our shared humanity and our mutual interest in having all members of our community be safe, have their needs met, and able to fully participate in society. Our response must be to help solve these issues, not exacerbate them by attempting to push them out of sight.