

Greetings,

I am a retired Lane County Behavioral Health Manager (22 yrs.) and current Board Chair of The Way Home, an organization promoting the wellbeing of unhoused individuals. I have almost daily contact with people living in tents on the streets, in parks, or tucked away in little crannies, trying to survive. My exposure to these people has broken my heart while also expanding my compassion. I have often witnessed the devastating impact, the trauma, of having the police show up to force removal. Yesterday I was at a camp that had received notification that they had to re-locate or they would be forcefully evicted. We were there to try and help people pack up and move to a different site. One of the campers told me his story which I will summarize.

Eight years ago, he was a happily married (he thought), 70 year-old, retired man with financial security. Unexpectedly his wife filed for divorce and in the legal proceeding came out financially advantaged. After 6 years of drawing down limited savings this person was 76, broke and started living in a tent. Last year his small group camp was "swept" by the police without notice, they took all of his camp gear away in a truck, and he was told to pick it up on Garfield Street. When he got there, he discovered that his gear never made it. It was lost forever. He had nothing, literally only the clothes he was wearing. He estimated the value of his possessions lost at \$1,200. Nine months later he has still not recovered his losses.

Imagine the trauma of losing 100% of what you own, your home, your possessions and all of your savings. For our unemployed neighbors living in poverty in tents, this too frequently is their lived experience, often happening several times a year. It destroys potential recovery, accelerates helplessness and hopelessness, disrupts small but sustaining communities, and exacerbates the problem of homelessness. There is no benefit, no potential solution or possible life- improvement offered. Just expanded personal suffering. We can do better.

None of us want to see messy camps in our cities. Solutions will never be simple nor short-term. But we have all come to believe that making it a crime and forcefully removing people from their only homes when they have no alternative place to live in not only a horrible public policy, it is cruel and dehumanizing. That is why I am asking you to strongly support HB 2367. This is not a solution to homelessness, we still need more housing, more services and better access to treatment. But this will protect some of our most vulnerable neighbors, promoting a small degree of social justice and personal wellbeing. It will encourage communities to try different approaches, develop different solutions, perhaps even to provide a small measure of camp supports such as garbage disposal, sanitation and drinking water.

Support compassion and choose kindness. Please support HB 2367.

Bruce Abel, Eugene Oregon