



March 22, 2021

To the House Committee on the Judiciary,

Portland: Neighbors Welcome urges you to support the Oregon Right to Rest Act. We are a grassroots pro-housing, pro-tenant organization and we endorse this important step toward protecting Oregon's houseless neighbors.

The nexus between the lack of availability of market-rate and affordable housing and the criminalization of homelessness is cruel and undeniable. Since 1996, there has been no new federal funding for affordable housing. That leaves decades of disinvestment in our most marginalized communities, resulting in rising homelessness and housing insecurity. It's also nearly impossible to rent an apartment or find a job with a criminal record. The criminalization of homelessness deepens poverty and creates barriers to exiting homelessness. The Legislature has addressed some of these issues in previous bills, namely in HB2724 and SB278, which sought to address systemic barriers to housing like past criminal record, eviction record, or poor credit. The Legislature now has the opportunity to expand protections to those currently homeless.

The Oregon Right to Rest Act is public policy for the very, very poor. Homelessness is a layer of our social fabric that many would like to pretend doesn't exist, or exists by the fault of those who are homeless. We view homelessness as a systemic issue and a failing of our social institutions that we have a collective responsibility to fix.

The Right to Rest Act follows the legal precedent and logic established in the August 2020 Department of Justice ruling *Bell v. Boise*, which stipulates that when shelters are full, it is unconstitutional to penalize homeless people for sleeping outside. In Oregon, many people experiencing homelessness have no access to shelter. This could be due to lack of shelter, as is common in rural communities; shelters are full, as is common in urban communities; or shelters are unsafe for them due to a marginalized identity. This bill ensures those who are homeless are not criminalized for resting in public space.

We urge this committee to pass the Oregon Right to Rest Act, and begin the difficult work of solving our homelessness and housing crisis. We understand the ways housing instability and the criminalization of homeless intersect on a broad spectrum. It's now time to pass common-sense legislation like the Oregon Right to Rest Act and start addressing the injustices that stem from homelessness.

Sincerely,

Portland: Neighbors Welcome