

I am a volunteer care worker in the city of Eugene. Eugene has the highest rate of unhoused residents per capita of any city in the United States, over 2.5 times the national average.

In the time I've spent in the tent communities of Eugene, I've seen my neighbors endure all manner of cruelty and abuse by our city and police. I've seen police demean, intimidate, threaten, and punish people for merely existing in public. Targeting and harassment by police is a daily reality for people living outside. They have to contend with rapid rule changes, rule changes that are never posted or communicated except online (which is of little use when you have no access to the internet), arbitrary enforcement, and a callous, disconnected city and enforcement apparatus that regards the unhoused as a nuisance, when they notice them at all.

I recently helped a camper after Eugene Police gave him a complete ban from all city parks and open spaces for a year. He is a disabled indigenous elder, and he was given 10 minutes to pack and move all of his belongings while police and parks employees stood by, arms folded, next to the flatbed truck that they used to haul everything left to the landfill. He was simply told to leave, without any attempt to provide an alternative camp site or shelter. One of the park employees told me that I should be ashamed of enabling him, while I offered him water and helped him pack his belongings into garbage bags. A ban from park spaces like this nearly guarantees a bad outcome, this person will now be disconnected from the safety of his community and the network of local caregivers. If he chooses to defy the ban, he will likely be arrested, and pulled into the carceral cycle.

Stories like this are common. I have witness countless camps being squashed and hauled away by forklifts and backhoes. I've seen the panic that sets in when the city sweeps a camp, I've seen people lose all of their belongings because they missed the 24-hour window between when a sweep is posted and when it's executed, and I've heard the stories of the damage caused by this endless cycle of harassment, displacement, and fear.

Nearly everyone I speak to in the camps lives in fear of our law enforcement and "park ambassadors". Our current system provides no protection for this vulnerable and rapidly growing segment of our population. Criminalized just for existing, they live a life without many of the basic rights that we take for granted, and this imbalance of power brings out the worst in our law enforcement.

HB2367 is a desperately needed step towards allowing our neighbors to live with greater dignity and less fear. This will help us rebuild the absolutely shattered trust between the unhoused and the city and law enforcement. Nothing gets better without trust.