

- Good afternoon to the members of the Committee. My name is Mahindra Mohan Kumar and I am a former case manager for emergency homeless shelters and a doctoral student at the University of Oregon working on issues related to housing and homelessness. I am also a volunteer advocate with the Springfield Eugene Tenants Association. Thank you for taking up HB 2637 and allowing me time to testify.
- The United States is a wealthy country, yet it is experiencing a national housing crisis. Ten years after the Great Recession and the burst of the housing bubble, many cities in the United States are facing challenges in alleviating the impacts surrounding growing chronically homeless populations. Criminalization of homelessness only serves to punish the folk most disenfranchised by an insufficient social safety net in the state of Oregon.
- Homelessness is often regarded in the public discourse to be the product of individual failure. A growing body of research shows that a lack of affordable housing and stagnant wages are the main causes of homelessness.
- If we have potential answers to some of the root causes of this crisis, I believe that public efforts are better spent directed at engaging in the development of responsive and evidence based strategies which increase access to housing and mental health services.
- With the understanding that such complex issues take time and funding to treat, we should not place the burden of waiting for such structural changes on the most downtrodden members of society. Across Oregon, sweeps of camps for the unhoused are still happening under the guise of “cleanings” or other maintenance.
- If we don’t have enough bed space in a given locale, it is unethical for the state to engage in enforcing “anti-homeless” ordinances which criminalize not only the right to exist, but borders on discrimination of people who carry the status of being unhoused!
- Because of the aforementioned points and in solidarity with the other advocates who have spoken up for those without a fixed abode, I support the passing of HB 2637 because it will be a small step in mitigating the harmful effects that arise from the systematic criminalization of homelessness in the state of Oregon. Thank you for your time.