

May 3, 2021

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, Members of the Committee;

I am writing to you today in support of the passage of HB 3115.

Recently, the City of Medford, located in Jackson County passed a city ordinance that prohibits camping and the right to rest on public land. This ordinance oppresses those who are experiencing homelessness, clogs our local justice system and does not offer an adequate solution to ending homelessness. This ordinance only reiterates the Not in My Backyard (NIMBY) phenomenon, suggesting that if we criminalize those who are experiencing homelessness, we will no longer have the issue in our community. This is clearly not the solution from a humanist, community-oriented perspective.

Only one of the City Council members, Sarah Spansail voted against this ordinance, stating that; “We cannot solve mental health issues, drug dependency issues and physical health issues without first having shelter for people,”... “Unfortunately, this proposal doesn't provide housing and it eliminates the one form of shelter that hundreds of residents have” (Parfitt, 2021). Sarah is correct that the city of Medford does not have adequate resources for our unhoused community members.

Currently the Housing Authority waitlists are anywhere from 2-8 years. Within Medford we have limited shelter resources and no options of warming shelters. Of the few shelter Medford has, many of them have numerous barriers or are consistently at capacity. The Medford Gospel Mission which operates both the women’s and men’s shelter focuses on “Providing Christ-centered restoration” which make services contingent on conforming to their religious views (Medford Gospel Mission, 2021). These two main shelters that NGO’s and other community services providers refer houseless individuals to have changed from short term shelters to 24-month programs, which limit the number of individuals they can care for. The women’s mission also has stopped taking mothers and children and has only focused on single women.

Our other shelter, the Saint Vincent De Paul (SVDP) shelter is the only family shelter located in Medford, has closed its doors, and is not taking in new individuals due to the pandemic. Our only low barrier shelter, meaning no religious commitments and individuals not being turned away due to have marijuana in their system is the Kelly Shelter, which has a waitlist for individuals who are seeking entrance. When these shelters are full, as they regularly are, there are no other options other than for individuals to find space in parks and parking lots.

Residents of Medford who are experiencing homeless need HB 3115 to help them survive, they deserve to be able to get sleep and rest without risk of citations or criminal convictions. As research shows humans need their basic needs met in order to be able to be functioning and contributing members of society. I only share information on Medford’s shelters, to illustrate how important HB 3115 is to the residents of Oregon. HB 3115 will assist our community members to have a layer of support from the State. House Bill 3115 will remind cities like the City of Medford that we need to be community members and offer solutions compared to just contributing to problem. compassionate to all

As a first-generation college student who experienced homelessness myself and now in the process of earning my master's in social work, I have a duty to uphold the values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of a person. To me this means that I need to advocate for those who do not have a platform, those whose voices are consistently muted and shut down. Therefore, I write to you, those who have the ultimate power to change the outcomes for those who are experiencing homelessness and to pass HB 3115. We are all one crisis away from being on the streets (losing our jobs, losing our support network/family, developing addictions, accruing medical bills, natural disasters, etc.) and we should be providing a hand up to those in need, listening to what they need and providing adequate, appropriate solution which I feel that HB 3115 is a good first step in the long battle to eradicating homelessness.

Best regards,

Alexandria Fenimore