

As a Portland resident who has experienced homelessness here a few years ago after losing a job and fleeing an abusive roommate, I strongly support HB 2367. Basic human rights protections for homeless people as outlined in the bill can easily make the difference between someone being able to get into stable housing and/or work or not. Criminalizing homelessness, which is currently the norm, is extremely cruel. Sleeping, eating, lying, sitting, occupying a legally parked vehicle, and other acts of survival should in no way be illegal, especially considering that we are in an affordable housing crisis and that there are far from enough shelter beds for everyone who needs one. Homeless people need to be treated with dignity just like housed people. It is not at all okay that homeless people's possessions, including vital medications, identification papers, and survival gear, are often seized in sweeps and destroyed, lost, or not able to be returned. It is awful when police harass and arrest homeless people just for being unhoused, further traumatizing them and getting them caught up in the legal system with charges and fines they can't afford. If we truly want homeless people to get off the streets, then the current approaches to managing homelessness must be recognized as cruel and counterproductive. We need to support homeless people in meeting their basic human needs of sleep, water, food, hygiene, and healthcare (including mental healthcare and addiction treatment for those who need them), and we need to make their lives as free from abuse, violence, human rights violations, and hardships as possible. People don't choose to be homeless unless in their particular situation, staying in housing is worse for them. No one should be forced to live on the streets without access to adequate shelter. No one should be priced out of housing, a basic human need. Yet, as long as there are homeless people, then we need our systems to help them survive and protect their basic rights and freedoms, not torture and/or kill them. Ending inhumane policies and supporting our homeless neighbors is worth it morally, socially, and financially--it is actually cheaper to house homeless people in supportive housing than it is to have them be chronically homeless in our current system. (See studies such as this one: <https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article-abstract/47/5/1534/2622376>.) Please, if you have a heart for your fellow humans, if you want to help end institutional racism and social inequities, and if you want to save huge amounts of taxpayer money currently wasted on subjecting homeless folks to a cycle of cruel sweeps, incarceration, etc., then please start by pass HB 2367, a vital piece of legislation.

Thank you,
Mr. Phoenix Oaks