

Submitter: Jordan Olson
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness
Measure: HB2001

Chair Dexter, Vice-Chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jordan and I live in Portland, Oregon. I am an Oregon renter submitting testimony in favor of HB 2001 to help people avoid homelessness and give more people who are living unsheltered the opportunity for safe and stable housing.

I have more friends who are or have been homeless, than friends who have never been homeless. This is just how it is in the transgender community. While this bill cannot and will not completely address the structural factors which cause this to be the case, it will reduce the number of people who end up on the streets in our state. This will make more resources available for all people, cis or trans, who become homeless or housing insecure in Oregon. In the midst of a historic housing crisis, this is a small but necessary step, of many we must take together along this path, to abolish homelessness by enshrining housing as a human right and foundational liberty.

It is not possible to speak meaningfully of American values like the right to the pursuit of happiness, when we legally protect the right of private equity firms and slumlords to keep rents high and real estate properties vacant in the pursuit of rent seeking, resale profits, tax writeoffs, but do not protect the right of the poorest people among us to shelter from the horrors and abuses they suffer daily, inside those very same vacant buildings.

What kind of happiness can be pursued, when you have no stable home to rest within? Only a weary shadow of what happiness there could be, defiant against a soulless normativity that prizes abstract quantities of currency, more than it prizes humanity. Each day lived in the streets, is a victory against a deeply corrupted state of affairs. Each day, however-- people die out here.

Even more disturbing a question, however, is: what kind of happiness, is pursued by depriving others of their homes? Does it not cheapen the luxuries that are thereby enjoyed? Does it not deprive us all of our public morals, replacing in their stead the utter depravity inherent to such avarice? Can we speak of even being a community at all, when even one among us wanders our very streets, gazing at shuttered doors, passing by storefronts with luxury goods they cannot touch, combing wastebaskets to find food?

Can we speak of ourselves even being human beings, when we knowingly allow not just one person, but TENS OF THOUSANDS, to walk the streets of Oregon thusly?

This is a moral catastrophe that defies comprehension. And it is a choice. We have more than the requisite resources needed to change this, but instead we hesitate over half and quarter measures.

Oregon voters recently chose by a significant margin to amend our constitution to state explicitly that access to healthcare is a fundamental right of all Oregonians, and that it is fundamental responsibility of the state of Oregon to ensure Oregonians can exercise and enjoy this right.

One day, Oregon's constitution will recognize that the right to shelter-- that is to say, the right to be free from the spectre, the fear of and the violence inherent to homelessness-- is just as fundamental as any other basic freedom.

It will be bills like HB 2001, which will help us approach the Great Society which we are destined to become. It will be the voting rosters of this Legislature that will record for the annals of our history, who stood with the cold, the hungry, the tired masses yearning to be free-- and, of course, those who chose to turn away, those who averted their eyes from us, and those who chose to accumulate profits from the tyrannical, brutal despotism that is poverty in America.

Consider carefully, then, who you shall be counted among.

Thank you for hearing this important bill and for considering my testimony. I hope you will listen to people like me and vote yes on HB 2001.