

Submitter: Eric Miller

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure: HB3501

I am submitting this testimony in opposition to HB3501. All Oregonians deserve shelter, healthcare, and decent treatment from their fellow citizens and the state. In theory I understand this is what bills like HB3501 are intended to do. But the truth is that these measures are counterproductive. The reality is that many homeless individuals are struggling with mental health, addiction, and other health issues and our current hands-off approaches to providing care don't work for these individuals or the communities they live in.

Compassion means helping people, and good governance means measurable progress helping people. Our public sector needs to acknowledge what doesn't work and make the hard choices necessary to make demonstrable progress getting people off the street and in a healthier place in life. Right now it's obvious we need to start making hard decisions and making significant investments in Oregon's mental health and drug treatment programs. It's shameful that we're often ranked last in the nation for availability of care, and that's a clear responsibility of Oregon's legislature to fix. It also means addressing our involuntary commitment laws so that people who are in no mental state to make sound decisions can be humanely engaged in treatment, even if that's not what they'd prefer at present.

Or to put it more personally: in the past year I've personally engaged with individuals at my home and at work who were clearly experiencing mental health and addiction issues. In one case they threatened violence and declined help from Portland Street Response. Is it humane to leave this person outside and their conditions untreated? Is it sustainable to have these people suffer outside for years, committing minor crimes and threatening their neighbors as they fight a losing battle against addiction? Our Legislature needs to stop making excuses and start making the investments in programs that will show meaningful improvement in care and outcomes.

It's time for the state to do the hard work, make pragmatic choices, and invest in better care.

Thanks for your consideration.