

Submitter: Eric Swett

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure: HB3501

House Bill 3501 ("Relating to rights of persons experiencing homelessness") would deprive local and state governments of tools necessary to regulate unsanctioned camping in Portland and other Oregon communities.

The current crisis afflicting Portland and other cities in this country is the result of decades of misguided political and social policies. I have traveled all over the world, including in South Asia, Latin America and in sub-Saharan Africa. I have never seen human misery like what one sees in the homeless encampments in Portland, with drug-addled and psychotic people living in filthy and dangerous conditions. Handing out tents and tarps has not solved the issue, and neither has well-intentioned hand-wringing.

Making it easier to camp in unsanctioned locations, and limiting local governments' ability to address the issue, isn't going to solve anything. It will simply further normalize squalor in the heart of our communities. Our still-lovely and once-vibrant Portland urban center is becoming a showcase for urban decay and street crime.

We encourage the House to focus on addressing the underlying causes of the current crisis: substance addiction, mental illness, lack of education, social fragmentation and disengagement, to name just a few. We need robust and humane evidence-based policies designed to work in the real world, not policies reflecting this week's political pieties, virtue signaling and political branding.

There is nothing inconsistent about cleaning up our streets and making them livable and safe again, and getting people the help they need in terms of addiction treatment, mental health treatments, and other support. Encouraging unsanctioned camping, as House Bill 3501 would do, is self-defeating and will make our communities worse, not better.

Respectfully Submitted