

Testimony in Opposition to SB 1514

Chair Meek, Vice-Chair Drazan, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dan Bryant and I am writing on behalf of SquareOne Villages (SOV) in opposition to SB 1514 and its amendments, all of which would roll back the current state law requiring that local ordinances regulating camping must be reasonable.

SOV is known in our state for its innovative approach to providing shelter for the unhoused in addition to our model of housing co-ops. We began our non-profit in 2013 with a village of 30 small huts for unhoused adults and have served over 300 individuals since then. Prior to that, I was the pastor of a downtown congregation that provided shelter for over 150 people in our parking lot (using 3 RVs) for nearly 20 years in addition to serving breakfast to approximately 300 people every Sunday morning for much of that time. I have also been a regular volunteer in our community's warming centers. Through all of that work, I have come to great appreciation for the struggles of the unhoused and the difficulties they face to survive on the street. I also know how extremely difficult it is to get housing once you have lost it, regardless for how hard you try.

The data is clear. The number one cause of homelessness is the cost of housing, period. The result of SB 1514, no matter how well intended, will be to criminalize activity that is unavoidable for most of the unhoused when there are no other options available to them. Every human being needs to sleep and when there are four times as many unhoused as there are shelter beds, then the only choice for those without shelter is to sleep somewhere not intended for that purpose. Addressing that shortage needs to be our focus, not erecting more barriers that further limit the options unhoused people face. When we make enforcement our primary means of dealing with the unhoused, all we accomplish is increasing costs to our jails and courts and more hurdles for the unhoused to jump when they literally carry everything they own on their back.

We have a good state law in ORS 195.530 which provides a clear framework for reasonable limitations that cities can put in place to prohibit camping where it is unsafe or otherwise unreasonable. Changing that law and the guidelines around time, place and manner to regulate public camping will do nothing to decrease homelessness and instead will only add to the burdens the unhoused already carry. Worse, undoing the current standards likely will have the consequence of driving many of the unhoused underground, seeking shelter in places that are less safe and potentially more harmful to the environment and further from the services they need to survive.

I encourage legislators to not rollback or repeal the state law on camping and to retain the current provisions which allow for reasonable regulations around public spaces while also making it easier to deliver effective assistance for our unhoused community members.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Bryant".

Dan Bryant
Director of Public Advocacy
SquareOne Villages