

Submitter: George Schweitzer
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Commerce and General Government
Measure, Appointment or SB1514
Topic:

Testimony in Support of SB 1514

Senate Committee on Commerce and Government

Honorable Chair Meek and Members of the Committee,
My name is George Schweitzer. I work for West Coast Hospitality which owns and operates The Benson Hotel in Portland. We also manage hotels in Salem, Independence and Dundee, OR and I am writing today in strong support of SB 1514. Let me begin by saying this clearly: homelessness is a humanitarian crisis. The individuals living unsheltered in our communities are human beings facing complex challenges from mental health issues, addiction, job loss, family breakdown, to lack of affordable housing. Compassion must always be part of the solution.

But compassion and clarity in law are not mutually exclusive. In fact, effective compassion requires workable policy.

In 2021, the Legislature codified HB 3115 in response to the federal court ruling in Martin v. Boise. That decision has since been overturned by the United States Supreme Court in Grants Pass v. Johnson. Yet HB 3115 remains on the books in Oregon, leaving local governments operating under a framework based on an outdated legal standard.

The result has been confusion, litigation risk, and paralysis at the local level. Cities are unsure what enforcement tools they can legally use. Law enforcement officers are hesitant to act. Municipal staff are caught between public safety concerns and the risk of being sued. The practical effect is that unsanctioned camping often persists for days or even weeks in parks, sidewalks, and public spaces before any action can be taken.

As a hotel operator, I see the downstream effects directly.

We have had meeting planners and group organizers decline to bring conferences and events to our properties because of visible and unmanaged encampments near hotels and downtown corridors. That means lost business not only for hotels, but also for restaurants, retailers, and local employees whose hours and tips depend on tourism and group travel.

In some instances, individuals have pitched tents directly across the street from our hotels (Portland in particular). Under the current legal framework, it can take multiple days—or longer—before the situation is addressed. During that time, guests question their safety, employees feel uncomfortable arriving to work, and our community's reputation suffers.

This is not about criminalizing homelessness. It is about restoring the ability of local

governments to manage public spaces in a humane, orderly, and predictable way. The drivers of homelessness are not identical across Oregon. The challenges in Portland differ from those in smaller rural communities. Local officials understand their own shelter capacity, law enforcement resources, and service networks. They are accountable to their residents. They should have the authority to respond accordingly.

SB 1514 does not eliminate compassion. It restores local control. It returns the law to its pre-2021 structure and provides needed clarity so cities can balance:

Public health and safety

Access to parks and sidewalks for all residents

The needs of businesses and workers

And the dignity of those experiencing homelessness

When local governments lack workable tools, everyone suffers, including those living unsheltered, who remain in unstable and often unsafe conditions.

Repealing HB 3115 gives communities the flexibility to craft solutions that reflect local values while maintaining humane standards. It removes uncertainty and allows cities to move from paralysis to action.

I respectfully urge this Committee to support SB 1514 and restore clarity and local authority in addressing unsanctioned public camping.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

George