

Brian Bouteller

Grants Pass Gospel Rescue Mission
Grants Pass, Oregon

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Brian Bouteller, and I have served at the Grants Pass Gospel Rescue Mission for sixteen years. During that time, I have worked directly with hundreds of individuals experiencing homelessness in Josephine County. I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 1514 and to urge the repeal of HB 3115.

I speak today from front-line experience serving people in crisis, not from theory or ideology. I know the individuals behind the statistics. I have walked with men and women through addiction recovery, job training, housing placement, and long-term stability. Because of this direct experience, I can say without hesitation that HB 3115 has caused measurable harm — both to those experiencing homelessness and to the communities trying to serve them.

Each year, the Grants Pass Gospel Rescue Mission serves between 300 and 400 individuals. Approximately 30% of the individuals who engage in our programs successfully obtain full-time employment and permanent housing. Among those who graduate from our structured recovery and stabilization programs, fewer than 5% ever return to homelessness services. Long-term follow-up and community contact strongly indicate that more than 95% of our graduates remain stably employed and housed years after leaving our program.

These outcomes are not accidental. They occur because successful transitions out of homelessness require structure, accountability, community support, and access to services working together. Policies that remove structure without increasing service engagement do not reduce homelessness — they prolong it.

HB 3115 imposed a one-size-fits-all policy across communities with vastly different needs, capacities, and challenges. Homelessness is a local issue requiring local solutions. The drivers of homelessness in Portland are not the same as those in Grants Pass, Prineville, or many rural communities across Oregon. Yet HB 3115 stripped local leaders of the ability to respond according to their community's realities and replaced local judgment with a rigid statewide mandate.

Even more troubling, HB 3115 was built upon legal precedent that no longer exists. The law was enacted to codify the Ninth Circuit decision in *Martin v. City of Boise*. That precedent was overturned by the United States Supreme Court in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*. Oregon is now enforcing a statutory framework that the highest court in the nation has rejected. Maintaining HB 3115 places Oregon outside the mainstream of national policy and outside clear federal legal guidance.

The practical consequences have been severe and predictable.

The “objectively reasonable” standard established by HB 3115 is vague, inconsistently interpreted, and nearly impossible for local governments to confidently apply. Rather than providing guardrails, the law has created a constant threat of litigation that has effectively paralyzed communities attempting to address unsanctioned public camping. Cities are forced to navigate public safety, sanitation, and humanitarian concerns while operating under legal ambiguity that discourages decisive action.

From my vantage point in Grants Pass, HB 3115 has directly contributed to the expansion of unmanaged public camping, increased health and safety risks for unsheltered individuals, and made coordinated outreach more difficult. When public camping becomes normalized without clear standards, individuals often remain disconnected from services that could help them transition toward stability. In effect, HB 3115 has unintentionally incentivized environments that prolong homelessness rather than resolve it.

It is critical to state clearly that repealing HB 3115 does not criminalize homelessness. Repeal does not create new penalties or expand enforcement authority. It simply restores the ability of local governments to adopt clear, enforceable public camping ordinances that reflect the needs, values, and service capacity of their communities. Local leaders are best positioned to balance compassion, public safety, and service accessibility.

Oregon has made significant financial investments in housing and homelessness over the past several legislative sessions. Those investments demonstrate sincere commitment. However, it is increasingly clear that funding alone cannot solve this crisis. Local governments must also have the policy tools necessary to support service engagement, maintain safe public spaces, and implement community-specific strategies.

Continuing to maintain HB 3115 despite clear evidence of its failures risks prioritizing ideology over outcomes. The individuals experiencing homelessness deserve policies that actually help them achieve stability and independence, not policies that leave them in unsafe and unstable conditions.

SB 1514 represents a responsible course correction. It restores local control, provides long-overdue legal clarity, and brings Oregon into alignment with the other 49 states. It allows communities to implement balanced approaches that combine compassion with accountability and services with structure.

If the Legislature does not act, this issue will almost certainly be decided by voters through a statewide ballot measure in November 2026. I strongly encourage the Legislature to demonstrate leadership by addressing this issue thoughtfully and proactively by passing SB 1514.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your commitment to addressing homelessness in Oregon.

Respectfully,
Brian Bouteller