

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

Dear Oregon Senate Committee on Commerce and General Government,

I am writing in unequivocal opposition to SB 1514. This bill would strip away the essential “objective reasonableness” standards that currently protect unhoused Oregonians from arbitrary, destabilizing, and often traumatic encampment sweeps. Weakening these safeguards is not only harmful policy—it is inhumane, counterproductive, and a serious erosion of civil rights.

Encampment sweeps conducted without meaningful standards do not resolve homelessness. They confiscate and destroy survival gear, medications, identification documents, and irreplaceable personal belongings. They destabilize individuals who are working toward housing, employment, or recovery. They interrupt outreach relationships and sever connections to service providers. Removing the objective reasonableness requirement invites enforcement practices that are punitive rather than solutions-oriented, and it disproportionately harms people with disabilities, mental health conditions, and chronic health issues.

Through organizations such as Ground Score Association, I have seen how unhoused Portlanders contribute meaningfully to our city when given opportunity instead of punishment. Ground Score’s low-barrier employment programs—including the G.L.I.T.T.E.R. (litter and tentside waste collection) initiative—create income, community accountability, and cleaner neighborhoods. Participants are paid for stewardship work that benefits the broader public. Sweeps undermine these efforts by scattering workers, destroying tentside storage systems, and forcing people into crisis mode instead of stability.

At Hygiene 4 All, a hygiene hub operating under the Morrison Bridge, unsheltered residents access hot showers, clean clothing, wound care supplies, and a safe, welcoming space. Staff members with lived experience of homelessness provide harm reduction and peer support grounded in dignity. Sweeps directly counteract this work by pushing people farther from sanitation access, increasing public health risks, and compounding trauma.

The Welcome Home Coalition’s “Finding Home” report—based on input from more than 650 people experiencing homelessness—makes clear that the overwhelming majority want stable, affordable housing. Respondents prioritized rental assistance, safe apartments or homes, and the ability to remain with loved ones. This data

directly contradicts narratives suggesting people prefer encampments. The barrier is affordability and access—not willingness.

SB 1514 shifts the focus away from proven housing-first strategies and toward expanded enforcement. In the midst of Oregon's housing crisis, this is a dangerous step backward. When governments remove guardrails like objective reasonableness, they increase the risk of constitutional violations involving due process, unlawful seizure of property, and discrimination against people with disabilities. Civil rights do not disappear when someone loses housing.

We need policies that expand affordable housing, strengthen eviction prevention, fund rental assistance, and invest in culturally responsive outreach—not measures that intensify displacement. Sweeps without strong standards fracture fragile stability, deepen mistrust of public institutions, and perpetuate cycles of homelessness at significant human and financial cost.

SB 1514 is not a solution. It is an escalation of harm.

I urge you to reject this bill and instead champion humane, evidence-based approaches that uphold dignity, civil rights, and long-term stability for all Oregonians.

Respectfully,

Heaven Merritt
Community Advocate, GSA Coordinator
Portland, Oregon