



March 10, 2015

To: Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood:

The Honorable Sara Gelsler, Chair
The Honorable Alan Olsen, Vice-Chair
The Honorable Michael Dembrow

The Honorable Laurie Monnes Anderson
The Honorable Jeff Kruse

Re: Concerns regarding Senate Bill 0629

On behalf of nearly 1,000 members of the Oregon Recreation and Park Association (ORPA), including park and recreation agencies, professionals, and volunteers, we are writing to express concern about Senate Bill 0629, the proposed "Right to Rest" legislation.

Park and recreation agencies are committed to providing parks and recreation services to *all* citizens. In fact, our annual state conference theme for 2015 is "Parks and Recreation for All: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion." Virtually all park and recreation agencies routinely – and deliberately – serve low-income populations and other socio-economically disadvantaged groups through after-school care, distribution of free and subsidized meals, and scholarships or fee waivers for citizens who might not have the ability to pay for recreational programs.

In addition, the topic of homelessness in parks has been a standing discussion item with ORPA's Administration Special Interest Section since 2013. Park and recreation agency leaders will gather in early April in Bend to discuss common concerns and to share positive solutions regarding parks and homeless individuals. We in Oregon are blessed to have a variety of wonderful public spaces, many of which include parks and other public facilities that are managed by municipal, county, regional, special district, and state parks and recreation agencies. These agencies often are one of the "first lines" of government to encounter homeless individuals. Oregon's Park and Recreation agencies have been interfacing with the homeless and apparently homeless populations for many years. In many cases, rangers and park personnel are trained to direct individuals who may be homeless to shelters and other social service resources available in the community in an attempt ensure that these individuals are able to get the support and help that they need. Some park and recreation agencies also support food distribution stations in parks and open their shower facilities to those in need at no charge.

Within that context, we certainly understand the spirit and intent to of SB 0629 to prevent discrimination against homeless individuals and families – a very worthy effort. However, we respectfully submit that this enormous challenge would be better addressed by a systematic strengthening of the social services net in Oregon. As with any type of public service, it is a challenge to serve every public need or demand of our park and recreation agencies with the limited amount of public funding and staffing resources available. While our parks serve many important public functions, they aren't necessarily the right vehicle to lessen homelessness or even necessarily to shelter those without housing. Simply put, this measure has the potential to over-tax limited park maintenance budgets and to create more of a stop-gap solution on homeless issues and needs rather than a comprehensive and systematic solution to this pressing concern.

We appreciate the need to address the issues that underlie SB 0629 and welcome the opportunity to participate in a work group that might examine ways to reduce homelessness.

Thank you for your consideration, and please feel free to contact either of us or Cindy Robert, ORPA's lobbyist, if we may offer any additional information to the Committee.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Redman, Executive Director

Don Horton, Legislative Committee Chair