

March 11, 2015

Dear Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood:

Senator Sara Gelser, Chair  
Senator Michael Dembrow  
Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson  
Senator Alan Olsen  
Senator Jeff Kruse

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Re: SB 629 Oregon Right to Rest Act

My name is Sharon Konopa, Mayor of Albany and I have been a member of the Albany City Council for over eighteen years.

You rarely see me here in front of you, yet I live only a half hour away from the Capitol. But, when there is an issue that affects my hometown and past homeless advocacy efforts, I need to come to express my concern.

In my experience with social service programs, SB629 would enable homeless individuals to continue their lifestyle and would be a hindrance to move them towards self-sufficiency and into housing.

I have advocated strongly for the past ten years to have programs and social service agencies collaborate to reduce the number of homeless persons. Former Governor Ted Kulongoski encouraged Oregon counties to establish 10-year plans to address homelessness and Albany followed that lead.

If you are thinking, "Oh, this lady just doesn't want any homeless people in her town," you do not know me personally.

In 2006, Albany shut down a homeless camp that had been in place on city property for 40 years. I took it upon myself to help these homeless campers by driving them in my car to get clean and presentable in order to seek jobs and housing. I learned a lot about the lifestyle of a homeless person during this time, and what layers it takes for them to try to become self-sufficient. I had to convince several persons to turn themselves in to law enforcement, as they had pending warrants. They trusted me and allowed me to take them to the county jail. Many people experiencing homelessness just need some support and guidance in life.

In 2008, I co-chaired Linn County's 10 Year Homeless Plan Committee and continue to be on the homeless plan oversight committee. Albany also coordinated with Benton County's Homeless Plan, since Albany is the second largest city in Benton County. Our community strives to make sure that agency and program services don't overlap so our limited resources can be more effective.

Albany's goal is to get people into housing and to not maintain their lifestyle of homelessness. We want to be truly of service to the homeless, by putting a roof over their heads. But, it can be extremely challenging to get a person who is homeless to accept a social service program. This Senate bill would be a huge hindrance to many homeless advocates'

efforts to help someone move towards housing. An example: in Albany, at the former camp I mentioned, some people had lived there for 15 years; why should they seek a job and housing when their lifestyle is allowed in public places? A person who is homeless has a fulltime job just to maintain that homeless lifestyle.

Every citizen should have a real dwelling. That should be the Number One focus and, I would hope, our state's goal. Can anyone conscientiously believe this bill would benefit a homeless person? Why would anyone want to encourage someone to live outdoors, some of them with pets, and subject them to the weather? Does anyone believe they are not causing harm to this person if this bill moves forward?

Please support homeless individuals by supporting social service agency programs that truly help the homeless. By voting no on this bill you will be helping the homeless.

Thank you for your service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Konopa', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sharon Konopa  
Mayor of Albany