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March 10, 2015

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood

Re: In support of SB 629 – Right to Rest Act

Dear Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee:

I write on behalf of the Oregon Opportunity Network in support of SB 629, the Right to Rest Act. Oregon ON is a statewide association of affordable housing and community development nonprofits, community action agencies, and public housing authorities. Oregon ON and many of our member organizations are also members of the Housing Alliance. Oregon ON member organizations provide housing and economic opportunity for working families, people with disabilities, seniors and others struggling to meet their needs in communities throughout Oregon.

As you know, across Oregon housing costs continue to rise, vacancy rates are at all-time lows, and too many families are locked out of the market. Too many children, veterans, seniors and other vulnerable Oregonians are in need of a safe, decent place to call home.

We support SB 629 because it would end the criminalization of rest and accompanying violations of basic human and civil rights for all people, regardless of their housing status. Specifically, it will end the vicious and ineffective cycle of creating criminal records for people via “resting in public space” citations, which then makes it difficult if not impossible for them to rent a home.

By acknowledging the failure of municipal laws that criminalize poverty and homelessness, we hope that passage of this legislation will turn the focus toward more humane and effective responses to homelessness. At a time when Oregon is failing to fulfill our shared value that everyone deserves a safe, decent place to call home – in particular, when 20,000 Oregon schoolchildren are experiencing homelessness – we need to stop criminalizing homelessness and redouble our efforts to support our most vulnerable neighbors.

We urge you to support SB 629. Thank you very much for your consideration, and always for your service to Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Miller'.

John Miller
Executive Director