

April 21, 2015

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood
Re: Support of SB 629

Dear Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of SB 629, the Right to Rest Bill.

Homelessness is such a difficult problem. The sight of abject poverty in our midst is perceived by many as a blight upon our everyday world.

But this 'blight' is actually composed of people, human beings. They may be young people escaping difficult situations at home, or women seeking refuge from domestic violence; individuals with disabilities including mental illness, substance abuse, physical disabilities or other chronic health conditions; veterans struggling with PTSD; minimum wage workers who cannot afford housing; and, down-on-their-luck families with children. Last year in Oregon, 20,000 school age children experienced homelessness.

I am in support of the Right to Rest bill because I am in support of human rights. It is a basic human survival need to rest and sleep. People without houses or apartments to live in have no choice but to meet those needs in public spaces.

But I am also in support of SB 629 because laws that in any way criminalize homelessness can only fail. They seek to remove these individuals from our sight, but they do not work because the homeless have nowhere to go. They can only be removed temporarily, appearing at another location deemed illegal. Laws that criminalize the right of homeless individuals to rest in public can never solve the problem.

We all know that the real problem is that there is a lack of sufficient safe and affordable housing for all people. And in the short term, right now there are insufficient shelter beds for people without a place to rest.

The sight of homeless poor people in our midst is a problem. Let us recognize this as a community problem that can be remedied with committed collaborative effort. Let us not further burden the desperate individuals with limited choices who make up the homeless. I urge you to vote yes for SB 629, the Right to Rest bill, so we can begin to move forward with positive and workable solutions.

Sincerely,

Susan Madar
Commissioner, Elders in Action
Chair, Housing Committee
Portland, Oregon

Member, Safety Off the Streets Subgroup
A Home For Everyone
Multnomah County