

Chairwoman McLain, Vice-Chairs Meek and Vial and Members of the House Committee on Transportation Policy:

I write to you today with regards to my support for HB 4054. I live in Portland on NE Clackamas St. There are two ODOT properties on the borders of our neighborhood. One is located on the west side of NE 33rd Street where Clackamas St. dead ends because of the freeway offramp (referred to herein as the "Clackamas Property"). The other ODOT property abuts Halsey Street (referred to herein as the "Halsey Property"), which is parallel to Clackamas to the North. The Halsey Property slopes down from Halsey to I-84 and is located to the east of the Clackamas Property.

Our neighborhood has seen first hand that a policy that permits camping on these ODOT properties is not safe to those camping on the properties nor to those who neighbor the properties. I've attached a photo from April of last year showing a fire which took place on the Clackamas Property as a result of one of the campers using a propane burner in their tent. Fortunately, no one was hurt and the overhead trees did not catch fire. Unfortunately, this sort of unsafe situation is not atypical.

I have also attached two photos from a camp on the Halsey Property last week. The first photo was taken from I-84 looking south and up the hill to Halsey Street. The second photo is looking east towards the end of Halsey Street. As is fairly typical for encampments on this property, as more people camp on the property, they start to spill onto Halsey Street. It is not uncommon to find trash and hypodermic needles on Halsey Street months after campers have left. Among the residents who live across the street from the property are a young girl who lives with her parents and grandmother, who has resided on the property since the 1940's. The neighborhood is a mix of young families and elderly people who have lived in the neighborhood for many decades.

Sadly, criminals have taken advantage of the ad hoc camping situation, victimizing other campers and neighboring residents. When ODOT evicted campers from the Clackamas Property and Halsey Property this past fall, among the individuals found on the properties was a fugitive wanted for driving a getaway car in an armed robbery. Similar instances have been discovered when police have investigated camping on other ODOT properties. We cannot allow our concern for the homeless to result in ad hoc camps becoming sanctuaries for criminals.

I am not unsympathetic to those impacted by the housing shortage in Portland, but having camping on ODOT properties is not a safe or appropriate alternative to providing more permanent housing or, at a minimum, providing campgrounds that have the necessary services to support camping. Ad hoc camping without proper bathrooms and waste disposal is a health hazard to campers and their neighbors alike. Other cities have already seen outbreaks of hepatitis and other diseases as a result of these unsanitary conditions. This ignores the lack of additional social services that an appropriate alternative would include--addiction services and mental health services in particular. If we are truly going to consider the human rights of the homeless, then we owe it to them not to simply ignore them literally along the side of the road and instead to attempt to address their unmet needs whether those needs are as simple as assisting them to get back on their feet and find permanent housing and, as needed a job, or whether those needs are more involved such as mental health and addiction issues.

I believe HB 4054 is a good attempt at eliminating the unsafe and unsanitary conditions in ad hoc camps and getting homeless individuals the help they need from service organizations by attempting to more quickly transition people from ad hoc camps to longer term housing. There are more things that can and should be done, but this is a good start.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Victor Roehm





