

Too often people unfairly assume that everyone who ends up homeless does so because, "they are not trying hard enough." We see the homeless population as a monolith and it is too easy to make assumptions about a persons character and worthiness when we don't know their individual stories. The underlying cause of homelessness is a lack of affordable housing. Beyond that fact there are a million individual reasons why people fall through the cracks and can't get back on their feet.

I work with a charity that provides services to homeless people in the Portland area. I've heard many people's stories of trying to make it off of the street. One of the biggest challenges is the constant instability. The inability to even get a good nights rest or even have a safe place to leave your things while you run errands. The way that sweeps work now further destabilizes people who are already living in precarious situations, with nothing to fall back on, and exacerbates the problem of homelessness.

I know there are valid concerns about safety, and garbage and theft that must be addressed. But, none of these issues are insurmountable. Continuing to criminalize homeless people for existing in public space is not reducing homelessness, its not making anyone safer, or preventing garbage or theft. The current sweeps just move the problem down the road - literally just down the road a couple of blocks. I serve homeless camps and we see about a 4 month interval between a camp being cleared and a new one springing up in its place. The current approach is inhumane, but also ineffective and too expensive for the few results it produces.

Please consider supporting this bill, and other legislation that changes our approach to dealing with homelessness. The economic fall out of the pandemic, wildfires and increasingly expensive, and limited, housing stock means that the number of homeless people in our state is not going to decrease without some different approaches. This bill is a start. Please support your homeless neighbors' rights to a more stable, safe and supported living environment.