



HOUSING SENIORS | CREATING HOPE | PILOTING CHANGE

March 10, 2021

Members of the House Committee on Judiciary
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 3115

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chair Noble, Vice-Chair Power, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony on behalf of Northwest Pilot Project, in support of HB 3115.

Northwest Pilot Project is a nonprofit social service agency that serves people aged 55 and older experiencing housing instability and homelessness in Multnomah County. We work to end homelessness for low income seniors, who are among the fastest growing segment of the population experiencing homelessness.

NWPP believes that law enforcement is not a viable solution to homelessness. In fact, as a provider of housing stabilization services for over 50 years, we have witnessed firsthand how responding to survival activities such as camping, sleeping, or lying down on public property with threats of arrest or violence only worsens the trauma and negative impacts of unsheltered homelessness on vulnerable individuals and community as a whole. Even just one arrest or citation can have a highly destructive “domino effect” for a person experiencing homelessness by creating new barriers to re-entering stable housing and compounding existing challenges.

Local ordinances that ban camping or sleeping outside are not only harmful to those who have no other option to meet the basic human need for rest, but also ineffective in ensuring safety in public spaces. To create real community safety, local jurisdictions must have policies that take into account all stakeholders, especially residents experiencing housing instability and homelessness, and they must take actionable steps to address the lack of sufficient resources to address the underlying causes of homelessness.

Due to structural racism, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities are disproportionately represented among the many vulnerable seniors we serve as well as in the overall population experiencing homelessness in Multnomah County. We know this overrepresentation is one of many long-term effects of profound injustices and systemic racism in public policy. BIPOC households also experience the most severe impacts of racial bias and discrimination in policing and the criminal justice system, thus amplifying the potential for harm in policies that attempt to manage public space through the criminalization of survival behaviors linked to homelessness.

It is urgent that local governments revisit ordinances that regulate or prohibit the ability for people experiencing homelessness to rest or seek shelter in public spaces, and ensure that these policies are reasonable and take into account the needs of the most vulnerable members of the community.

NWPP would like to share our appreciation for Oregon Law Center and League of Oregon Cities for their work on this bill. We urge this committee to support HB 3115.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Marisa Espinoza
Public Policy Coordinator
Northwest Pilot Project