

According to an article published by Oregon Quarterly, 130 Lane County residents become unhoused each month. Eugene city officials routinely perform what are known as sweeps, where they go to unofficial unhoused encampments and tell everyone residing there that they have 24 hours to move. These individuals carry with them all of their belongings and often end up having to leave things behind as they are rushed out. In March, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the CDC set guidelines that suspended the city of Eugene's enforcement of illegal camping. This was seemingly beneficial to the unhoused community, as it provided some stability rather than having to constantly move around. By June of 2020, regardless of CDC guidelines, regular enforcement of camping limitations returned. This enforcement continued throughout Summer and most of Fall in Eugene, but as Winter approached, local organizations began to voice concern for those living outside.

There are a number of organizations in Eugene, Oregon founded to help the unhoused community with medical needs, provide food, shelter, and clothing, and crisis management. These organizations also frequently advocate for unhoused individuals and communities to city officials and other government entities. Occupy Medical, White Bird Clinic, and Cahoots are examples of local organizations that have worked with the unhoused population throughout the duration of the pandemic. "On Dec. 14, nine local nonprofit organizations including Eugene Catholic Workers, Carry it Forward, Occupy Medical and White Bird Clinic penned an open letter asking the city to follow CDC guidance, cease removing camps and begin identifying places where people could shelter in place." (Talesnick, 23 Jan 2021) It is now claimed by Eugene City Officials that urban camping is still allowed as long as the encampments meet criteria set by the city. The list, however, has eighteen criteria points that must be met to avoid eviction of a camping site. Some examples of rules include: The encampments may not be within 50 feet of private property or within 300 feet of playgrounds, sports courts, park shelters, picnic shelters. Another example of a criteria that must be met by existing camps includes, "Camp is safe with no evidence of conspicuous drug use. Uncapped, used, or hypodermic needles or other paraphernalia that could be a health hazard to other community members are not permitted." The regulations currently set for unhoused encampments create an unstable environment for unhoused individuals and members of the community involved with the community. Considering the opioid epidemic of our country and within this community and high addiction rates in homeless populations, this rule seems unrealistic. Furthermore, the criteria requiring camps to be "clean and healthy spaces with no significant garbage or debris". is subjective in nature and would allow for the removal of camps based on the opinion of someone who may be biased.

The continuous eviction and disregard for the unhoused community in Lane County impedes healing, exacerbates chronic conditions, and is generally unhealthy for the community as a whole. To promote the well-being of unhoused persons, I respectfully ask Chair and Members of the Committee to vote yes in support of House Bill 2367.