

My husband and I have advocated for and worked within the low-income housing community for our entire careers. We have no interest in victimizing the disenfranchised. We want them to be safe, appropriately treated, and respected. This bill does not accomplish that.

We have had an increase of homelessness in our neighborhood in the last five years. This has been terrible for the neighborhood. We can not even begin to keep up with the garbage and we have had to buy several sharps containers. We have moderate-income black neighbors who are repeatedly having their homes vandalized (one of them had 3 incidences in the last year). They (and we) see people urinating on a regular basis. Amongst us, we have had more instances of human feces in our yards than we can count. This is no longer a safe place to raise a child. This neighborhood has low-income housing for seniors and people with disabilities. The neighborhood is well-integrated with the residents of low-income housing and we support each other in multiple ways. It is difficult for people with disabilities to get around the neighborhood because some sidewalks are completely blocked by tents and garbage. My husband and I, both over 65, have been physically threatened when we respectfully told people they could not be in our back yard digging through the garbage can and throwing garbage all around. We have all loved Portland very much; we have all lived here most of our lives. We are currently sickened and feel deep ambivalence about moving.

Even though many of the homeless would prefer to live on the street rather than in a shelter, this is a truly a terrible option for them. There is a disproportionate amount of drug use and untreated mental illness within the population that is camped in our neighborhood. People engaged in criminal activity, including but not limited to groups such as "The Brood" and "The Sick Boys" take advantage of the vulnerability of the homeless and the chaos of the camps. Mental illness and addiction worsen in street camp conditions. The death rate and the murder rate amongst homeless in Portland is astonishingly high.

This bill is a neo-liberal, help-no-one solution. Housing is a dire emergency. Funds need to be secured, re-allocated, whatever, to establish shelter and housing now. If due to mental illness and/or addiction, folks can't follow enough rules in a shelter for their fellow residents to be safe, such folks may need secured treatment. The urban environment also deserves a modicum of respect. There should not be ANY unregulated, unsanitary, unsupported urban camping. There can be designated areas, with sanitation, some security, some social services and a component of self-government for folks who prefer their tent or camper to a shelter.

This bill demonstrates the kind of ineffective, neo-liberal governance that will push our country towards more conservatism. Such a shift will only worsen the economic crisis of wealth and resource distribution that our communities are facing today.

We need a right to shelter bill, not an unregulated, unsanitary, unsafe right to camp in the sidewalks bill.