

Dear Chair Bynum and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for this public hearing about the Right to Rest in Oregon. I am the chairperson of Housing First Umpqua, a non-profit advocacy group in Douglas County, Oregon, which is made up of all volunteers. HFU exists to address failures in the systems we rely upon to solve homelessness. The most pronounced failure that the state can do something about today is the practice of using law enforcement to deal with the problem of people who are forced to live rough outside.

Housing First Umpqua (HFU) supports Oregon House Bill (HB) 2367 (Right to Rest Act) because it will protect the rights of people who are homeless and help solve one barrier we have to getting people off the streets: threatening people without housing as criminals. We urge you to support this bill and allow it to go forward. Although there have been such bills in the state legislature before, they did not get anywhere. We hope this is not the case now.

Although housing is the solution to homelessness, reducing barriers for people to access whatever housing and services we have now must be a state priority. Any outreach service provider can tell you of the ongoing struggle we have just keeping track of folks. This is made dramatically worse by public policies that focus on constant displacement of people from public space. Even in a pandemic, with CDC guidelines and Governor's orders to the contrary, local jurisdictions, like Roseburg, find subtle and not so subtle ways to get people to just move along. This law enforcement approach has been the only resource that many of our local communities have used to address the ever growing number of homeless living on our streets. We have decades to show that it simply does not work.

It has been a mistake to allow local jurisdictions to have laws that criminalize the simple act of being. This is why it is so important for the state to take action now. We need a uniform policy regarding throughout the state regarding addressing homelessness humanely. HB 2367 does that.

Thank you for your time,

Betsy Cunningham, Chair
Housing First Umpqua
Roseburg, Oregon