

Submitter: Yvonne Garcia
On Behalf Of: ACLU of Oregon
Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development
Measure: SB799

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Committee Members,

My name is Yvonne Garcia. My pronouns are she, her. I am the Deputy Director of the ACLU of Oregon. The ACLU of Oregon is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to civil liberties and rights, with more than 27,000 members statewide.

This is the testimony that I had prepared to provide to the Committee on January 30, 2023, which I wasn't able to provide because the Committee did not have sufficient time to hear everyone who had signed up to testify.

I've also separately uploaded 5 pages of written testimony with important information for the Committee to consider, including links to relevant federal and ACLU of Oregon reports.

The ACLU of Oregon strongly supports SB 799. SB 799 is needed now to prevent more Oregonians from becoming houseless.

People across Oregon – from urban to rural areas – are experiencing alarming rates of houselessness. 2022 data from HUD shows:

- Oregon is in the top three of states with the highest rates of houselessness per population.
- We are in the top four of states with houseless people living unsheltered, and top four of states with rural houselessness.
- We are in the top two of states with the largest number increase of houseless veterans.
- Of all U.S. states, Oregon has the highest rate of houseless families living unsheltered.

There is a history of Oregon towns and cities criminalizing houseless people instead of supporting policies that actually get people off the streets.

In 2017, the ACLU of Oregon produced a report showing that there were 224 laws at that time across Oregon that criminalized homelessness – by criminalizing basic human activities such as sitting, lying, resting, and eating in public.

Were these criminalization approaches effective? No. The 2022 data from HUD shows that Oregon was in the top four of states with an increase in the number of houseless people from 2020 to 2022.

Houseless experts for the federal government clearly state that criminalization policies are “ineffective, expensive, and actually worsen the tragedy of homelessness.”

The federal government also tells us something we all know: A critical policy for addressing homelessness is preventing people from becoming houseless in the first place.

This is why SB 799 is essential to Oregon’s efforts. We must prevent more Oregonians from becoming houseless. To do this, we must amend fast-track eviction timelines so that people can access services that will prevent them from losing their homes.

SB 799 is common-sense legislation that Oregonians need now to prevent homelessness from becoming even worse.

The ACLU of Oregon urges your support of SB 799.

Thank you,
Yvonne Garcia