

Submitter: Nathan Brubaker

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure: HB3501

For most of 2022, the neighborhood I live in has been the location of a group of homeless campers who have set up behind a mixed use, former industrial building, on a dirt road on the edge of a natural area that the local community has been working for years to revitalize and protect. Their encampment consisted of several RVs, which were consistently surrounded by small mountains of trash, a variety of other cars, and a tow truck. They stole and stripped cars on that dirt road, allowing engine fluids to run freely onto the unpaved ground, and they used my street as a dumping ground for those stolen cars once they'd finished with them, or while they were awaiting further disassembly. Sometimes they would remove the wheels of those cars and put them up on dangerous, makeshift blocks to make it harder for the city to remove them. In addition to these activities, they verbally threatened my neighbors, brandished weapons openly, and on one occasion shot at one another in the middle of the day on our street. It was only through concerted effort, coordinated with our neighbors, that this encampment was removed. Despite the fact that it was, it is in the process of being rebuilt as I prepare this testimony.

This is not an isolated incident in Portland; to the contrary, it's a very common occurrence. Ask anyone who's had a sizeable encampment appear in their neighborhood, many of them will tell you a similar story. There is precious little help available to the people of Portland who want to return their neighborhoods to the safety of just a few years ago. In the grand scheme of things, my neighborhood was actually lucky in that our efforts to disband the camp paid off. Many other neighborhoods have not been similarly lucky.

This bill, as it is written, further reduces the already scant resources the people of Oregon have to deal with the very real portion of the homeless community that exploits our city and state for their own gain. In conjunction with HB 3115, which severely restricts camping regulations, this bill creates an asymmetrical rights relationship that allows the unhoused to take over public spaces at will, but disallows the housed community from objecting. In my experience, Oregonians are kind hearted people, and when an unhoused person sets up camp in a neighborhood in a respectful manner, they tend to be left alone. I will hazard a guess that this bill is being written in response to some kind of tactics that have been used to clear encampments in the past. If it is the belief of this committee that such tactics represent a cold and uncaring population who simply want to sweep the unhoused out of sight, I would urge the committee to reconsider this position. The escalating dialogue and frustration surrounding this issue is the result of the government's failure to step in and equitably protect the safety and livability of our cities, both of

which have degraded noticeably over the past several years in conjunction with the steep rise in homelessness. Oregonians are kind and empathetic people by and large, but they've been asked to endure too much already. I urge the committee to reject this bill.