

Submitter: MARY EVERSON

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure: HB3501

I am writing to express my concerns about the decriminalization of public camping, HB3501. While I understand the intention of the proposal, it appears to be performative without offering any significant solutions to the ever-growing problem facing all areas of Oregon.

Decriminalizing public camping will have serious health and safety implications. This is not a compassionate act but one that sets every system currently in place up for failure. From enforcement to social services, both public and private, there are no options available and no solutions that are actionable.

When people camp in public areas, they often do so without access to basic amenities such as running water and sanitation facilities. This can lead to the spread of disease and unsanitary living conditions as currently evidenced in our public areas such as Oaks Bottom, North Park Blocks, Springwater Corridor, and Chapman Park to name a few. Spend time in those locations. Look at the damage that has been done. These are locations meant for all to enjoy, not a few who are regrettably experiencing homelessness. Additionally, public camping areas are key areas for criminal activity, putting both campers and nearby residents at risk. Many of the larger encampments are known for open drug use and chop shops for stolen items such as vehicles and bicycles. Approaching individuals in these camps is often met with aggression and physical violence. The bill does not address these issues in any substantive way.

Furthermore, the presence of large numbers of homeless individuals in public areas can have a negative impact on local businesses and property values. If public camping is allowed, it is likely that these areas will become magnets for homeless individuals, which deters shoppers and drives down property values. In Portland, many longtime businesses are closing and leaving due to the criminal activity and threats experienced by the current situation. Without the ability to protect themselves, their business, and their employees, there is no reason for businesses to invest in the local economies.

Decriminalizing public camping will also deepen the problem of homelessness. Rather than providing a solution to the problem, it will encourage more individuals to choose homelessness as a lifestyle, knowing they will be allowed to camp in public areas without fear of legal consequences. It's naïve to think this won't occur. This will lead to a larger homeless population and further strain on social services. Who is being assisted when those that assist cannot meet the overwhelming demand? The

bill is shortsighted in its proposal.

In conclusion, while the idea of decriminalizing public camping may seem well-intentioned, however, the potential consequences to public safety, public property, and individuals in Oregon are just too great to ignore.