

Submitter: Nancy Casey

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure: HB3501

Dear Oregon Legislature,

I would like to formally submit my testimony in opposition to the Oregon Right to Rest Act. I am an employee of the Multnomah County Health Department and have been treating at risk individuals for 10 years. There is a difference between compassionate care that includes accountability and responsibility and then there is enabling. The legislature in Oregon is unequivocally enabling, thereby increasing risks and adverse outcomes for marginalized people. This measure, any many others ostensibly created to "help" marginalized people are misguided and created by people who seem to have no real knowledge or experience with actually serving and helping these populations. This situations reminds me of counseling parents of children who themselves have been abused. These parents are required to process and work on the trauma they were unfairly dealt WHILE AT THE SAME TIME being held accountable to be the best parent they can be and not abuse their own children. We can compassionately help people and ALSO have expectations of them.

Another situation worth mentioning is the issue of abusing the system. Whenever this is brought up many progressive people are quick to say "That is a myth! That does not happen!" I (and many I work with) also know that it is absolutely true that some people, in fact, DO abuse the system. Trauma informed care justly guides us to wonder what happened to someone that makes them feel they need to operate in this manner. However, the fact remains that people absolutely abuse the system and we see it every day. There is ample video footage of people taking water bottles donated to them, emptying them out and then recycling them for money. There are plenty of people who use drop in centers just for food with no intention of getting help.

An example of helping that was actually enabling: I volunteered in the Multnomah County operated emergency shelters during the wildfires and it was one of the worse experiences I have had as a volunteer. There was no expectation that people come in and stay- people would leave to use substances and then return throughout the entire night. The door was revolving and there was smoke in the shelter- the very opposite of what it was intended to provide. The night I volunteered, a shelter guest left to use drugs, returned to the shelter, started a fight and then left in a flurry of physical altercations with staff. Shortly after leaving he attempted to stab another homeless person just outside the shelter and the police came. This was not a safe environment for anyone, least of all the shelter guests, the very people the shelter was designed to protect. Situations can change on a dime and it is unwise to have untrained people interacting with the severely addicted or mentally ill.

As a nurse practitioner, It feels that the "care" of the homeless is a ruse. We will allow people to regularly suffer the human indignities of defecating on the sidewalk in full view of others, suffering mental health crises in full view of others, walk naked down the street and use drugs in front of children because they are marginalized and can't help themselves. We should be caring for others when they cannot help themselves. When people with opioid use disorder come to me I do not freely dole out prescriptions, I do the hard work of tough love- I say no and explain what I can do instead- help them into treatment, work to taper their medications etc.

As a tax paying citizen I feel enraged. I am not sure how it has happened that people without homes, many of whom struggle with addiction, and some of whom commit crimes, seem to have more rights than other citizens. What is the point of laws, of property tax, of personal property if some people can be wherever they want, whenever they want and for however long they want? What is the incentive to be a law abiding citizen if some people don't have to follow the rules because they have had harder lives than others?