

Submitter: Nora Gruber

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure: HB3501

I am the head of one of several Firewise Neighborhood groups in Northwest Portland certified by the NFPA and the Fire Department to take measures to protect our community from wildfires during fire season. Our group has worked hard with the Parks department and the Fire Department to make sure that unsanctioned camps don't get established in and around Forest Park, especially during the Fire Season. It has been a true community effort and even the most ardent houseless rights supporters like Joanne Hardesty backed the Fire Dept in this effort to keep the public safe from a wildfire.

As the Oregon Dept. of Forestry explained to us during a community assessment two years ago, a major fire in Forest Park is a question of when, not if. Due to climate change, Forest Park during Fire Season becomes a veritable tinderbox, that, in the event of a wildfire, could easily burn down a very large swath of not just the Park itself but the neighborhoods around it. This threatens not just property but many many lives. Recall the destructive and horrific fires of recent years or even the Oakland California fire of 1991 where 25 people lost their lives and many more were injured.

The vast majority of fires in the park (several dozen in the last year alone) have been caused by houseless people in unsanctioned camps.

While houselessness is a horrible tragedy, it would be a massive tragedy if many lives were lost in a major wildfire event just because we refused to take basic measures to protect the public during Fire Season.

. Police, Fire and other first responders need to be able to protect lives, first and foremost. Bill 3501 ignores the primacy of this right of people to be fundamentally safe.