

Submitter: Bruce Heurgue

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure: HB3501

As a lifelong Oregonian and 30-year voter in this state, I have never felt the need to submit a testimony to any bill. That was until HB 3501 was presented. As a mostly democratic party voter, it amazes me that this is the best solution our elected officials can come up with to combating the houseless crisis in this state.

I am sure I don't need to tell you the statistics, but I will remind you how Oregon continues to be a national leader on the issue of homelessness:

- Between 2020 and 2022 the number of people experiencing homelessness grew 23% (3,304 more people to total of about 18,000 houseless) This rate is well above the national average of 1% increase and placed us in the top 5 amongst all states for this period
- 62% of this population is unsheltered, another top 5 mark amongst all states as of 2022
- We have an estimated 5,200 shelter beds for this population of nearly 18,000 people.
- Oregon had the highest rate of chronic homelessness in the nation with 44% of individuals experiencing homelessness showing patterns of chronic homelessness. It is the 2nd highest increase in the nation between 2020 – 2022 with a 56% increase.

So, what is HB 3501 going to do to reverse this trend? I don't know, there is no analysis included with this bill that can sway my opinion. That seems like a logical step when putting forth a bill. But absent that, I am going to make a conclusion, "IT WON'T HELP AT ALL!" Instead of a solution we are going to exasperate this problem by making it easier for the houseless to simply camp out virtually anywhere they want. There is nothing like going to our local parks to see dilapidated tents filled to the brim with stuff, needles and other drug paraphilia at our footsteps, and human waste. Our city center parks will become tent cities (did we forget all about CHOP the autonomous zone in Seattle, that sure went well). Lastly, we cannot forget our fellow neighbors, many who live daily with illegal tent sites in their front and back yards already and can't get any support to remove these illegal encampments. Law abiding businesses and residents have been fleeing areas with high homelessness populations already because they can't help with the issues that come along with illegal camping. Law enforcement tries their best to handle the complaints, but this bill all but shuts the door on involvement by local police.

All this proposed bill does is make it easier to be homeless. It enables people to avoid getting help and services that they need to make changes in their lives. I get

that a lot of people don't want help right now or don't come to conclusion they need help overnight, but the approach HB 3501 does not set any urgency or resource support for them to make these changes. Nothing in the bill increases shelters, support services, or safe living environments. It just kicks the can down the road for another legislative group to have to clean up the mess. There are 4.2 million people in Oregon, yet we are creating laws to make less than half of 1 percent of the population feel comfortable. How about taking the time to come up with a real solution and stop forcing 99% of the state's population just accept this is the way it has to be in this state. As an Oregonian, I cannot support this bill and hope our elected officials see it the same way.