

Jo Davis
Portland, Maine

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Dear Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety: my name is Jo Davis, I am a resident in Portland, Maine. I am here today because there are people I care about that are homeless and are currently being affected negatively by the lack of resources available to them. I am testifying in favor of LD:1478.

People experience homelessness for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to: lack of resources, domestic abuse, discrimination, gentrification, a criminal record, and being paid non living wages. None of these reasons involve them as the reason they are homeless, because it is not their fault. Adopting the Homelessness Crisis Protocol would start to focus resources on harm reduction strategies on the current housing crisis, rather than police intervention. It is important to find out what people need and make those resources available and accessible to them. That is what harm reduction is all about--meeting an individual where they are at. If an individual is seeking shelter in a public place, they need a home and resources, not police--that just makes sense.

Alternatively, we are also asking police to facilitate a public health/ social service issue. I have heard an account of two individuals in Portland, Maine that were approached by police. The police would ask them to leave, over and over again, in places where they were "seeking shelter in a public place". Their substance abuse recovery, search to find jobs, and stable housing was put on hold, as they had to move around after being asked by police to do so. Adopting the Homelessness Crisis Protocol could have been an opportunity to connect these individuals to resources to actively help them. Instead, it only exacerbated homelessness and their recovery from substance abuse. It would additionally remove police out of the equation.

Connecting unhoused people to resources and housing should be our #1 priority! It is time to shift our efforts and resources from police reinforcement/incarceration to harm reduction strategies. I encourage everyone to vote in favor of LD:1478. Thank you for your time.

Jo Davis