

Ann Dodd-Collins
Portland

Dear Senator Susan Deschambault, Representative Charlotte Warren, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Ann Dodd-Collins, and I am resident of Portland. I am asking you to vote in support of LD 1478: An Act To Decriminalize Homelessness.

This critical legislation would ensure that homelessness is not criminalized and that trained mental health and substance use professionals would respond to encounters between law enforcement officers and people experiencing homelessness. Criminalizing someone experiencing homelessness dehumanizes that person and places blame on the individual, rather than the larger systems that continue to fail people who are seeking help. Instead, we should be looking at ways to meet the basic needs, such as free public toilets and places to rest during the day, for those who are currently homeless.

When my son was a teenager, he was diagnosed with a mental disorder. His evaluation, in part, said that he would probably never be able to find a job and that if he did he would not be able to keep it, that he would never be able to make a friend, and that he would probably end up homeless. None of those things happened. He has accepted that he is who he is and mastered the coping skills needed to not only survive but thrive.

When I first volunteered at Preble Street 5-1/2 years ago, so many of the young men coming through the lunch line reminded me of my son. I was in tears by the end of my shift. They deserve my (and your) compassion and respect. They should be offered a safety net, not jail.

I am asking you to vote in support of this much needed bill so that people are met with empathy and the resources they deserve, rather than criminalization and incarceration.

Thank you,
Ann Dodd-Collins
120 Pleasant Ave #3
Portland ME 04103