

Eli Evans
Resident

Dear distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,
My name is Eli Evans, and I am a resident of Maine. I am urgently 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. Further, it would work to connect people with crisis services, emergency and transitional housing, and case management.

I currently work with people experiencing homelessness, helping them access shelter, food and needed services. I can't tell you how many times I have heard stories from my clients about interactions with police and the criminal justice system. For many struggling individuals who are living on the edge of society, when they are in crisis they go to jail. This could look like having a mental health break, a substance use relapse, or even using the bathroom. What our unhoused community needs are services not jail time. For many of our houseless neighbors having a criminal record creates more barriers to jobs and housing that are practically insurmountable. The criminal justice system directly leads to chronic homelessness.

The criminalization of homelessness reinforces the marginalized status of people experiencing homelessness, disconnects people from the services that they need, and further traumatizes individuals by involving them in our punitive criminal justice system. 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. For these reasons, 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 for your time,
Eli Evans