

Starr Gilmartin
Trenton

Dear distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Starr Gilmartin and I am resident of Trenton, 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.

As a social worker, I work and have worked for many years with the homeless. I once was homeless myself as a teenager. What the homeless need is not judgment, punishment, marginalization.

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,
STarr C. Gilmartin, LCSW, Trenton, Maine