

Bill Goodykoontz
Cape Elizabeth

Dear distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,
My name is Bill Goodykoontz, and I am resident of Cape Elizabeth. I was a Preble Street volunteer for thirteen years after I retired, first at the soup kitchen, then the food pantry, then seven years at the Resource Center front desk opening the doors Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings, followed by more than three years at the front desk of Florence House. So I have a bit of experience and know a few people and, because of that, 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.

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.

As someone who spent his career in the fields of sociology and criminology, I would humbly suggest that turning poverty into a criminal act benefits absolutely no one, and is short-sighted to say the least.

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.