

Peggy Kolesar
Resident

Dear distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,
My name is margaret (peggy) kolesar, and I am resident of waterville. 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.

When I am asked for an address, I become annoyed lately. I live in my truck with my 2 dogs & travel between Richmond & Waterville, depends on where my current doctors appointment is. Richmond has been the worst, their police force harassing.

I try real hard to be inconspicuous. Keep the dogs as quiet as possible, make sure I clean up after ourselves. It's not easy, but I do the best I can. It's also difficult finding safe, clean places to let them out. Police have threatened to take my "home" my dogs who are also my support animals. I've been bullied.

I am disabled, trying to survive on \$844 from SSDI. The winter of 2020 was the first time we had been in the truck during the winter . We've been living in the truck off & on since 2015. It's a hard life, criminalizing my existence would create more problems that I'm not sure I could survive. I became homeless after foot trauma sent me to the ER & I spent a week hospitalized, unable to continue paying the full rent after also having to give up my job.

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,
peggy kolesar
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