

Emily Lilly  
Dover, NH

Dear distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,  
My name is Emily and I am resident of Dover, NH. I attend school in Portland. 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 understand that socially there is a lot of stigma around homeless people. Many feel threatened by them such as the case with MECA and their new dorm building (I am a rising sophomore at MECA). However, the homeless people of Portland have been nothing but kind and generous to me. They are not a threat. They do not deserve to be arrested and punished for something that is out of their hands. Homelessness is a tragedy and if we do not support our unhoused citizens we are only letting homelessness become a tragic and terrible norm.

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,  
Emily Lilly