

Christine Martin
Portland

Dear distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,
My name is Christine Martin, and I am resident of 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 work as a resource connector in affordable housing and have witnessed time and again the trauma of experiencing homelessness. I just got off the phone with a resident, who has been housed for 10 years, who still jumps at every phone call from his landlord, fearing eviction. This is lifelong trauma and further exacerbates inequities, keeping low income Mainers on the fringe. Let's act with dignity and connect our neighbors to the resources they need to thrive.

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,
Christine