

Good morning members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

Thank you for this opportunity to express my strong opposition to LD 1478.

My name is K. Scott Morrison and I reside at 9 Parris Street, Portland, in the West Bayside Neighborhood which is home to 82+% of the homeless shelter beds available in Portland. My family and I experience daily the full impact-both positive and negative- of the lives of unhoused people. In a word I would say the biggest need of the unhoused is respect. Respect as human beings! Respect as citizens! Respect as people in need! I find it unfathomable that LD 1478 will do anything positive for the unhoused but, if passed, will add to their personal and community lack of respect.

It is disrespectful (and unsanitary!) to urinate and defecate on public or private property. It is disrespectful (and disturbing!) to engage in disorderly conduct on public or private property. It is disrespectful (and dangerous!) to use drugs or alcohol in an illegal manner on public or private property. It is respectful to be responsible for oneself and the community where a person is visiting or resides.

I would ask each of member of the committee to pause a moment, close your eyes and envision your residence with you and your children, grandchildren, neighbors, or friends enjoying your home. Do you really want to make legal that someone may urinate or defecate on your street or sidewalk in front of your home? Do you really want someone to have the legal right to engage in disorderly conduct by making loud or unreasonable noises, activate a device or expose a substance that releases a noxious and offensive odor or pick a fight on your street or sidewalk in front of your home? Do you really want someone to have the right to inject heroin or other drugs in their bodies on your street or sidewalk in front of your home? I do not want any of this, though I have experienced many of these behaviors on our front steps, yard, sidewalk, and street.

The Portland Police do an exemplary job of responding to citizen complaints and intervening in the above-mentioned situations. With their patrolling the neighborhood, it is rare to see the same individuals commit the behaviors more than once. Legalizing offensive behavior will do nothing to help unhoused people get help.

May I recommend, instead of passing legislation like this which will lessen respect of and for the homeless, that the legislature support building new homeless services centers like the one underway in Portland. Portland's proposed new center will provide shelter guests and staff a place to live and work in a respectful and safe environment. It will be open 24 hours day, 7 days a week with on-site meals and a wide range of services including health and mental health care, substance abuse treatment, housing assistance, peer support, case management, employment assistance and more. Our most vulnerable community members will no longer have to live in inadequate conditions and in locations where they are easily abused, taken advantage of, and judged for their perceived shortcomings. New homeless service centers built on this type of model- comprehensive services under one roof- will go a long way to getting the homeless help and respect.

K. Scott Morrison  
Portland

Please confirm receipt of my written testimony