

Karen Prieto
Topsham

Dear distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,
My name is Karen Staples Prieto. I grew up in Topsham, and returned to Brunswick in 2019 after living out of state for many years. I work as an information professional at a privately-held environmental engineering firm in Portland. I have volunteered at Preble Street in Portland many times, and currently assist monthly at MCHPP in Brunswick.

I am excited to learn about LD 1478: An Act To Decriminalize Homelessness, and am urgently asking you to vote in support of this bill.

This critical legislation will ensure that trained mental health and substance use professionals respond to encounters between law enforcement officers and people experiencing homelessness. Further, it will connect people who are experiencing homeless with crisis services, emergency and transitional housing, and case management.

Homelessness is not a crime, and should not be treated as one. 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.

I believe caring for community members whose circumstances are less fortunate is a characteristic of an advanced society - one I trust we all strive for here in Maine.

For these reasons, please 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 and best wishes for a healthy 2021.

Karen Prieto
She/Hers