

Craig Saddle mire
Lewiston

Dear Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

Please support LD 1478, An Act to Decriminalize Homelessness. I serve on the Lewiston Housing Committee and manage 3 apartment buildings for the Raise-Op Housing Cooperative, a resident-owned affordable housing organization in Lewiston, Maine. I also live in the Tree Street Neighborhood and see and know people who are living without shelter in our community. They are people who have been overwhelmed by life circumstances, mental health challenges, and/or abuse. When our society fails to provide our community members shelter when they are struggling, the only alternative is for them to live outside, in public places, and use those public spaces to cope and survive with their hardship. We should not view these uses of public spaces as crimes, but rather the direct result of our failed public policy to take care of vulnerable people in recovery from trauma and hardship. Unsheltered people do not want to harm or offend anyone, they mostly want to find peace, comfort, and privacy. It's in everyone's best interest to recognize this truth and address their basic needs with trained mental health and substance use specialists, and provide transition services to permanent housing. To treat basic acts of survival as a crime and respond with law enforcement who are untrained in social work and mental health needs only exacerbates the problem. It ignores the root of the problem and has the potential to escalate conflict for no reason. Neither party should be put in such a circumstance. Let's decriminalize the basic behaviors that unsheltered people practice to cope and survive, and look to real solutions to solve the underlying problems that deprive them of shelter in the first place.

Sincerely,
Craig Saddle mire