

Carolyn Silvius
Portland

Good morning Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. I am Carolyn Silvius from Portland. I'm an advocate for Homeless Voices for Justice and a member of the State Committee of the Green/Independent Party, and I'm here to speak in favor of LD 1478.

It's a verifiable fact that the homeless are arrested more often than those who are housed, and often for acts that would not be considered criminal by those housed. Since black and indigenous people constitute a larger percentage of the homeless population, this means these arrests play a big part in racial inequity. This situation has many causes. One is the false perception by some in law enforcement that if you are homeless you must have done something wrong to be in that situation. Profiling of the homeless enters here, and I have experienced this profiling myself when I was living in a shelter. Another is that if you are housed, you have the privacy afforded by your home to drink and use the bathroom. You have a place to just sit and think. However, if you are homeless, that privacy is absent, and you can only drink or urinate or sit and think (also considered loitering) where you live -- outdoors -- in a park or other public area.

The other provision of this bill-- the nontraditional alternatives to arrest-- will help rather than hurt the homeless. If a person is arrested for a minor infraction, the time spent in custody interrupts his ongoing efforts to end the homelessness, and, in fact, the arrest itself may be a barrier to getting a home since landlords often refuse to rent to those recently involved with the criminal justice system. Having a social worker respond to the infraction and offering resources may speed up the efforts to acquire safe and decent housing.

Being homeless is not a crime, but the homeless are criminalized by the system currently in place. To change this, I urge you to vote "ought to pass" in your work session, and take a step to make justice equal for all.