

Good morning Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Mike Stuckmyer. I live in Portland and I am a member of Homeless Voices for Justice. I am here today to speak in support of LD1478: An Act to Decriminalize Homelessness.

I am speaking today to express to you how important this bill would be for the Maine homeless community. This bill is important because everyone, whether or not they are experiencing homelessness, deserves human dignity. Just because someone is homeless does not mean they should encounter undeserved harassment or punishment from laws that criminalize homelessness.

I experienced homelessness for 3 months in Portland, Maine, and I have been homeless for other periods in my life, in Maine and in other places in the United States.

When I was homeless in Portland, Maine in 2017 there was a time when I needed to use the bathroom so badly, and there was no place to go at all. I was many blocks away from the shelter. Another homeless person I was with said to me "oh, just go ahead and pee anywhere, it's no problem." I replied "really?". This was my first week in Portland, so I didn't know if what he was saying was correct. I was almost about to relieve myself, but all of the sudden I had this overwhelming feeling of "don't do it" and within 5 seconds a patrol car turned the corner, and the officers got out and questioned us about what we were doing. I am so grateful that I listened to my intuition, because the officer said to us "you know, it will put you on the sex offender list if you urinate in public." Sometimes I think about that day, and I am so grateful that I made the choice I did, because something as simple as needing to use the bathroom could have gotten me on the sex offender list for the rest of my life. No one experiencing homelessness should have to experience this.

Another point I would like make in support of this bill is how important it is for people experiencing homelessness not to be criminalized for drinking in public, as long as they are not causing any trouble. This is very important because I have witnessed, while living in Portland for over four years, both while I was homeless and now that I am housed, homeless individuals being arrested, harassed and humiliated by the police because they were drinking in public. For anyone who is of legal age to drink, as long as they are simply peaceful keeping to themselves, should not be arrested and humiliated for doing something they are not able to do in the comfort of their own homes because they are homeless.

I was only able to touch on 2 of the 5 things this bill would decriminalize, but all 5 of them are of the utmost importance. This bill prioritizes human dignity, and for that reason, I urge you to vote "ought to pass." Thank you.