

Barbara Thomson
Portland

Dear distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,
My name is Barbara Thomson, and I am resident of Portland. I am urgently asking you to vote in support of LD 1478: An Act To Decriminalize Homelessness.

This critical legislation would ensure that homelessness is not criminalized and that trained mental health and substance use professionals would respond to encounters between law enforcement officers and people experiencing homelessness. Further, it would work to connect people with crisis services, emergency and transitional housing, and case management.

Living in Portland, my husband and I frequently encounter folks who are unhoused. We regularly give money to signers and indeed have come to know a few of the regulars on the streets we frequent. Folks who are unhoused need our support and the services of our state so that they do NOT become part of the criminal justice system and instead find a way forward so that they are now longer unhoused. We need to stop asking the police to take care of “problems” that we as a society would rather not address. Once we as a community or state “toss” the problem to the police, we only change and grow the problem. That is not the way toward solutions for individuals who are unhoused or for our communities.

For these reasons, I am asking you to 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 for your time,
____Barbara Thomson
_ Portland ME