

# Homelessness isn't a media event. It's real life.

The mayor recently declared an end to his "Safe Sleep" policy in our city. The policy allowed for people experiencing homelessness to sleep in tents, during nighttime hours, undisturbed.

Unfortunately, that's assuming that nearly 2,000 individuals and families had a safe place to sleep to begin with. Living under a freeway underpass, in a doorway, in our public parks or in a mass shelter is no way to live — especially when the majority of those fellow humans are our elders, children, the sick and

disabled.

The reality is that without adequate housing for thousands of Portlanders, nothing is going to change. In fact, I'd argue that the noise and media scrutiny is just going to get louder and louder.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: People on the streets and in homeless camps have become tabloid news on social media and in the larger media landscape.

In February, I wrote about what it's like to be homeless in today's climate. Nothing has changed.

"Imagine for a moment that the entire world stepped inside your home at this very moment. Not just anyone, but everyone — the evening news, elected officials, angry neighbors and friends. Strangers took photos of you and all your belongings, especially your mess. I hope you're presentable. They ask you questions about how you're living and if you chose the life you live.

Some guy in a uniform asks to go through all your stuff. A reporter asks you questions about housing policies and why you choose to live this way.

Is your bathroom clean? The kitchen? What's in your bedroom? What's in your bathroom cabinets? Do you have a prescription for those? We're going to need to see that now. I hope you took the trash out already. What a mess.

All of this, of course, will be aired tonight on the evening news. It will be written about

in tomorrow's paper. Experts and strangers will weigh in and comment on your behavior and your lifestyle. Do you really deserve the life you're living?

Now imagine doing all of that each and every day with only a tent, if you're lucky and a handful of belongings. You will have no access to running water or a working toilet. No electricity. No trash pick up. No access to a safe place to call home. Nothing. Most likely it will be hard to sleep. Anyone at any time could come unannounced and wake you up. Take pictures of you. Best-case scenario, strangers want to help you. Worst case, they are there to harm you.

You are a refugee in a modern land. Cast out for the world to see. How would the world feel about you and the way you're living?"

My point is, it sucks to be homeless. Some people think that it's easy in Portland. They are wrong.

Nobody is choosing to be homeless because they don't want to go into a shelter. Seriously, would you? Living in a shelter stinks — literally. It's uncomfortable. It's loud. It's overwhelming to someone with a trauma or living with a mental illness. Want to be able to sleep with the one you love? Too bad. Need some time alone to think? Sorry. Want to not be treated like you're a child or you're in a jail? Good luck.

If I were currently homeless I would choose living outdoors over living in shelter. Hands down. That doesn't mean I would be choosing to be homeless.

Of course, shelters are needed for our most vulnerable and others who want to access shelter. But to think that an individual is choosing to be homeless is ridiculous.

Homelessness exists due to the lack of housing in our community, rising rents and the lack of federal resources. Two thousand people didn't decide to be homeless just to create a media spectacle or to piss off the larger community. People sleeping on the streets are human beings. They are our fellow human beings struggling to maintain in a world gone mad, a world without a safe place to call home. It's as simple as that.



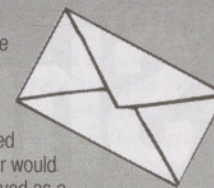
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