

Support Oregon's Right to Rest Act

Homelessness is hell. Sleep deprivation. Verbal taunts. Physical violence. Surviving in the cold and wet. Being displaced by law enforcement on a routine basis for not having a safe place to call home. It's the opposite of the American Dream.

The Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP), of which Street Roots is a member, conducted interviews with 560 homeless people living in Oregon — Portland and Eugene specifically.

Eighty-eight of the respondents reported having been harassed, cited by a law enforcement agency or arrested for simply sleeping. Eighty-three percent had been harassed, cited or arrested for sitting or

lying down, while only 35 percent of homeless people reported knowing a safe and legal place for them to sleep outside.

The harsh reality is that local communities don't have an answer for what to do with thousands of people experiencing homelessness throughout our state. The answer has historically been to create laws that punish people for nothing more than their existence.

"We are right back to Jim Crow Laws, Sundown Towns, Ugly Laws and Anti-Okie Laws — local laws that profess to 'uphold the locally accepted obligations of civility,'" said Paul Boden, organizing director with WRAP. "These laws have always been used by people in power against those on the outside and people experiencing homelessness."

Laws vary from community to community throughout Oregon, but in reality, if you're homeless in many communities in Oregon, you're more or less not welcome.

Some would argue that Portland is one of the more liberal communities in the state and around the country when it comes to

enforcing archaic laws against people experiencing homelessness. Unfortunately, that's not the case. While Portland doesn't ban panhandling or sitting or lying on a sidewalk — it does conduct hundreds of costly sweeps every year.

Oregon House Bill 2215, Oregon's Right to Rest Act, would end the criminalization of sleeping while homeless, while working to support the basic human and civil rights for all people, regardless of their housing status. The bill would ensure that all people have their right to restful sleep and equal access to public space preserved.

"The way to reduce the number of people who are sleeping and living outside is not to criminalize their efforts to exist in public spaces,

but rather to make appropriate health care services, meaningful employment, and especially housing available to people regardless of income," says Boden.

Numerous organizations are supporting the efforts to decriminalize homelessness in Oregon, including the ACLU of Oregon, Right 2 Survive, Sisters Of The Road and Street Roots.

Organizations supporting the bill are also pushing for more access to basic hygiene facilities (See "Hygiene, a human need," page 7) for people experiencing homelessness. The harsh reality is many people on the streets experience discrimination every day. Part of curbing people's homelessness and providing people with opportunities is providing people with a safe place to access things like showers, public restrooms and laundry facilities. These kinds of facilities exist on a small scale in Portland, but not enough to meet the need. Statewide, it's a hard knock life.

The reality is modern day homelessness is a product of bad policy and the lack of resources both locally and federally. Thousands of people in Oregon didn't wake up yesterday and decide to become homeless. We can't police our way out of homelessness and certainly people experiencing homelessness shouldn't be punished for not having a safe place to call home. It's time for change.

What can Street Roots readers do?

Email and call the members of the House Judiciary Committee by Friday, March 10, and urge them to support HB 2215, the Oregon Right to Rest Act

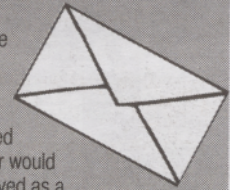
- Committee Chair, Jeff Barker: (503) 986-1428, rep.jeffbarker@state.or.us
- Committee Vice Chair, Jennifer Williamson: (503) 986-1436, rep.jenniferwilliamson@oregonlegislature.gov
- Mitch Greenlick: (503) 986-1433, rep.mitchgreenlick@state.or.us
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- Tawna Sanchez: (503) 986-1443, rep.tawnasanchez@oregonlegislature.gov
- Duane Stark: (503) 986-1404, rep.duanestark@state.or.us
- Rich Vial: (503) 986-1426, rep.richvial@oregonlegislature.gov

What can you say?

I am calling to urge you to vote yes on the Right To Rest Act. You will be hearing HB 2215: Oregon Right To Rest Act in the Assembly Judiciary Committee. This bill provides critical civil rights protections to all Oregonians to ensure that every Oregonian is able to meet the biological need of rest. The practice of criminalizing poor and homeless people for engaging in basic life sustaining activities like eating, sleeping, resting, lying and sleeping is unjust, cruel and entrenches people in homelessness. HB 2215 will allow homeless people more time and energy to access services, search for employment and apply for housing that would otherwise be spent responding to police harassment, tickets, courts and jail time. Please vote yes on HB 2215!

Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

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