

Emily Puterbaugh

#267294 | March 14, 2021

Testimony to **Portland City Council** on the **Shelter to Housing Continuum Project, Recommended Draft**

I understand that homelessness is a complex and difficult issue to manage and has become more urgent amidst the COVID 19 pandemic. However, the part of this proposal suggesting “temporary shelters in city parks and open spaces for 180 days” would be an absolute detriment to our community. City parks are a lifeline for families and kids during the pandemic. Particularly since kids will not be vaccinated any time soon, they need a safe, outdoor space to play. Having homeless camps in public parks threatens their safety due to the unfortunate prevalence of mental illness and drug abuse amongst this population. We do not want our children finding discarded trash, needles, and other debris potentially exposing them to a multitude of diseases. My family lives right next to Gabriel Park with 3 young children. We cannot allow a homeless encampment in our children’s safe play space. Our tax dollars are currently at work maintaining this public space, and there is a huge inclusive playground renovation project breaking ground this month at Gabriel Park. This expensive and exciting new space will not be utilized and appreciated by the community funding it; if this proposal is accepted as written and homeless camps move into the park. Opening the parks to homeless shelters would also have a disproportionately negative effect on low income families, who generally do not have the same access to private yard space and are even more dependent on safe, public, outdoor spaces during the pandemic. Equity for our community’s families and children should also be paramount in our lawmaker’s policies. This sets a dangerous precedent. We are not going to solve homelessness in the next 180 days, and if we open up public parks to homeless shelters, it will be very difficult to reverse this decision. It is easy to imagine a camp set up for 180 days – and then moving to the other side of the park for another 180 days. This proposal would essentially allow homeless encampments in public parks indefinitely.

Testimony is presented without formatting.