

Thomas Jackson

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

Dear Mayor and Commissioners: I recently read Jo Ann Hardesty's statement: "I'm gonna be really clear about that. Parks are for everybody, and I don't think having a few camps in a park will somehow make the park unavailable for people to jog, or play golf, or do all the other stuff that people do in parks. And I live in a park deficit neighborhood, so I can tell you that many people in our community who are suffering through this pandemic and this economic downturn don't have the luxury of saying, "Well, but we'll hold this place sacred." Indeed, parks are for everybody. Yet if parks are not clean and safe, by definition not everyone will be included. Would any sane parent allow a child to play around the syringes that litter campsites? Would any senior citizen feel safe when screamed at and vilified by "campers"? Would you encourage people to share an area where people are publicly masturbating, urinating and defecating? If sharing parks is a good idea, why does the city hire hazmat teams to clean up campsites? I've seen all these behaviors - and more - too frequently. If you visit camps in our city, you will too. According the National Alliance to End Homelessness, approximately 26% of homeless people struggle with some form of mental illness. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimates that 38% of homeless people are dependent on alcohol, and 26% abuse other drugs. It is abundantly clear that this is a very troubled population. How can anyone expect children and families to "do all the other stuff that people do in parks" when parks are inhabited with such a deeply troubled population? Most disturbing about this approach is that "camping" is the modern equivalent of "warehousing" human beings that need - and deserve - help in turning their lives around and regaining their physical and mental health. Living in squalor in parks - or any public space - is no more healing than confinement to the asylums of centuries past. It disturbs me to think that our elected representatives have no better response to the problems of the homeless than to suggest the barely regulated proliferation of tents in our city parks and neighborhoods.. I'm not writing to ask you to hold parks "sacred" - it is far too late for that. I am asking that you help people in trouble rather than encouraging the proliferation of campsites. Sincerely, Thomas L. Jackson

Testimony is presented without formatting.