

From: [Ricardo Ismach](#)
To: [Council Clerk – Testimony](#)
Subject: Homeless in Portland
Date: Wednesday, October 26, 2022 12:38:09 PM

Dear Portland City Council members,

My name is Richard Ismach, and I am an Emergency Physician and Epidemiologist in Portland, a resident of the Pearl District, and a long time volunteer with groups like The Wallace Medical Concern and Portland Street Medicine. I am an expert in the medical care of homeless people.

Homelessness is a humanitarian crisis in United States, and in our city in particular. The proposal to ban camping outright in Portland seems well intentioned, and aimed at improving the quality of life in Portland and helping people on the streets. But the real effect on thousands of homeless individuals will be disastrous, dramatically worsening their already precarious lives, and leading to a innumerable deaths directly as a result.

1. Criminalizing being houseless does nothing to help the houseless person, and almost nothing to protect homeowners and business owners in the neighborhoods where they are camping. It just deepens the cycle, often robbing the person of their few possessions, and shattering whatever little bit of stability they might have created.
2. Large shelters are not safe or tenable for very many houseless people, who fear the risk of disease or assault, and loss of privacy, that they entail. In particular, large numbers of houseless people with mental health challenges will never be able to tolerate big congregate shelter settings.
3. Forcing people to enter these campuses will rightfully shatter trust in local government, raising the specter of concentration camps or resettlement camps that have been long since repudiated. Rather than help people to access services, this will become a huge barrier to engaging in care of any sort.
4. Enforcing this re-settlement, and staffing these "campuses," will be supremely expensive. This unfunded mandate will come on top of voter supported investments in affordable housing (M26-210) and substance use treatment (M110). The camps will pull resources from other, arguably far more productive programs.
5. Finally, temporary shelter – even a more humane and livable option to the mass camps being proposed – is not a solution to our housing crisis. A tsunami of evictions seems likely for Portland now, especially given the increase in the cap on rent increases to 15% and the end of 10 day of action protections.

Please withdraw these resolutions and engage the community in creating solutions that respect the dignity, humanity and self-determination of our houseless neighbors.

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Ricardo Ismach, MD, MPH