

From: [Jerusha Jerome](#)
To: [Council Clerk – Testimony](#)
Subject: Testimony not in favor of items 899-903 for Portland City Council meeting 10.26.22
Date: Wednesday, October 26, 2022 4:36:41 PM

Hello. My name is Jerusha. I am a RN in the State of Oregon who volunteers with Portland Street Medicine, as well I am a mother of a son who has a severe mental illness, Schizophrenia. I believe that as a whole, these measures that are being proposed, mainly serves the privileged and not the people that are actually living on the streets. I believe that these initiatives have an overall good intent arch, but I am concerned that they are motivated by ignorance of the complexities that cause people to become and stay houseless. My concern is that the motivation is fueled by those who find houselessness to be an inconvenience, rather than a hardship and reality one is facing to survive.

Increasing funding for the police will not solve the problem of houselessness and will add to the trauma affect if further sweeps occur of those who are living on the streets. This will be a waste of money and of resources and will broaden the chasm between those who are houseless and those who want to help them become housed. Trust is inevitably one of the most important pieces when working with other humans to meet needs. I believe giving more resources to crisis services and organizations doing the work on the ground would be more beneficial in the long run to service those are living in crisis, as well as build further trust between the different communities of underserved individuals.

I would like to share my own lived experience with my family members homelessness. My son was homeless last fall for a month due to many unfortunate and tragic circumstances. After camping in his tent for 2 weeks, all of his belongings were swept and taken away by the police. He ended up with nothing after the sweep, which led to him roaming the streets. He developed debilitating sores on the bottom of his feet because he didn't have consistent shelter to keep himself dry in. My son also was placed in a shelter that had close to 90+ different people living within a smaller space. This was very triggering for him to be in a smaller space with multiple people that he didn't know. He ended up choosing to leave the shelter and live on the streets, rather than stay in the shelter. My son doesn't not function well within large groups of people, due to his lived experience with schizophrenia and the complex way that his brain processes social stimuli.

The people that I have worked with side by side from Portland Street Medicine continually serve those who are experiencing homeless, hoping to be able to provide more resources for those who are experiencing houselessness. Often the issue is the lack of resources that are available for those who are experiencing houselessness. Houselessness is not a crime. Society has viewed people in these circumstances as an annoyance, an inconvenience to them, or as an uncomfortable feeling that occurs within themselves. It is wrong that people will be criminalized for being houseless. It will be wrong to create a diversion program that will not provide a safe environment for individuals. The reality that it will not be a voluntary choice for the individual makes it feel unsafe for many individuals. Forced services do more harm than good overall. People who experience serious mental illness often do not have insight into their mental illness, which is called anosognosia, this is part of their mental illness. This is experienced in over 1/2 of the population of those who live with serious mental illness. It is wrong to think that by forcing people into a diversion program that you think this will provide a therapeutic alternative for healing and escape the pattern of living on the streets. These measures are not fully in the best interests of those who are experiencing

homelessness. Energy and resources would be better spent with supporting the different programs that are currently in place. Sharon Merien, county commissioner, had a study performed in 2018 regarding the current state of resources for mental illness here within Oregon. It is important that we use the research that has already been done in addressing mental illness and the services that need to be put into place: <https://www.multco.us/commissioner-meieran/multnomah-county-mental-health-systems-analysis-report>. It will be important to provide funding towards resources that work and help solve the issues and not create a bigger gap between those who are housed and have their basic needs met, and those who do not have homes and who do not have the resources for their basic needs being met.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony against the proposed plans.

Jerusha Jerome