

Right to rest - testimony
Vern Rempel
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I am Vern Rempel, Mennonite pastor from Littleton with a congregation in Englewood.

I am honored to be able to testify on behalf of this "Right to Rest" bill. Thanks for the this opportunity.

The ancient prophet Isaiah declared these beautiful words about 25 centuries ago. They still ring in my heart.

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.

Isaiah 58:7, 8

Jesus spoke in this great tradition and made it his own when he declared to his home synagogue:

18 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

Luke 4:18a

Our own Mennonite Disaster Service for this region has declared homelessness to be a situation of personal disaster, and has committed to helping to build for the sake of homes for the homeless.

When people are on the streets, it is not a crime but a personal disaster, resulting from all kinds of disconnections, broken relationships, and other forms of separation.

together - people without houses,
people with houses, all...

How may we enter into community with folks who are God's beloved children, so declared by Isaiah and Jesus? We will not be able to understand good next steps and arrangements without entering into relationships that enable us to know each other and consider together our pathways forward. People on the street are not "them." People on the street are us, ~~in our communities~~, if only we will see it.

^{we} How may we choose community with people instead of fines and incarceration? How may we choose dignity instead of isolation.

Let us honor God's good love and wisdom in saying that the great fast, the great goodness, is to declare good news for the poor, and to offer ourselves in care for the homeless. ~~and community with those who are vulnerable~~ all God's children. I warmly invite you to vote yes.

House Bill 17- 1314 Right to Rest

Good Afternoon Chair and members of the Committee.

My name is Rev. Amanda Henderson. I am the Executive Director of The Interfaith Alliance of Colorado and an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). I am here to testify in support of House bill 1314, the Right to Rest Bill.

This is my third year in a row testifying in support for the Right to Rest. Honestly- the first year I testified I supported the *idea* of ending the criminalization people face for trying to survive in the midst of homelessness and poverty. At that time- even while I supported the *idea*-- I hadn't fully experienced the stories or seen the direct impact of dehumanizing people through naming them as 'criminals' for simply trying to survive.

Over the past two years I have seen first hand the brokenness and ineffectiveness of laws and ordinances that simply serve to mask the deep systemic problems that lead to homelessness and poverty.

In Denver, Fort Collins, Colorado Springs, Boulder, and all of the towns and counties between there are laws and ordinances that prohibit people from putting blankets over themselves, or for sitting more than an hour on a bench, or for urinating in public or trespassing....

While no one wants to have to urinate in public, or to sleep on a park bench-- we know that the answer is not tickets or jail time-- rather the answers lie in more toilets, more storage, more community and support, and first and foremost more homes.

I have been a founding member of the Alternative Solutions Advocacy Project- as a broad and diverse coalition we have been meeting for more than a year to call for an end to criminalizing people for experiencing homelessness and poverty- and to call for alternative housing ideas.

As a part of this coalition when we meet with leaders we often hear 'don't spend your time trying to end criminalization-- put your energy into solutions'...

I will say here what I have repeated many times-- you cannot have one without the other. We cannot simply spend our time thinking of new programs and building new shelters and hopefully homes-- without addressing the underlying issue that we continue to dehumanize and demean people who are simply fighting to survive when we give tickets, jail and more laws calling people criminals for being poor.

Until we see every person as loved- unconditionally loved-- deserving dignity respect and care we are not living into our own full humanity. Until we listen to those who have been marginalized and ignored we will be half-people. As a Pastor -a Christian pastor I follow someone who called us to be fully human. To heal and feed and care. This healing and feeding and caring is for all-- not just those who fit our societal or cultural norms- not just those who have enough money or a good enough job to live in a home-- but for *all*. If we are ever to be a community where all are welcome and able to thrive- we must address the underlying brokenness of calling people criminals for simply trying to survive.

It is from this place that I ask you - with a full and heavy heart- to support HB 1314- to change our way of seeing and legislating so that all people might be treated with dignity and compassion.