

Committee Sign In - Remote Written Testimony Registration

Thank you for submitting your written comments on HB 2489 Public space/local use laws. Your comments will be made available to legislative committee members and staff of the committee, and will be included in the legislative record for bill and meeting archival purposes, but will not be used as part of testimony summary materials on the bill report.

The text of your submission is below:

As it stands, the key issues with it are that

1. It is not equitable to all our residents.
2. It eliminates regional success to housing our populations.
3. It encourages and opens the door to costly litigation, diverting limited city funds to lawyers.

It is not equitable to all our residents.

Unfortunately, this bill seeks to increase the rights of homeless individuals but at a steep cost to children, low-income families, seniors and other residents. With this bill, cities like ours may not prohibit individuals from engaging in life-sustaining activities in public spaces, and you have defined such activities as moving, resting, sitting, standing, lying down, sleeping, protecting oneself and personal property from the elements, eating, drinking, and other basic activities necessary for survival. What's missing on that list, that I also count as life-sustaining activities? Running, playing, sitting outside, meeting friends, celebrating birthday parties. These are all the activities that people currently use our parks to do that your bill will, unfortunately, eliminate. Teens can't play soccer if there's a tent erected in the middle of the field. Seniors can't enjoy Washington's famous pickleball if an individual decides to sleep and protect their personal belongings on the covered pickleball court we just spent millions to build. This bill purposefully puts conflicting uses together in the same spaces, creating volatile, unsafe situations for all.

It eliminates regional success to housing our populations.

Everyone agrees that we must care for our homeless and most vulnerable populations. I myself have cared personally for individuals sleeping on Sumner's streets. I know their names. I know what they need. I've helped them get services with care and compassion. Have you? This kind of dictation from on high will make services less accessible. This bill seems to ignore all the gains we've made. It starts by saying it's necessary because "Evictions and homelessness are increasing and are at unprecedented levels." Does that mean your historic Rent Control bill, passed less than a year ago, is not working? In Sumner, we have an unprecedented level of multi-family units are being built. And one of the developers told me last week that the key challenge to developing more housing is the homelessness issue as homeless individuals try to gain access to their buildings from public spaces. And when more families than ever are living in multi-family units instead of single-family homes, you know what else they need? Parks to play in and get outside. Our small businesses need the

outdoor tables and chairs we're building in Heritage Park right on our classic Main Street. This bill also ignores the regional approach our cities have taken for housing and human services. This bill specifies that shelter space only qualifies if it is located within the territorial limits of the city or town. I'm on the board of South Sound Housing Affordability Partners (SSHA3P). The driving force behind this was purposefully to partner across our smaller Pierce County cities to better care for people on a regional basis because we can do more with limited funds. And, it's working. This bill completely ignores those efforts if the shelter spaces are in nearby Puyallup. Sumner is never an island in providing essential services to our residents. ALL our residents have to cross the "territorial limits" to reach an Emergency Room in Bonney Lake or Puyallup. It works. Our animal shelter is in Puyallup; our court is in Bonney Lake; key non-profits like Step-by-Step and St. Francis House are in Puyallup with lots of support from Sumner residents. We will help get people the services they need much better if you will acknowledge the regional partnerships already in place to do just that.

It encourages and opens the door to costly litigation, diverting limited city funds to lawyers. Unfortunately, the actual result of this bill will funnel limited city revenue to lawyers. Section 2 outlines "an action for injunctive or declaratory relief to challenge the enforcement of a city." This is a bill to sue cities. And it already happened in Oregon on a similar bill. Any lawsuit, even a frivolous one, takes money and time away from cities providing core services including human services to our homeless populations.

In summary, this bill states that "State and local governments have a shared responsibility in addressing the homelessness crisis and transitioning unsheltered residents." I agree with this line. Unfortunately, this bill also eliminates a city's ability to address homelessness and dictates from the State what will work best in every single community in Washington State. I don't agree that's best. It is offensive to every social worker, affordable housing advocate, donor and caring person in Sumner who is already helping to take care of the homeless individuals in our community while retaining public spaces for the equitable use of all.