

Representative Javier Valdez,

I am writing to you as a resident of your district (living in Greenlake), and to submit public comment for **HB 1591, concerning the rights of persons experiencing homelessness**.

Before I begin, I would like to note that the bill does not define "unreasonable fines or fees" or even the term "unreasonable" alone--which could be adapted from the RCW's language around child care or at-home care when it comes to the standard basic necessities of a living person. While I appreciate allowing local jurisdictions the ability to define how much unreasonable fines and fees may be, I feel the bill should define what constitutes as "unreasonable," be it on a monetary and/or manner basis, so as to avoid disparate and unequal punishment under this law across jurisdictional lines.

Homelessness is a women's rights issue. Homelessness sits at the intersection of so many crucial issues that plague our society today. While women make up a minority of homeless demographics, the majority of homeless women are in that situation because they are fleeing domestic violence.

Homelessness is a taxpayer issue. Criminalizing the homeless, forcing them through jail and court systems, and accumulating fines place a more significant taxpayer burden than would've otherwise accrued with no bookings or fines. The taxpayer burden additionally increases most significantly when the homeless are in dire need of medical attention because they face the brunt of outdoor conditions rather than getting housed. As such, medical costs for trips to the ER cost taxpayers a far greater expense than no trips at all (due to a difference of living in indoor versus outdoor conditions) or than regular check-ups (typically accompanying services).

Homelessness is an equity issue. Homelessness, especially that of King County, disproportionately affect people of color. Of the homeless persons demographics, Indigenous people are the most disproportionately affected, followed by Black men.

And, the most important piece of all: Homelessness is everyone's issue. Anyone can become homeless. Studies show the majority of Washingtonians are but one missing paycheck away from becoming homeless.

It wasn't too long ago that my mother and I became homeless. As a single mother who got divorced when she didn't have a job (specifically because she wanted to be at home, caring for me), my mother struggled to battle in divorce court, pay lawyer's fees, find employment, put food on the table, and pay her monthly bills. Not to mention the chunk of income loss when my father left the household; income otherwise assumed would be present when my parents originally bought the house. Resulting bills, fines, and fees became too much and my mom could never get out of the debt cycle. The bank took our house and we had to leave.

While we never had to live on the street, we were very close. For a while, we just haphazardly lived in my mom's boyfriend's place. But not for too long because neither of us wanted to be there. That was the summer before I left for college.

Eventually, my mom settled with living on her mom's (my grandma's) extremely rural property for a very low cost of rent. But she's isolated there as she ages, is reminded of her childhood sexual abuse, and struggles very deeply with depression. To this day, we never really found a solution for my mom--especially in rural Washington. Housing and homelessness--inextricably linked--are very close to

my heart and very directly affect those around me. If housing and homelessness do not directly affect you, you most certainly know someone they affect--whether you're aware of it or not.

As a reporter in Seattle over the course of four years, I routinely covered homelessness and talked to homeless people. It is no small coincidence that the struggle to get back on their feet primarily derives from being unhoused. Then, nearly in the same stride, from being deemed a criminal for a choice that did not begin as theirs.

If someone is homeless, doesn't have a means to gain housing, and then gets a criminal record for simply existing the only way anyone can when they don't have housing, the odds of that person then gaining housing become dramatically worse with a newly-attained or added criminal record.

The cycle has to stop somewhere. And the hands-down, scientifically-proven best way to stop the debt, jail, and/or homelessness cycle is by providing permanent supportive housing.

No person, child, teen, veteran, victim, or parent should ever become homeless. In the event that happens, our government has failed them. The faces and the circumstances of homelessness are many, and it doesn't necessarily matter how a person got to be homeless; the fact is that they are, and therein lies the problem. It's as simple as that.

Please show support for this bill. Let it pass out of committee, and please cast a vote in favor should it reach the House and then Legislative Floor.

Thank you for your dedication and your time,
Kelsey Hamlin