

Testimony of Vince Munoz

House Welfare Reform Committee Testimony in Opposition of HB 2430 March 2, 2023

Dear Representatives Averkamp, Meyer, and other members of the Committee,

I'm writing in opposition to HB 2430, criminalizing homelessness. I'll keep this brief, as you'll likely receive longer, more data-intensive testimony from other organizations across Kansas. There are two primary reasons to oppose this bill.

First, this bill is designed to get unhoused people out of sight and out of mind, not to actually solve homelessness. It's predicated on the fundamentally incorrect view that homelessness is a moral failing rather than a financial situation many people find themselves in. Unhoused people deserve our support, not punishment.

There are many Christians in the legislature and likely on this committee. While I don't think religion should play a prominent role in policy making, my hope is that we understand that this bill does not follow Christian ideals. Would one turn away the Christ, who started life unhoused, if he was with us today? One of the most elementary teachings in Christianity is the corporal works of mercy, which includes sheltering the homeless, not punishing them.

The second reason to oppose this bill is that there is one obvious solution to breaking the cycle of homelessness: housing people. This might sound strange to those who view unhoused people as an inconvenience, but unhoused people want a stable housing situation for themselves. However, it's close to impossible to escape homelessness once one finds themselves there.

Imagine if you were homeless trying to find a place to live. On nearly every standard rental application, you're asked to list your current address for credit and background checks. If

you cannot provide a current address because you do not have one, a landlord simply won't consider your application to live there.

And even if a landlord did process your application and somehow approved you, how do we expect unhoused people to pay their first month's rent or their security deposit? They would have obviously used that money to stay sheltered in the first place if they had it. Rather than requiring local governments to spend additional money on policing homelessness, we need to support municipalities in using money to house people experiencing homelessness.

Imagine, once again, that you're homeless but now looking for work. Similarly to the rental application, job applications ask for your current address, as they need it for payroll purposes. If you do not have one, it looks like you did not complete the job application correctly, and you will not even be considered for an interview.

And, once again, even if you did get an interview, many employers harbor the same prejudice against unhoused people as the authors and sponsors of this bill. They are not interested in hiring people they perceive to be failures. By housing someone before efforts to find a stable source of income for them, we increase their chance of success in getting that source.

Unhoused Kansans deserve to be treated with dignity. Not only is it the morally sound thing to do, it is also good policy. This bill does nothing more than attempt to get rid of people perceived to be a problem. If we actually want to end homelessness in our state we need to house those experiencing homelessness. We also need to prevent others from falling into it. Things like expanding Medicaid, raising the minimum wage, and other measures that support working class Kansans are essential to keeping people housed.

For all the above reasons, this committee must vote down HB 2430.

Thank you,

Vince Munoz

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