



PEACE & FREEDOM PARTY OF CALIFORNIA

State Central Committee

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March 31, 2015

Hon. Carol Liu
State Capitol, Room 5097
Sacramento, CA 95814-4900

Subject: SB 608 Right to Rest Act of 2015 - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Liu,

The Peace and Freedom Party of California supports SB 608, which will end the criminalization of rest and accompanying violations of basic human and civil rights for all people regardless of their housing status. In doing so, SB 608 would encourage the diversion of expenditures on citing and jailing people for resting in public spaces to efforts to prevent homelessness. It is our belief that homelessness is not a crime. The crime is allowing a society where people are forced to live without a decent place to live.

California, with only 12 percent of the country's overall population but 22 percent of its homeless population and 25 percent of its homeless veteran population, is at the epicenter of the criminalization of homelessness. According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, California cities are substantially more likely than cities in other states to ban rest. While only 33 percent of non-California cities restrict this activity, 74 percent of California cities ban the practice.

Researchers from the Policy Advocacy Clinic at the University of California at Berkeley Law School analyzed the prevalence of these types of municipal codes restricting rest and sharing of food in 58 California cities for its report "California's New Vagrancy Laws: The Growing Enactment and Enforcement of Anti-Homeless Laws in the Golden State." Researchers identified over 500 municipal laws criminalizing standing, sitting, resting, sleeping and sharing of food in public places as well as laws making it illegal to ask for money, nearly nine laws per city, on average. The study also found that the number of ordinances targeting those behaviors rose along with the rise in homelessness following the sharp decline of federal funding for affordable housing that was cut in the early 1980s and again with the Great Recession in 2008.

Criminalizing practices which are not criminal not only worsens the condition of people without homes, but also narrows their opportunities to escape homelessness. By acknowledging the failure of municipal laws that criminalize poverty and homelessness, we hope that passage of this legislation will improve the focus on more humane and effective responses to homelessness.

The Right to Rest Act of 2015 will end the practice of citing and imprisoning Californians for resting, sharing food or practicing religion in public. The Peace and Freedom Party has a base in the poor neighborhoods and barrios of California. Our goals are to lift people out of poverty through education and jobs at union wages and to ensure that everyone has access to adequate food, housing, health care, and transportation.

The Peace and Freedom Party supports SB 608 and urges its passage. Thank you for introducing this important legislation. If you would like to discuss our position on SB 608 further, please contact C. T. Weber at 916-320-9186 (mobile) or ctwebervoters@att.net, or Debra Reiger, at 916-698-8131 (mobile) or debra.reiger@earthlink.net.

Sincerely,



Debra Reiger
State Chairperson



C. T. Weber
Legislative Committee Chair

cc: Senate Transportation and Housing Committee

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