

HCS HB 2614 -- FUNDING FOR HOUSING PROGRAMS

SPONSOR: DeGroot

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Judiciary by a vote of 8 to 0.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 2614.

This bill provides that state funds for homelessness shall be used for certain facilities, including parking areas, camping facilities, and short-term shelters, and shall comply with certain requirements as provided in the bill. Additionally, any person who owns or operates a private camping facility pursuant to this bill shall be immune from liability as provided in the bill.

State funds otherwise used for permanent housing projects shall be used to assist individuals with substance use, mental health treatment, and other services like short-term housing. The Department of Economic Development shall award certain funds as bonuses for political subdivisions that reduce the number of individuals with days unhoused, days in jail, or days hospitalized. This bill provides that no person shall be permitted to use state-owned lands for unauthorized sleeping, camping, or long-term shelters. Any violation shall be a Class C misdemeanor; however the first offense shall be a warning with no citation.

A political subdivision shall not adopt any policy under which the political subdivision prohibits the enforcement of any ordinance prohibiting public camping, sleeping, or obstruction of sidewalks. The Attorney General shall have the power to bring a civil action to enjoin the political subdivision from failing to enforce any ordinances prohibiting public camping, sleeping, or obstruction of sidewalks.

Any political subdivision with a higher per-capita homelessness rate than the state average shall receive no further state funding until the Department determines the political subdivision has a lower homelessness rate than the state average or it enforces ordinances prohibiting unauthorized sleeping and camping.

A political subdivision may allocate up to 25% of funds it receives from the state through grants for public safety to the creation of homeless outreach teams as provided in the bill.

This bill shall not apply to shelters for domestic violence victims.

The provisions of this bill shall be effective on January 1, 2023.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that there is a homelessness issue in St. Louis and it is very sad. The streets where there are a lot of homeless people are not safe and people's businesses are affected. The people in the homeless camps need treatment and care. This bill bans camping on the streets and instead provides a place for them to go, and there are requirements for the stays. Once they are there for six months they can go into a federal program for housing, but they can't stay at this place for more than six months. People are getting assaulted and being ignored and the solution is not to throw money at the problem. We have to get them off the streets and into facilities. There are at least 6500 homeless people in Missouri, and we need a new path because our current one is not working. If you don't have a time limit, you can't help people get to the next step. The intention of this is not to criminalize homelessness, but Austin has this and so does Colorado Springs and they have seen a reduction in crimes and injuries in their homeless communities. The encampment usually gets a week's notice that it's going to be shut down and you provide them information for services and treatment. Missouri already has some of these laws in place but this bill is trying to provide more "bang for our buck" with addressing the issue and getting treatment and moving people off the street.

Testifying for the bill were Representative DeGroot; Arnie C. Ac Dienoff; and Judge Glock, Cicero Action.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that there are some concerns about the criminal components of the bill.

Testifying against the bill were Belle Delacruz; Chessa Dixon, Pettis County Community Partnership, Inc.; Kelly Winchester, Finding Grace Ministries; Micah Titterington; Patirica, Project 360 Youth Services; Patricia Brayfield, Elevate Lebanon; Patti; Health Forward Foundation; Sarah Owsley, Empower Missouri; Empower Missouri; Sarah Robison, Callaway Cares; and Sarah Robison, Callaway Cares.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say the intent here is not to include domestic violence shelters.

Testifying on the bill were Missouri Coalition Against Domestic And Sexual Violence (MoCADSV); and Jillian Barnas, Missouri Science and Technology (MOST).

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full

written testimony can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.