

February 24, 2016

TO: Chair Gilbert Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair Maile Shimabukuro and  
Members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and Labor

FROM: Barbara Polk

**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SB 2816**

I strongly oppose SB2816 which would extend the Honolulu City vendetta against the homeless to the State. I believe we are all aware that there are not enough jobs in Hawaii, where even with increases in the minimum wage, a person cannot afford to rent even a very basic apartment on a minimum wage salary. Added to this, we do not have enough low income housing to accommodate the needs of our communities. Politicians at all levels have watched for years as homelessness increased without taking any meaningful action to help homeless people. Although both the City and the State have passed measures that somewhat increase the store of affordable housing, "affordable" has more often been defined as being for people earning \$90,000 or more than being truly affordable for people on very low, minimum wage incomes.

Rather than dealing with the underlying problems, the City began forcing people out of the parks, then step by step eliminating any other place they could be. Now the Governor, while cutting back his request for funds to repair public housing, is asking that the State undertake the cruel measures of the City. I strongly object!

Until such time as the State and City take major steps to house people, I do not understand why people cannot stay on unused public land. Why should land sit idle while families struggle to find anywhere to sleep that will not result in being pushed around in the middle of the night? If the desire is to get homeless people out of sight until solutions are found, I do not understand why they should be forbidden to live under the freeways, where they are protected and not impeding anyone else.

I would also point out that this bill has no referral to WAM, although it would be quite costly in material and labor. Has anyone estimated the cost of posting all public lands with no trespassing signs, not to mention maintaining them and replacing them as needed? Has anyone estimated the cost of the personnel time necessary to enforce this law?

When I was in Tokyo three years ago, I saw a homeless encampment in a public park adjacent to government buildings. An area near a Buddhist temple had been cordoned off. A small community of people had pitched tents, hung out their laundry, and were cooking on hibachis. The temple apparently provided sanitary facilities. It is painful to feel that Tokyo has more Aloha than the so-called Aloha state.

Homeless people are also your constituents. Although they cannot fund your campaigns, they deserve your support. Please do not pass this bill.