

We can protect people who live in their vehicles from losing their only shelter because of their poverty. HB 1240 (Peterson) ensures that the rights of people who must shelter in their vehicles are protected as required by law.

Steven Long was living in his truck when the City of Seattle impounded it, cutting him off from his shelter and the tools he needed to work. He could not pay the \$547 in fines required to keep his truck from being auctioned off, so he was forced to sleep on the street.

As a result of his case, the Washington Supreme Court held in 2021 that the constitution prohibits fines that deprive people of their means of living. Courts must now consider a person's ability to pay when determining whether a fine is constitutional. The Court also held that Washington's Homestead Act automatically protects vehicles used as a primary residence. Vehicle homes can't be forcibly sold to pay off towing debts.

Unfortunately, courts around the state continue to impose fines that people living in their vehicles can't pay, leading to their only shelter being illegally sold at auction.

House Bill 1240 would:

- Require courts to consider a person's ability to pay before levying towing fees, and to lower fees where they are constitutionally excessive
- Strengthen homestead protections for vehicle residences by preventing vehicle residences from being sold at auction and more quickly returning impounded vehicles to people who live in them
- Update court forms to make it easier and more efficient for people who live in their vehicles to request the hearings necessary to getting their vehicles back
- Require that people who live in their vehicles be given an opportunity to claim them as residences before they are wrongly disposed of as abandoned

Updated: January 13, 2025