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HB 4094 Medical amnesty for Minors

Chair Prozanski and members of the committee, my name is Katy King and I'm here today representing OCEP, the Oregon Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians. OCEP is a medical society that has represented physicians specializing in emergency medicine since 1971 and its members share a commitment to improve emergency healthcare for all Oregonians.

OCEP supports House Bill 4094. This bill encourages minors to seek medical care on behalf of a friend experiencing an alcohol-related emergency. Often teens fail to seek medical assistance for fear of prosecution. Legal immunity for "Good Samaritans" may help save a life.

Emergency medicine physicians are frequently called upon to provide care for people of all ages who experience alcohol overdose. Alcohol poisoning, a medical emergency that results from high blood alcohol levels that suppress the central nervous system and can cause loss of consciousness, low blood pressure and body temperature, coma, respiratory depression, or death. The Centers for Disease Control reports there were over 1.2 million emergency room visits and 2.7 million physician office visits due to excessive alcohol use in 2006.

You've heard about tragedies that result from teen-age binge drinking. Let me share with you a story about a young person doing the right thing. Recently, a student brought their friend in to an emergency room in Eugene. The young patient had an extremely high blood alcohol level and immediate measures needed to be taken to support the patient's breathing. However, the student's decision to bring his friend in may have saved his life. The emergency room physician and

colleagues made a point of thanking the student for having the courage to bring his friend in for help rather than wait until it was too late.

Some other examples: A 15 year-old female was dropped off at an Oregon emergency department late at night, not breathing, unresponsive, and smelling of alcohol. Her friends gave her name and left. The emergency department physician had to intubate (resuscitate) her and put her on a respirator to breathe for her until the next morning. Fortunately, she had no obvious residual damage, and was discharged home with her family. So, the kids did the right thing by bringing her in, but it could easily have been just too late.

An 18 year-old male college freshman found by another student at school event on restroom floor -- unresponsive, but breathing on his own, but he possibly aspirated vomit. He was naive about alcohol but was urged to drink more and more by an upper-classman. Sometime before the patient was transferred to the hospital by ambulance, the police served him with a MIP. He did not realize that since he was unconscious when it was served. The patient recovered overnight on oxygen & observation in the emergency department of the local hospital.

The patient found the MIP ticket in a pair of jeans a few weeks later. He didn't remember anything concerning it, in fact, didn't know what an MIP was.

All of these patients were very fortunate not to have died of respiratory arrest from acute alcohol poisoning. In these instances the window between life and death is short and it is critical to get the patient to immediate medical help.

Rather than serve an unconscious person an MIP, it's more helpful to tell the friends who brought the patient in that they did the right thing and to educate them on the dangers of alcohol poisoning.

This bill will help to promote more scenarios like that.

In summary, HB 4094 is a good policy that may help young people to make better decisions during an emergency. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'd be pleased to answer any questions.