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To: House Behavioral Health Committee
From: Oregon Law Center
Date: February 24th, 2021
Re: Support for HB 2417

Chair Sanchez, Vice-Chairs Nosse and Moore-Green, and members of the committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, I submit this testimony in support of HB 2417, which would support the establishment of mobile crisis intervention teams to assist communities in coordinating compassionate and trauma-informed access to sobering facilities, shelters, and crisis respite centers. We thank Chair Sanchez and all the bill's sponsors for bringing this important measure forward.

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a statewide non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. OLC uses its limited resources to serve only the most critical legal needs—food, shelter, basic medical care, physical safety, and self-sufficiency. By ensuring access to justice for our clients in these areas, we can remove barriers to escaping poverty.

A significant percentage of our client community is one emergency away from homelessness – or are houseless themselves, living either doubled-up or in shelter, or living outside without adequate shelter. The pandemic has exacerbated this situation, and currently more than half of Oregon's population experiencing homelessness is unsheltered, exposed to the elements and myriad public health and safety crises.

It is important to note that BIPOC communities, as a result of long-standing systemic racism, are more likely to suffer unsheltered homelessness than other Oregonians.¹ Black Oregonians are twice as likely to live in poverty, two times more likely than white people to rent their homes instead of owning them², and three times more likely to experience homelessness because of the impact of racism in our housing and employment systems.

¹ <https://www.streetroots.org/news/2020/12/02/opinion-what-do-people-experiencing-homelessness-need>

² https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/citizen_engagement/Reports/2019-JARDHO-Addressing%20Barriers%20to%20Home%20Ownership%20for%20People%20of%20Color%20in%20Oregon.pdf

Oregonians experiencing homelessness are subject to disproportionate rates of arrest and criminalization.³ These responses can often inadvertently create additional barriers to recovery and stability, as arrest records and fines and fees add up. It is well-documented that homelessness is correlated with mental illness, and that mental illness requires specialized response.⁴

HB 2417 will expand upon the very successful CAHOOTS program to expand access to trauma-informed service providers to respond to non-emergency calls. These services will enhance community safety, and provide individuals with assistance that can link to greater access to services, shelter, and crisis support. For these reasons, we urge support of HB 2417.

Thank you for your commitment to Oregonians.

³ <https://www.kgw.com/article/news/local/homeless/portland-arrests-2019-homeless-mayor-race/283-abe6c46f-6e91-405d-88f8-c315f718fad7#:~:text=%3A%20Report%20on%20homeless%20arrests%20sparks,arrests%20in%20Portland%20last%20year.>

⁴ <https://www.bbrfoundation.org/blog/homelessness-and-mental-illness-challenge-our-society>