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Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and Members of the Senate Committee on Health Care:

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 1076, which addresses the urgent need for better discharge planning for homeless residents, to prevent needless deaths from cold and other inclement weather conditions. As a concerned citizen of Oregon, I believe that every human being deserves access to basic healthcare, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that vulnerable populations, including the homeless, are not left to suffer and die needlessly.

Homelessness is a complex issue that affects communities across the America, and Oregon is no exception. While there are many different factors that contribute to homelessness, one of the most pressing concerns is the lack of access to medical care and safety when it is needed most, especially during extreme weather conditions through the winter months. When temperatures drop below freezing, homeless individuals are at increased risk of hypothermia, frostbite, and other serious health complications. Without proper medical attention, these conditions can quickly become life-threatening, as they have many times in the past. Often homeless folks who go to the emergency rooms in Oregon are discharged at night in winter months into dangerous conditions. They may be medically stable at discharge, but only because they are warm and sheltered from the elements.

Senate Bill 1076 seeks to address this critical issue by providing emergency medical care for homeless residents who are dying outside during cold and other inclement weather. The bill would require emergency medical services to be cautious in their discharge practices of our homeless. It would also require hospitals to prioritize releasing homeless patients when it is safe for them to do so, and to prioritize services to homeless individuals and connect them with housing and other supportive services.

I believe that Senate Bill 1076 represents an important step towards addressing the needs of homeless residents in our community and ensuring that they receive the care and support they need to stay healthy and safe. By exercising caution with discharge decisions, Senate Bill 1076 will require hospitals to create a best practice system for homeless patients, to prevent needless suffering and death among some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 1076 and take action to address the urgent healthcare needs of homeless residents of our community.

Sincerely,

Lisa Harnisch
Executive Director

