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**To:** Joint Committee on Behavioral Health and Healthcare  
**From:** Vicky Armstrong, BS, MA  
Community Engagement Liaison, Medford Police Department  
**Date:** March 11, 2025  
**Re:** **HB 3146 – Testimony in Support**  
**A Safe Place to Wait**

**Chair Nosse and members of the committee:**

For the record, my name is Vicky Armstrong, and I am the Community Engagement Liaison for the Livability Team at the Medford Police Department. My work involves engaging with justice-involved individuals with complex needs to help them imagine and achieve a healthy, safe, stable life. I most commonly meet people during arrest or while they are lodged in jail and begin to build relationships.

I have the privilege of learning from each person their unique story and circumstances as well as their goals and dreams. These individuals may be battling the effects of childhood dysfunction and trauma, homelessness, substance use, mental health concerns, and despair from the hopelessness of their situation. I often encounter people who tell me they would rather die than continue to live their current life; they cannot imagine a pathway to hope.

While jail is not the place for the care and long-term treatment most individuals need, it is a place of safety and a chance to not use substances; this frequently offers a time for clarity and a chance to dream. It is in these moments that the relationship we've been building flourishes. The possibility of treatment comes into focus, and we begin to put the steppingstones to their specific pathway in place. Through programs in the jail, people can begin medication assisted treatment, meet with peers, and be assessed to determine their level of care needs. This engenders hope and the beginning of the dream for a different life.

This is also where these journeys are often derailed. Because the number of residential treatment beds in the state is insubstantial relative to the need, individuals being released from jail seldom have the



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opportunity to go directly to residential treatment. Instead, they are often left with no option but to return to their former places, habits, and circumstances.

In Jackson County, local behavioral health providers have recognized this problem and created a new model of care that offers lodging for people who are unhoused or unstably housed and on waitlists for residential treatment. These emergency lodgings are low barrier and – while there is not a requirement for sobriety or reduced use – they are a stable, safe place to wait. Support is provided through daily contact with a case manager or peer, and participants must accept the placement to residential treatment when it becomes available.

I cannot overstate the significant impact of this program. When I'm working with someone in jail who has made the decision to engage with services, completed their assessment, and is looking forward to the promise of a different life, the certainty of having a Safe Place to Wait is affirming and life-giving as they step onto this new path.

The expansion of this type of lodging across the state is imperative to support both individuals seeking care and agencies working to provide that needed treatment. I urge your **full support of HB 3146** to administer a pilot program to provide low-barrier emergency housing for houseless or unsafely housed individuals on waiting lists for residential substance use disorder treatment or withdrawal management programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to support this important legislation.