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Public Hearing before the Senate Committee on Health Care

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In Support of SB 1079

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, please accept this testimony in support of the goals of SB 1079, which proposes standards for licensed hospitals to include in the hospital's discharge policy specified procedures for the discharge of homeless patients.

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a state-wide 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. The majority of our client community is rent burdened – one emergency away from homelessness – or are houseless themselves, living either doubled-up or in shelter, or living outside without adequate shelter.

When our clients who are experiencing homelessness are discharged from hospital care, they face serious challenges in maintaining their health care recovery plans. If they do not have a safe and stable place to be, discharged patients struggle to access and retain medication, follow through with treatment plans, or avoid further injury or infection. This vulnerability suffered by people experiencing homelessness is evident in the tragic death rates among this population, which we can now track more effectively on a statewide basis thanks to Chair Patterson's recent legislative efforts.

It is far too common that OLC's clients with serious medical needs who are experiencing homelessness suffer harm as a result of being discharged without adequate planning.

We know that caregivers in hospitals, and community service providers, care deeply about their patients and community members who are experiencing homelessness. SB 1076 calls attention to the critical impact that discharge planning can have on the health and safety of patients experiencing homelessness, and is an important call for collaboration and improvement in our community response to this crisis.

For the above reasons, we urge your support. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.