

Submitter: Derek Stewart

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care

Measure: SB1076

I am a board certified emergency medicine physician at Salem Health Hospital. The Salem Health emergency room is the busiest ER on the west coast with 300-400 ER visits everyday. Our ER like many across our state is challenged by overcrowding, boarding, and staff shortages which have only been made worse by the pandemic. Our community also faces a housing crisis with a growing homeless population and very limited homeless shelter resources to refer our homeless patients to. Our homeless patients often have challenging mental health and substance abuse problems complicating their discharge plan even further. For example, we will refer them to our only local homeless shelter only to find out that they are not welcome there due to their violent and criminal behavior in the past. Also, we will refer a patient to a homeless shelter, but the patient refuses to go stating that they would rather be on the street than at the shelter. Boarding these patients in the ER for hours to days on end does not solve the homeless crisis and it also takes emergent medical resources away from members in our community who have emergent medical needs. The ER can not refuse to treat anyone who checks in per the Emergency Medicine Treatment and Labor Act and with OR Senate Bill 1076 what is to stop dozens if not hundreds of homeless patients checking into the ER every evening for a place to stay overnight knowing we can not discharge them until morning. Our ER can not treat and stabilize potentially 300-400 emergencies a day and also be a homeless shelter. I oppose OR Senate Bill 1076 as this will hurt patients and hospitals while not remedying the root cause of homelessness. Our legislature should instead invest in more mental health resources, addiction medicine resources, more homeless shelters, and more publicly funded low income housing instead of putting this burden onto its hospitals who are trying to provide high quality medical care in a very challenging post pandemic environment.