



OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, Members of The Committee

I am deeply concerned with the death of Melisa Blake, one of our houseless neighbors who was discharged from a hospital in my district. We need to make sure that this never happens again in my region. While I support the intent of this legislation I know that those providing care and resources for those less fortunate recognize what happened here. I know they are improving their processes so none of our neighbors are at risk of dying because of no fault of their own, but through a failure in the connections between various service providers, as discussed here.

Following her death, I've heard from constituents, colleagues of mine in the legislature, and read about her death as reported in the news. I had a number of meetings with leadership at Salem Health and Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency, and learned more about this specific incident, including what each organization is currently doing to ensure safety of patients and make future improvements necessary to ensure this never happens again.

It's clear improvements are being made to increase coordination between providers and ensure that all parties are notified when an unhoused person is under care or supervision. A homeless navigator program is also being developed and will be staffed by entities that are most familiar with resources provided to our unhoused neighbors.



To the legislation specifically, I believe our healthcare system across the state is understaffed and under-resourced. This legislation may increase the burden on hospital staff and I'm working with experts to better understand the strain reporting requirements will or will not put on the staff. I am focused on increasing pay for direct care workers, the number of hospital beds in our region, more resources and housing for the unhoused, and addressing root causes of homelessness and health.

My minister father always said that the poor and underserved in our communities do not need charity, they need justice. I hope that we can continue working together to find understanding about how Melisa Blake died the way she did, make the necessary improvements to our inter-agency care for those less fortunate than we are, and seek to make the world, and, specifically, our community a better place.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Andersen".

Tom Andersen