



April 12, 2021

Testimony in support of HB 2367

Oregon Health Authority's commitments to improve care for Oregon Health Plan members under CCO 2.0 include a focus on social determinants of health and health equity¹.

Houselessness is a public health emergency. In Eugene, around 2,200 human beings were estimated to be living unsheltered in June of 2020² and around 178 people become newly unsheltered each month³.

Houselessness is a social determinant of health associated with a panoply of negative health outcomes, including higher rates of chronic illness, mental illness, infectious disease, injury, disability, and premature death⁴. The negativity of each of these outcomes is cruelly exacerbated by criminalizing the basic human need for rest.

Oregon's responses to unsheltered populations have centered on policing, criminalization, and sweeps of camp sites, an inhumane practice which contravenes current CDC guidance during the pandemic⁵. The urge to police and criminalize houselessness rather than establish sanctioned camping and parking space, fund shelter-based solutions, and address housing shortages, has produced humiliating arrest statistics for Oregon cities. Roughly one out of every four arrests in Eugene are of an unsheltered human being⁶, while in Portland over half of arrests are of an unsheltered person⁷. Health outcomes are directly worsened by sweeps, where medicines and medical devices are often disposed of and infectious disease spread is accelerated.

Though unsheltered people suffer from sleep deprivation at alarming rates⁸, even sitting on a bench in a public space is used arbitrarily as pretext for citation, harassment, and/or arrest. Unsurprisingly, stress and harm associated with policing and the threat of criminalization has been shown to have negative mental and physical health outcomes, including an increase in the risk of premature death⁹.

HB 2367, The Right to Rest Act, is essential for improving health equity and outcomes for unsheltered people in Oregon and it cannot wait. We urge the House Judiciary Committee to pass this essential legislation out of committee for a full vote.

Sincerely,

Robert Fisette, ASA, MAAA, PhD
Principal and Consulting Actuary
Apollo Actuarial Services

Alathea Letaw, PhD
Principal and Senior Data Scientist
Apollo Actuarial Services

¹ <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/OHPB/Pages/CCO-2-0.aspx>

² <https://www.eugene-or.gov/DocumentCenter/View/55791/Homelessness-By-Name-List-FAQ>

³ <https://newswire.kepw.org/2021/03/28/randy-groves-to-hrc-178-new-homeless-each-month/>

⁴ "Homelessness and Emergency Medicine: A Review of the Literature." Academic Emergency Medicine, Volume 25, Issue 5, pp.577-593. Accessed April 11, 2021 from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/acem.13358>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html>

⁶ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/cities-try-to-arrest-their-way-out-of-homeless-problems>

⁷ <https://www.kgw.com/article/news/local/homeless/portland-arrests-2019-homeless-mayor-race/283-abe6c46f-6e91-405d-88f8-c315f718fad7>

⁸ "Subjective Sleep Inadequacy and Self-rated Health among Homeless Adults." American Journal of Health Behavior, Volume 39, Number 1, pp.14-21. Accessed 4/11/2021 from: <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/png/ajhb/2015/00000039/00000001/art00002;jsessionid=1mmwq3ua2x1al.x-ic-live-03>

⁹ <https://www.networkforphl.org/news-insights/policing-as-a-social-determinant-of-health-addressing-the-public-health-crisis-of-systemic-racism/>