

Submitter: THOMAS JOHNSON

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care

Measure: SB1076

I am an emergency physician working in Yamhill County, and this bill is ill-conceived and dangerous to all Oregonians. Housing insecurity is a catastrophic societal problem, and by no means is my opposition to this bill based on a bias against the homeless population. As an emergency department, we are trained and set up to manage medical conditions. Particularly with smaller hospitals, this bill will lead to dramatic delays in everyone's care, since the overwhelming majority of small hospitals do not have a social worker or case manager dedicated to the emergency department. Therefore, physician's and nurses will be tasked with performing these duties. Overutilization of emergency departments for non-emergent conditions will become even more dramatic than it already is. If a patient identifying as homeless comes to the emergency department and says "I cut myself shaving", even if they have absolutely no evidence of active bleeding, and they register as a patient, by federal law, I am required to perform a medical screening exam. This would of course only take several seconds and they could then be discharged, but if this bill becomes law, this visit will take hours. This patient will now occupy an emergency department bed as we navigate the requirements of this law (not to mention if they patient checks in at 10pm in December), preventing individuals with actual medical complaints from being seen. The medical system is already at a breaking point, and this bill will result in people dying in emergency department waiting rooms.

Homelessness needs a solution, but the Oregon legislature seems to want to defer their responsibility to address this problem, and instead, simply place it on the backs of the state's emergency departments. Our emergency departments are already strained from the delta and omicron waves of Covid, staffing shortages, the recent RSV and influenza surges, as well as continued hospital capacity issues. Adding on an additional barrier to provide care to the citizens of Oregon with emergency medical conditions like heart attacks, trauma, strokes, or the myriad other medical emergencies we treat on a regular basis is a complete folly, and will result in the death of innocent Oregonians. Perhaps what is the most disturbing, this bill will not at all address the root causes of homelessness. Passing this bill will only serve to increase the strain on the healthcare system, at a time when it is already under immense pressure.