



Board of Commissioners

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Honorable Chair Jama, Vice Chair Anderson and members of the committee,

The Benton County Board of Commissioners endorses the -5 amendment to SB 847.

As a HB 4123 pilot county for coordination on homelessness, we work very closely with our cities, the Community Services Consortium (community action agency), IHN-CCO and local community-based organizations to address homelessness and housing insecurity.

Through our joint efforts, we have made progress in expanding shelter beds, transitional shelter and coordinated wrap-around services. However, we have barely made a dent in the issue of rough camping in our parks, along highway right-of-ways, and in riparian areas.

Housing people in cars or tents is not our preferred option, but until we have a full-service navigation center and more transitional and permanent supportive housing resources, we will continue to have neighbors camping rough. Couples, LGBTQ+ individuals and people with pets are among those who don't find a place in standard emergency shelters.

Scattered and unsupported camping is unsafe for our residents – especially for the unhoused. It places a water quality burden on Marys River and other waterways, and a cost burden on our cities and ODOT. But mostly, it exacerbates the instability and stress for those who are unhoused.

The -5 amendment will remove one of the primary obstacles to providing designated safe resting places – obtaining liability coverage. Our local service providers have been unable to obtain liability coverage, even when we have located potentially suitable sites.

We support the sidebars, including the protection of riparian areas and provision of basic amenities and access for emergency services.

Thank you for your consideration.

Xan Augerot, Vice Chair

Cc: Speaker Rayfield, Representative Gomberg, Senator Gelser-Blouin,