

March 29, 2021



To Whom it May Concern:

In Salem, Oregon, a small movement known as Church@the Park has formed in order to interact with people who experience homelessness in a relational way. As the Capital of Oregon, Salem is a central hub in the State for those who experience homelessness, incarceration, and mental illness. Church@thePark is a Collaborative Navigation Center supported by seven Churches working with the City of Salem, Arches, United Way and the Marion Polk Food Share. Salem Leadership Foundation serves as the backbone collaborator and technical consultant. Using our one day count and interview efforts we know over 1200 individuals are experiencing homelessness on a given night in Salem. Our current shelter capacity for men, women and children in Salem is 555. This leaves 750 people looking for shelter in doorways, cars, and urban camps.

Please support SB 850 so we have a way to identify and track homeless deaths statewide. Tracking this data enables analysis for making more informed decisions, helps identify trends, gaps, and service needs, and enables more accuracy, efficiency, collaboration, and transparency.

Tracking homeless deaths also provides some humanity and dignity to homeless individuals who often live in horrific and inhumane poverty, with disabilities and declining health, and so often die alone, unnoticed, in anonymity. We can do better than that, and the first step is knowing how many people are dying outside.

Death is inevitable for all of us, yet SB 850 assures the humanity and dignity of acknowledging the lives of our neighbors in the streets and counting each of their deaths, so we have accurate numbers for planning how we can do better in the future.

Please support SB 850. Thank you for your consideration.

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