

Dear Senators and Staff,

We stepped up, under the leadership of President Courtney, to honor and remember the 3,000 unknowns who died at the Oregon State Hospital and were interred in canisters. Let's do the same for folks who pass away while homeless ... as my close friend Rick Levitt did in Bush Park in 2017. Please support SB 850 so we have a way to identify and track homeless deaths statewide. Tracking this data means useful analysis that will help identify trends, gaps, and service needs so we can be more effective and accountable.

Like the memorial (and attendant record-keeping) at the State Hospital, tracking homeless deaths will provide some measure of humanity and dignity to homeless individuals who often live in horrific and inhumane poverty and who suffer from disabilities and declining health. Like my friend Rick, they often die alone, unnoticed, in anonymity. We can do better than this, and the first step is having a firm awareness of how many people are dying outside.

Thank you for reading this letter and hearing my testimony. I appreciate it.

Sam Skillern
Executive Director
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