



**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 equity<sup>1</sup>.

Houselessness is a public health emergency. In Eugene, around 2,200 human beings were estimated to be living unhoused in June of 2020<sup>2</sup> and around 178 people become newly unhoused each month<sup>3</sup>.

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 death<sup>4</sup>. The negativity of each of these outcomes is cruelly exacerbated by criminalizing the basic human need for rest.

Oregon's responses to unhoused populations have centered on policing, criminalization, and sweeps of camp sites, an inhumane practice which contravenes current CDC guidance during the pandemic<sup>5</sup>. 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 unhoused human being<sup>6</sup>, while in Portland over half of arrests are of an unhoused person<sup>7</sup>. Health outcomes are directly worsened by sweeps, where medicines and medical devices are often disposed of and infectious disease spread is accelerated.

Though unhoused people suffer from sleep deprivation at alarming rates<sup>8</sup>, 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 death<sup>9</sup>.

HB 2367, The Right to Rest Act, is essential for improving health equity and outcomes for unhoused 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,

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> "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>

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

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

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

<sup>8</sup> "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>

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